

Generic Insistence:  
Joseph Conrad and the Document in  
Selected British and American  
Modernist Fiction

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Hilary 2013

## Abstract

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Submitted for D.Phil. English Literature

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This thesis explores the citation of documents in the modernist novel. From contracts to newspaper articles, telegrams to reports, documents are invoked as interleaved texts in ways that, to date, have not been critically interrogated. I consider a range of novels, including works by Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf, Nella Larsen, and Willa Cather, which are selected, in part, as a litmus of Anglo-American modernism, though they can more productively also be understood as coalescing around the example set by Joseph Conrad. Replete with allusions to documents, Conrad's *oeuvre* is developed across the thesis as a meta-commentary on the document in modernist literature. In placing the document at the centre of analysis, and in using Conrad as a diagnostic of the document in modernity, the manifold ways in which authors use interpolated texts to perform denotative and connotative "work" in their narratives emerge, with the effect of revising our understanding of documents. These authors reveal the power of mass produced documents to lay claim to novelistic language; the historical role of documents in reifying inequality; on the level of narrative, the thematic potential of the document as a reiterable text; and finally, the capacity of the document, in its most depersonalized form, to realize social collectivity and community. This project therefore asks us to rethink and relocate the document as central to the modernist novel.

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## Abbreviations

Citations of Conrad's letters as *CL* are to *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Eds.

Laurence Davies et al. 9 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983-2007.

Citations of Conrad's writing are to *Dent's Uniform Edition of the Works of Joseph*

*Conrad*. 22 vols. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1923. If an introduction or annotation

of a Conrad work in a different edition is cited, its bibliographic information is included

in the Works Cited.

*AF* Almayer's Folly

*Ch* Chance

*LE* Last Essays

*LJ* Lord Jim

*NLL* Notes on Life and Letters

*NW* The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'

*No* Nostromo

*OI* An Outcast of the Islands

*SA* The Secret Agent

*SL* The Shadow-Line

*UWE* Under Western Eyes

*WT* Within the Tides

*YOS* Youth, a Narrative; and Two Other Stories

## Acknowledgements

To my supervisor Professor Elleke Boehmer: I am grateful for your guidance, generosity, and unstinting support. Thank you for seeing me through to the end of this project. Mentors and friends have read various drafts of these chapters and provided tremendously helpful feedback. My thanks to Professor Hermione Lee, Jarad Zimbler, Vincent van Bever Donker, Scott Teal and especially Charlotta Salmi. To the postcolonial group: thank you for your friendship and encouragement.

Wolfson College has provided financial support across the years and the Vice Chancellors' Award aided in the completion of this project. A version of Chapter 2 has appeared in *Studies in the Novel* and versions of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 are scheduled to appear in *The Conradian*. Thank you to my anonymous readers for your astute comments. My thanks to the Joseph Conrad Society (UK) for providing a generous welcome to this recent Conrad convert.

Thanks to my cheer squad at home for being exaggeratedly proud of me: Raj and family, Natalia, and my soon-to-be family. Chettama and Biji, I wish I could share this with you. Jithendra Chacha, if you get to choose, you should teach literature in your next life.

Janak, you can't begin to imagine the depths of my gratitude.

Mom and Dad, thank you for believing that liking something enough means it's worth pursuing. Thank you for never allowing me to worry too much about anything. This is from me to you with all my love.

## Introduction

### Paper: “Really the important thing”

In 1912 Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso departed from their well known, and by this time, acclaimed cubist style to find a new *métier*. Picasso described “the true Cubism”—the fragmentation of three-dimensional images on a two-dimensional plane—as “an awful materialist affair, a cheap materialism . . . the imitation of material form . . . objects depicted from the front, in profile, from above” (qtd. in Bernadac 90). Alternatively, his new method would be “really the important thing” (Gilot 70).



Pablo Picasso *Glass and Bottle of Suze* 1912

Curiously, for Picasso, “the important thing” entailed gluing paper to his canvases. Printed papers including labels, advertisements, wallpaper, cigarette wrappers, stamps, and especially newspapers would become the material of synthetic cubism. Braque’s introduction of *papier collé* to modern art—compositions made by fastening printed or decorative papers to surfaces—invigorated Picasso. From 1912 to 1913 he created over fifty *papiers collés*. Gertrude Stein was not exaggerating when she wrote that her friend “liked paper” (26).

In *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (1912), one of the most celebrated works of this period, Picasso pastes a Suze label (*Apéritif à la Gentaine*) to the centre of the canvas and surrounds it with what art historian Brandon Taylor identifies as “a Balkan War report from *Le Journal* of 18 November, an account of an anarchist and socialist anti-war demonstration, and a fragment of a serialized novel” in addition to pieces of wallpaper and other coloured papers (20). In select areas of the composition, bold charcoal strokes or a light charcoal wash is applied to create the illusion of depth. Though this work might be considered from various perspectives, perhaps the most obvious point of view suggests a still life: we peer down at a tabletop covered by arranged objects.<sup>1</sup> The bottle and glass are placed on a table strewn with papers upside down, right side up, and folded over. Although the placement of the various newspaper sheets in addition to the other bits of paper are carefully considered—the papers are glued after all—Picasso is able to produce an informal scene: a glass and bottle alongside an array of mass printed matter connotes a probable, if not typical,

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor argues that a figure of a body and a musical instrument resembling a lute can also be discerned.

café interior or kitchen table in Picasso's Paris in the early 1900s. He sought new ways of expressing everyday realities.

If the image Picasso renders is a familiar one, he was also adamant that the materials he would use to create the bottle, glass, and tabletop should be commonplace rather than singular. Thus *Glass and Bottle of Suze* features cheaply and easily found printed matter like newspapers, wallpaper, and labels.<sup>2</sup> Even though Picasso acknowledged that all his viewers were unlikely to understand the complex significations of his work, he insisted on drawing from readily available materials: "I want to tell something by means of the most common object . . . I make reference to objects that belong to everybody; at least they belong to them in theory" (Gilot 67).

What did Picasso mean when he described this work and the hundreds like it created by himself, Braque, Gino Severini, and Juan Gris to name a few, as "really the important thing"? How did Picasso come to use "materials" and yet avoid producing "materialist" art? Picasso's choice of words here seems purposeful. Although he does not link his use of "materialism" to Hegel's writing on aesthetics explicitly, he expressed interest in Hegel's theories of art at the same time that he denounced early Cubism.<sup>3</sup>

According to Anne Baldassari, Picasso's turn to *papier collé*—which I am taking as my illustrative opening scene—reflects his investment in the question of art's relationship to mimetism (124). The *papier collé*, Picasso explained, is "the reality in

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<sup>2</sup> See Christine Poggi's *In Defiance of Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) for a discussion of the significance of the wallpaper that so frequently appears across Picasso's *papiers collés*.

<sup>3</sup> See Gilot, *Life with Picasso*, 64-70. Differently to Picasso (and Hegel), I employ the term "materiality" in this thesis to describe the cultivated objectness of documents in the modernist novel. Picasso, however, invites us to consider how art transcends its thingness through its use of materials.

the painting that competes with the reality in nature” (Gilot 70). To be sure, this is not an attempt to place a newspaper in a painting *as* it exists in the world: “[the newspaper] was never used literally but always as an element displaced from its habitual meaning into another meaning to produce a shock between the usual definition at the point of departure and its new definition at the point of arrival” (Gilot 70). Though art historians continue to debate the extent to which Picasso’s use of printed text demands engagement with its textual content as a condition of the work’s meaning, especially with respect to his frequent political references to the Balkan war, as Baldassari argues, whether “read or not” his use of paper “is recognized as a message”: “fragments of material reality” now constitute the artwork (125).

That the Cubists and later the Futurists and Dadaists thought reality could be produced through the recontextualization of found or purchased printed paper—though in irreverent and, at times, deeply suspicious ways—suggests that practitioners of modern art and those related to them were exploring versions of materialism at the same time that they were developing an expanded definition of paper. Whether it was perceived as modernity’s detritus, the democratized object of the everyday, or propaganda, paper was *recognized* as exceeding its function as a material on which text or image could be inscribed, and it is in this capacity that it is invoked in *papiers collés*. This recognition, however, was not limited to the visual arts.

\* \* \*

This thesis, “Generic Insistence: Joseph Conrad and the Document in Selected British and American Modernist Fiction” explores Joseph Conrad’s and his modernist interlocutors’ turn to what I describe as “documents.” Varieties of paper stand in relation to pictorial art as varieties of document stand in relation to the novel. In the

decades leading up to and just after Picasso's formal experiment, Anglo-American modernist fiction, too, registers and also reifies and emphasizes the presence of documents including letters, telegrams, diaries, articles, and contracts through their quotation and reproduction.

The scenario is a familiar one; perhaps so familiar that it has gone unexplored by critical studies of modernism to date. The narrator of a novel might introduce the lines of a newspaper article with the words: "They ran thus:" followed by a quotation (SA 307); readers might learn the contents of a telegram at the moment it is received by a character: "she had just opened a telegram: 'Nancy will be going to India, tomorrow, to be with her father'" (*The Good Soldier* 190); finally, a diary entry may be embedded in the narrative without any direct reference to the narrator's act of transcription or the character as they write it.<sup>4</sup>

Like the papers of the *papiers collés*, these newspaper articles, telegrams, and diaries are not invoked as a mimetic gesture—that is, the quoted document is not figured as a reproduction of a document as it exists in the world. If their inclusion is not only an attempt at verisimilitude, what, then, can explain their numerous appearances? How does modernism seek to produce materiality in the form of reproducing extant genres of text like the letter or the legal contract and yet abstain from the "cheap" material reproductions for which Picasso chided early Cubism? What is the relationship between the document text and the primary narrative at the site of its inclusion?

This study undertakes to answer these questions through four separate but linked case studies which pay close attention to the documents that feature in the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the reproduction of Susan's diary entry in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, which begins a new paragraph (115).

works of Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, and Virginia Woolf. In treating the document's appearance in the novel as a subject of critical inquiry through a sustained focus on its origins, language, form, and its figurative and literal locations, this thesis seeks to do for the modernist novel what art critics have done for Picasso and his peers: render modernity's documents as visible as those affixed to the canvas. When the document is recoded with significance, in the manner of this study, it then becomes a tool to decode the modernist text.

## **The Document**

It is useful at this stage to establish a definition of the document, and in doing so, begin to sketch Conrad's centrality to the question of documents in modernism. "Heart of Darkness" offers a characterization of "documents" that I find compelling, and which, therefore, informs my recognition and reading of documents across his *oeuvre* as well as in the novels of Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf. Although the novella refers to several texts including letters and newspaper articles, which Chapter 1 considers in detail, it is worth noting for the purpose of setting out a definition here that the word "document" arises on two separate occasions and makes several more appearances in Conrad's other fictions. In the first instance, before departing for Africa, Marlow agrees to sign a "document" issued by the Company that prevents him from divulging trade secrets (56). In the second, the word is used not to describe a legal contract, but to refer to the papers belonging to the recently departed Kurtz. Once Marlow returns from Africa with Kurtz's papers in hand, he is sought out by "a clean-shaved man, with an official manner and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles . . . about what he was pleased to denominate certain 'documents'" (152-3). The

quotation marks around documents suggest that Marlow associates the usage of the word with the “official manner” of his visitor; perhaps, this is a case of professional jargon. We know, however, that Kurtz’s papers do not resemble the Company’s document in form or purpose. Kurtz’s bundle of papers includes letters, memoranda, his Intended’s portrait, and the infamous Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs.

Not quite knowing what he is looking for, “documents” seems to be the visitor’s catch-all word for the sum of Kurtz’s paper remains. Of these, Marlow infers the most appropriate text he can offer him, that which resembles a document according to his understanding, is the Report. Crucially, he hands him the Report “with the postscriptum torn off” (153). It is precisely in this moment that the materiality of the document comes to the fore. The recalibrated text-object, through its physical alteration, gives us pause: it facilitates, even if momentarily, the recognition that we are not hearing Marlow’s voice, but reading a book. That is, the charged materiality of one text-object gives rise to the recognition of another.

A brief excursion into Conrad’s other works reveals further valences of the “document” as Conrad imagined it. In his fictions that feature offices, documents are abundant. In the opening sequence of *Chance*, a young sailor en route to the Shipping Office in hopes of securing a berth encounters a man in a “litter of yellowish dusty documents,” which justifiably repulse him (11). In the context of sea life, documents exist in stark unreality to the work they delimit. In *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* however, official documents play a more prominent role in calculating the balance of power in social interactions. The characters that possess documents are at a clear advantage, having the support of the document-producing institution behind

them. Thus Vladimir of the Foreign Embassy glances at the “documents” that sit on his desk, even “smiling faintly” at them as if they share in a secret. Verloc, ignorant of the impetus behind this smile, is forced to endure Vladimir’s abuse until the significance of those documents is revealed (25). Councillor Mikulin of *Under Western Eyes* similarly refers to “documents” that contain potentially incriminating information about Razumov’s role in Haldin’s affair (92). Like Verloc, Razumov is not privy to the document, and his ignorance is used to the document-holder’s advantage. Further official documents include those whose authorship is crucial to achieving particular political outcomes. *Nostramo* is filled with such examples including the Gould concession, papers paid for by Charles to gain entry into influential Sulaco circles, and Decoud’s Separationist proclamation. Despite the varieties of forms and intents these texts represent, the narrative refers to each one of them as a document. In decidedly more banal manifestations, “documents” also include the surreptitiously written cheque issued by Flora de Barral’s governess to her lover in *Chance* and the tariff Falk writes up for towing the narrator’s ship in *Falk*.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that a document is simply an official paper, however loosely “official” is applied. Documents might also refer to deeply personal materials. Almayer, inquiring after the long absent Captain Lingard, asks if he has left any “any papers, documents; any indications or hints as to his great enterprise?” (AF 32). The narrator of *The Shadow-Line* describes the photograph of the deceased captain of his ship with a secret lover, as an “amazing human document” (59). The ship’s first-mate is convinced that document haunts the ship, and it is quickly thrown overboard. The teacher of languages in *Under Western Eyes* refers to

Razumov's record of his life as "a strange human document" (67): something in "the nature of a journal, a diary, yet not exactly that in its actual form" (4).

Though this list of documents in Conrad's work is not comprehensive, it is instructive for primarily two reasons. In the first case, it gives us some indication that texts of various kinds feature in his fiction, and in several instances, such as Kurtz's Report, Razumov's record, and Decoud's proclamation, these documents receive sustained narrative attention. These examples are evidence of what I describe as Conrad's "documentary imaginary": his consistent invocation of documents to structural and thematic effect which, I also contend, has been so important for self-consciously modern writers working in his wake, like Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf. Secondly, and more to the point of this definitional exercise, Conrad employs the document as a noun to denote a range of written (and visual) texts with ostensibly different formal exigencies, motivations, and practical uses.<sup>5</sup> The single feature which seems to bind these papers together—ranging from the personal journal to the cheque—is their non-fictional form.

The earliest entry for "document" in the *OED* defines it as "that which serves to show, point out, or prove something" (Def. 3). The early eighteenth-century entry is more closely aligned with current usage, applicable also to word-processor documents: "something written, inscribed, etc., which furnishes evidence or information upon any subject" (Def. 4a.). While the document's status as non-fiction is not made explicit by this definition, the 1871 addition "documentary" does suggest

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<sup>5</sup> Although Conrad does invoke the photograph as a document, I have chosen to limit the study to textual documents as I am interested specifically in the interactions of one form of writing with another. Moreover, as the image is not reproduced in the space of the novel, it is difficult to consider the implications of such allusions to documents with respect to the language and structure of the narrative.

this interpretation. Documentary, of the nature of or consisting in documents, is the “factual” or “realistic” applied to necessarily non-factual or non-realistic forms. The definition offers “documentary fiction” as an instance of this; perhaps documentary film is more apt as a contemporary example. Admittedly, it would be near impossible to argue today for the indexical or truth-value of a document. Moreover, as Conrad makes clear in “Autocracy and War,” art participates in a kind of truth-telling that is simply not in the purview of the document.<sup>6</sup> As one example, a document I cite across this study—the newspaper—is registered as practicing partisan politics virtually as soon as the press becomes popularized in the nineteenth century. To say that it was read as fact or truth would be disingenuous.

I choose the word document because it is capacious enough to embrace different forms and their respective conventions, while suggesting their *professed* non-fictionality as the basis of their affiliation. Therefore, irrespective of whether the telegrams in Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, Tom’s mesa diary in Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, Clare’s letters in Larsen’s *Passing*, or the newspaper in Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* are referred to directly as documents, “document” forms an expedient way to recognize them as non-fictional forms, allowing for the same flexibility in denotation as Conrad applies to his own work. Although I could refer to Kurtz’s Report or the newspaper articles in “Heart of Darkness” as simply “text,” or, by its narratological description, “embedded non-narrative text,” these terms lack the suggestiveness of

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<sup>6</sup> In “Autocracy and War” Conrad makes a distinction between the newspaper, or “information” as that which we are “strangely impervious to” and “direct vision of the fact, or the stimulus of great art” which can incite genuine emotion and feeling (84). I consider this essay in detail in Chapter 4.

“document.”<sup>7</sup> While I draw these disparate texts together under the banner of “the document,” I am attentive to their generic variations. So while a letter and a newspaper article may both be read as non-fiction, they are not treated as interchangeable forms of writing. The formal conventions of each are taken into consideration.

I must emphasize that while the status of the document as non-fiction is conceptual rather than verifiable, it is nonetheless a crucial distinction insofar as it determines the generic difference between the document (representing a variety of genres of writing) and the primary narrative (the novel). The novels concede to and reproduce these differences through visual and/or rhetorical signs used to delimit the document text from speech text or the narrator’s discourse. This may be in the form of a page break, the use of italicization, quotation marks, or a lead-in such as the narrator’s words in Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* before he offers an excerpt from his diary to the reader: “Here I must give [a] sample of it” (106). The document is presented as the creation of another time or produced by another hand: it possesses an integrity of its own. The effect is paradoxical: documents are read as constructed prior to or outside the larger narrative while constituting the novel in its totality.

## Joseph Conrad and the Document

Before considering the profit modernism obtains in its citation of documents, Joseph Conrad’s centrality to this study requires further outlining. The sailor-turned-author, who only began to write in his thirties—notably in his third language—figures as the

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<sup>7</sup> See Mieke Bal’s section “Levels of Narration” in *Narratology* 43-77. According to Bal, embedded non-narrative text refers to embedded text (text that is not the primary text) “in which no story is related in them” (60). In contrast, embedded narrative text refers to text that imparts a story, such as Marlow’s narration aboard the *Nellie* in “Heart of Darkness.”

protagonist of this thesis. In one respect, his experience at shipping ports and his familiarity with harbour offices would have acquainted him with certain “documents,” but as I have suggested, documents, for Conrad, encompassed many kinds of text emerging from different contexts and appealing to different conventions. In addition to providing a definition of the document, this thesis posits Conrad as a modernist and hence his use of documents is a gloss on the document in modernism. Conrad is used, in part, to explain and comment on Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf. In a 1902 letter to his publisher William Blackwood of *Blackwood’s Magazine*, Conrad differentiated his writing from his respected literary predecessors William Makepeace Thackeray, Walter Scott, and George Eliot by describing himself as “modern” and “new.”<sup>8</sup> In “Joseph Conrad’s half-written fictions,” Jeremy Hawthorn elegantly tests Conrad’s self-assessment against his fiction. Conrad’s “technical or formal innovation and originality” and his use of “social or cultural modernity as fictional subject matter,” as demonstrated in the works published to date—including “Heart of Darkness” (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900), and *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* (1897)—suggest that Conrad was discerning in this evaluation of his literary practice (151). His modernity was, in a sense, something he suffered for consciously, aligning himself with the likes of Wagner, Rodin, and Whistler. He duly observed that his newness was commercially unviable.

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<sup>8</sup> Reproduced in Hawthorn’s “Joseph Conrad’s half-written fictions” (151). The full paragraph reads as follows: “I don’t compare myself with them. I am *modern*, and I would rather recall Wagner the musician and Rodin the Sculptor who both had to starve a little in their day—and Whistler the painter who made Ruskin the critic foam at the mouth with scorn and indignation. They too have arrived. They had to suffer for being ‘new’.” In this letter, Conrad aggressively defends his “method based on deliberate conviction.” He continues, “however unfavourably it may affect the business in hand I must confess that I shall not depart from my method” (CL 2: 417-8).

Hawthorn reads Conrad's "willingness to vary and to complicate his narrative technique in the interests of his artistic aims" as emphatically new (154). The confusion and incompleteness that pervade his narratives on account of his reticence are demanding: readers must perform interpretive work to draw conclusions that are not easily confirmed or denied by the narrative. If the condition of modernity is Conrad's subject—including an increasingly globalized world, unmatched economic and political expansion into other continents, the rise of the nation state, and mechanized forms of social mediation—then Conrad is, in this respect, using an aesthetic of difficulty to replicate for his readers the very existential questions that modernity raised for him.

The new modernist studies have sought to reenergize—and revalidate—the discipline by locating modernism(s) in particular geographical and historical frameworks, as Hawthorn does in his discussion of Conrad's modernity.<sup>9</sup> Two recent books, Jed Esty's *Unseasonable Youth* (2012) and Christopher GoGwilt's *The Passage of Literature* (2011) have also made this case for Conrad. Conrad is a "definitive Anglophone Modernist" according to Esty's study of the stunted modernist *Bildungsroman*. Esty claims that once the "the commonplace notion that modernist fiction resists the tyranny of plot"—referring here to the *Bildungs* tradition—is read in the context of expansionism and the emerging nation-state, there appears to be a

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<sup>9</sup> See Rebecca Walkowitz's and Douglas Mao's Introduction to *Bad Modernisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), which sets the vision for the new modernist studies. See Garry Leonard's article "'The Famished Roar of Automobiles': Modernity, the Internal Combustion Engine, and Modernism" in *Disciplining Modernism*, Ed. Pamela Caughie (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 221-241. Although Leonard is the most explicit in his attempt to take up the call of the new modernist studies, the essay collection largely responds to the task of contextualization. Catherine Driscoll in *Modernist Cultural Studies* cites the journal *Modernism/Modernity* as making manifest this necessary departure from New Criticism: "As the title of the now influential journal *Modernism/Modernity* makes clear, for modernist studies today the concepts of modernity and Modernism need to be addressed together" (5).

nexus between “modernist aesthetics and modern colonialism” (2). In this view, the protracted youth of Jim in *Lord Jim* is a modernist response to the problem of subject-formation in the colonial context. GoGwilt’s model for comparative modernisms also locates English modernism in its overlap with the Age of Empire, 1875-1914, the years Eric Hobsbawm describes as the greatest moment of imperial expansion in history.<sup>10</sup> The centrality of colonialism to modernism produces modernism as “a wider, transnational phenomenon” that allows GoGwilt to pursue the multiple but crucially interrelated trajectories of Jean Rhys’s Creole modernism, Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s Indonesian modernism, and Conrad’s English modernism (4).

The studies of Esty and GoGwilt are important here for bringing into view Conrad’s recognition of and aesthetic response to a “world in a process of transformation” as a *modernist* response (Hawthorn “half-written fictions” 160). In the spirit of Hawthorn, Esty, and GoGwilt who, according to their different focuses, recognize Conrad as central to the question of modernism, Conrad forms the conceptual core of this thesis. If, as Susan Stanford Friedman suggests in her seminal essay “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/ Modernity/ Modernism,” what defines an artist as modernist is seeing “sooner and more searchingly the profound significance and future effects of epistemological, ontological, political, technological, demographic, cultural, and aesthetic transformations” then Conrad meets these demands with conscious assurance (501). As I will elaborate over the course of my readings, Conrad was attuned to the proliferation of documents at the turn-of-the-century and their ideological significance, especially in the context of

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<sup>10</sup> This is also the title of Hobsbawm’s book length study of the modern European empire. See Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1994).

empire. In other words, Conrad plays a pivotal role, too, for the question of the document in modernity.

While Conrad is central to this project, I importantly do not propose a model of influence whereby Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf are read as indebted to him. Rather, Conrad's example proves a compelling way into a consideration of the documents that feature in these novels, though, to be sure, the comparative readings that follow are intended to be mutually illuminating. It is worth acknowledging, however, that the newness Conrad felt he introduced to the literary field was echoed by these other writers. Although I sketch these affiliations in greater detail later, Ford, Cather, Larsen and Woolf each commented on Conrad's modernity in the manner of his subject and form as the way forward for fiction. Ford, his friend and literary collaborator on *The Inheritors* (1901), *Romance* (1903) and *The Nature of a Crime* (1909), acknowledged what he identified as Conrad's impressionistic technique as pertinent to the development of his own style. He commented on the period of their co-authorship: "if I know anything of how to write almost the whole of that knowledge was acquired then" (*Return to Yesterday* 203). In her essay "Modern Fiction," Woolf celebrates Joseph Conrad as the antithesis of Victorian "materialists" who are concerned "not with the spirit but with the body" (7). Woolf's derision of their preoccupation with surfaces recalls Picasso's impatience with early Cubism.

With respect to the modernity Conrad represented for readers across the Atlantic, Peter Mallios's *Our Conrad* demonstrates Conrad's relevance to American modernists as they address topical political and social issues in their fictions. I return to Mallios's path-breaking study of the "invention of Conrad as a 'master' literary figure" in America in Chapters 2 and 3, but for now, it is worth noting that Conrad's

formal innovativeness was not lost on Cather and Larsen (4). Cather's observation of Conrad's resistance to conventional plot lines in her Pulitzer Prize speech becomes a rallying call for American authors, including herself, to "learn to give our purpose the form that exactly clothes it and no more" (qtd. in Bohlke 170). Larsen defends the experimental writing of her friend Walter White by suggesting it recalls the works of modern writers. She invokes the names of her recent reading, Conrad, Proust, and Thomas Mann, to defend its literary value.<sup>11</sup>

Conrad is also the protagonist of this study because it is his understanding of the document that informs my recognition and reading of documents in the works of his modernist collaborators and interlocutors. Documents feature across Conrad's *oeuvre*. From the outposts of empire to imagined cities, the expanse of the sea to the London metropolis, documents are a constant element in his fiction. Yet despite the numerous reports, telegrams, notes, letters, contracts, diaries, newspaper articles, and journals in, but not limited to, *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, "An Outpost of Progress," "Heart of Darkness," *Lord Jim*, *Typhoon*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, *Chance*, and *The Shadow-Line*—always as more than a detail of setting or plot—readers familiar with Conrad criticism will likely find the fundamental relationship between Conrad and documents that is posited here to be unconventional. Traditionally, Conrad's association with documents, or, more broadly, writing, is characterized by resistance rather than affirmation. Insofar as Conrad is interested in documents, it is to illustrate their inadequacy or failure. As the critical

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<sup>11</sup> Larsen was asked to intervene in the controversy around Walter White's *Flight* (1926). She wrote a review that defended its perceived "awkwardness" on the basis that it was modern. Chapter 3 discusses this episode in further detail.

line of argument goes, there is a vital and persistent opposition between text and speech operating in his fiction.

Michael Greaney's penetrating study *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*, tells just this story. Greaney reads Conrad's "suspicion of language" alongside his "diminishing faith in utopian dreams of oral or communal modes of storytelling" as culminating in fiction which "finally yields to" what he calls "the *rebarbative* textuality of modernism": a provocative description of modernist writing that my subsequent readings of Conrad will return to in detail (emphasis added 6). Greaney introduces Conrad's text-speech binary as follows:

No less hateful for Conrad than the business of writing is its textual product. His fiction is mesmerized by the spoken word—the charismatic oratory of Mr. Kurtz, the sibylline counsel of Stein, the richly enigmatic storytelling of Charlie Marlow—but deeply inimical to its own medium . . . Conrad's fiction endeavours to negate its own writtenness, usually by ventriloquizing a raconteur—Marlow or one of his many counterparts—behind whose garrulous personal presence the text silently effaces itself. (2)

This view of Conrad's rejection of text—including his own writing—is not limited to Greaney's study though, perhaps, it is argued most vigorously there. Several other eminent Conrad critics, including Edward Said and Tony Tanner, acknowledge Conrad's vexed relationship to text.<sup>12</sup> Said makes the following observation in *The World, The*

*Text and the Critic*:

the dramatic protocol of much of Conrad's fiction is the swapped yarn, the historical report, the mutually exchanged legend, the musing recollection. This protocol implies (although often they are explicitly there) a speaker and a hearer. (94)

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<sup>12</sup> See also Jeremy Hawthorn's *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990). Hawthorn is interested in how Conrad represents speech and thought, especially his use of free indirect discourse. He does consider Conrad's representation of texts including Decoud's letter in *Nostramo* and the language teacher's writing in *Under Western Eyes*, but he does not engage with them *as* texts. That is, they are recognized as devices to transmit the thoughts of their authors without mention of their material forms.

Notwithstanding a few exceptions duly noted, Said concludes that:

the presence of spoken words in time mitigates, if it does not make entirely absent, their written version; a speaker takes over the narrative with his voice, and his voice overrides the fact that he is absent (or unseen) to his listeners as he speaks. Conrad's goal is to make us see, or otherwise transcend the absence of everything but words. (95)

Said argues that Conrad's speaker-listener scenarios, in their various guises, are able to render events proximate to the reader. Spoken words thus deployed achieve an immediacy of vision that the outwardly textual work cannot aspire to. Tony Tanner, however, is apt to interpret Conrad's colourful storytellers as the product of his mistrust of writing along the lines of Greaney's argument. The inventions of Marlow and other characteristically tentative speakers are part of Conrad's attempt "to make his very *artful* piece reproduce the *artlessness* of the told tale":

In Conrad's case I think the motive is to undermine the illusory finality and exactitude of the written text, to unstabilize its silent impersonal unquestionable authority, by reintroducing the hesitations of the speaking voice, the uncertainties and fadings of memory. This is not necessarily part of a philosophic attempt to impugn completely the capabilities of language as such. I think it is more an attempt to rephysicalise language, as it were, to get it off the page and back into the mouth. (540-41)

Even with Tanner's concession that Conrad does not completely disinherit the written text, these accounts would suggest that insofar as documents appear in Conrad's fiction, they are locked into a text-speech binary.

This thesis, however, subscribes neither to the idea that for orality to be privileged, text must be subordinate, nor the reverse construction. This formulation obscures rather than illuminates the complexity of Conrad's citation of documents. Therefore, if, as these critics and others argue, Conrad's emphasis on speech invites structural innovation and contributes significantly to theme, so do his documents. The narrator's diary entries in *The Shadow-Line*, the notes and account books of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, and the newspapers of *The Secret Agent*—all of which are discussed here—crucially do not grow in importance with respect to their

real or imagined antithetical relationship to speech. When the impact of documents is no longer conditional upon their bolstering of speech—that is, when we reorient them differently and to the centre of Conrad’s fiction—the narrative “work” they perform as material objects in the vein of Picasso’s pasted papers comes into view.

However, this extensive attention to orality in Conrad’s work has been beneficial; it demonstrates what must be the urgent materiality of the document. In light of Conrad’s dramatization of the speaking voice, the textual object arrives strangely and forcefully in his fiction. Nowhere is the presence of the document made more palpable than in “Heart of Darkness.” Conrad’s novella is concerned with and consumed by voices. As darkness falls upon the Thames, Marlow, “no more to us than a voice” transports the frame narrator—and readers—to the centre of Africa (83). His searching recollection of his experience in charge of the Company’s steamer is both replete with silences—some strategic and others more ambivalent like the absent speech of Africans save for that remarkable pronouncement “Mistah Kurtz—he dead” (150)—and extraordinary descriptions of speech. Kurtz, the object of Marlow’s river journey, is “little more than a voice” (115). It is, however, a voice so powerful that it can perform in utterly distinct contexts: it can transform the young Russian harlequin into his disciple in Africa and also electrify large political “meetings” at home (154). In an often-quoted passage, Marlow describes Kurtz’s “gift of expression” as the embodiment of manifold contradictions: “the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness” (113-114). That speech can be used for good or evil—a proposition Marlow puts directly to his listeners aboard the *Nellie*—seems to concern the novella less than “the speech that cannot be silenced” (97). In a

context in which speech is overdetermined—the narrator is positioned as a “listener” to facilitate a storytelling scenario which makes frequent reference to the power of speech—the “document” appears with startling materiality. As I suggested, the tearing of Kurtz’s Report brings us back to the physical text we read: it is an act of self-location.

### **Documents and Modernism/ Modernity’s Documents**

Conrad is not the only author citing documents in his fiction during the early decades of the twentieth century. As the title of this thesis suggests, Conrad’s deployment of letters, telegrams, diaries, contracts, reports, and articles can be situated firmly within modernism. Conrad’s example forms part of a broader recognition of documents as a narrative strategy that this study traces through novels by Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf as a litmus of Anglo-American modernism.

What is the logic of these authors’ relation to documents? It is immediately apparent that the types of documents cited above are not twentieth-century inventions. Thus the documents that feature in Conrad and his modernist interlocutors are not responses to novel communications technologies in the period such as cinema, wireless radio, or television.<sup>13</sup> Telegraphy technology, for example, dates back to the early nineteenth century. Its rapid expansion alongside the growth of the British Empire meant that by the end of the century, sending or receiving telegrams was

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<sup>13</sup> In contrast, see Julian Murphet’s *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-Garde* where the question of the perception of technology as new and determining social relations is crucial to his reading. Murphet pursues his interest in “the systemic competitions and collusions between and amongst the media institutions and technologies” of the era as if technological determinism is true (12). The point is that the “writers of the early Anglo-American avant-garde behaved as if new media technologies were ‘causing’ the series of formal breaks internal to their work” (2). This concession allows him to pursue the “media system as a mediatory code for the decryption of modernist texts” (17).

unexceptional. With improvements in technology and falling costs, in the year 1895, two million telegrams were transmitted.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, there are several works predating Conrad by years or even centuries that feature the types of documents he cites. Matthew Rubery's recent book *The Novelty of the News*, argues that the "newspaper was integral to the Victorian novel's development" (4). Rubery elaborates:

Novelists used newspapers in a variety of ways: retelling events reported in the press; reproducing journalistic voices, styles, and features; the pastiche of news items through headlines and quotations; recording the process of news production; and, most dramatically, portraying the individual reader's reaction to the news. Paratextual markings such as headlines were just one of the many ways in which novelists played upon audience expectations by introducing competing layers of verisimilitude into the fictional narrative. (11-12)

Although I will argue that Conrad, Ford, Cather, Larsen and Woolf, all of whom cite newspaper articles, deploy this document in very different ways to their Victorian counterparts—that is, their invocation of the paper is invested neither in mimetic referentiality nor plotting—Rubery's book is a useful reminder that the popularization of the press is a nineteenth- rather than twentieth-century phenomenon. By the late 1800s, as a result of the rotary press and typesetting machines, "periodical printing became one of the most highly mechanized of all English mass-production industries" (Altick 357). And once the tax on papers was suspended and the market opened up to competition, newspapers became widely accessible to middle-class buyers. The result was an enormous increase in circulation: "more people were reading than ever before" (Altick 368).

In addition to the newspaper, all the novels in this study feature letters.

However, it is Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel *Pamela* that incites nearly a century of

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<sup>14</sup> See Daniel Headrick's *The Tools of Empire*. Headrick compares this figure to 1870 when only "a few dozen telegrams were sent" (161). For Headrick, the acceleration in telegraph technology and its increasing use relates directly to the momentous expansion of the Empire.

epistolary fiction. The personal records in *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor's House*, too, have their literary antecedents. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is based on the record Crusoe writes of his life, which references a journal written at the time of the narrated action. Emily Steiner's *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* explains that the emergence of legal and political documents in the medieval period—charters, deeds, indulgences—had a formal influence on spiritual poetry. The “distinctive physical shape” of official documents made them citable and appealing as a legitimating practice (Steiner 3). Although Razumov's journal and the legal contracts that feature in “Heart of Darkness,” *The Shadow-Line*, or *The Professor's House* are not appealed to as forms of authentication or legitimation for the fictional enterprise as in the cases of Defoe, Richardson, or Steiner's medieval poets, these few examples indicate that the citation of documents in literature has a long history.

The documents that comprise this study are not new to the twentieth-century, but, to put it bluntly, there are many more of them. One way, then, of understanding the modernist turn to documents, as in the case of the *papiers collés*, is through the recognition of their ubiquity. Documents are the “common objects” of modernity, as explored by Picasso. Contemporary accounts of paper production are especially useful in understanding this proliferation of documents as having cultural meaning. Paper's importance to modern societies becomes ever more apparent. A. Dykes Spicer's *The Paper Trade*, first published in 1907, begins his study by citing the relevance of paper to “modern life”:

If the manufacture of paper were proportional to the importance of paper in modern life, it would be the largest industry in Great Britain. Paper is the cheapest and most familiar object in every English household. Every one knows how to read, and books and newspapers have come within the reach of the poorest. The first material which must be

at the disposal of every clerk in the country is the paper which goes to the making of ledgers and notebooks. Hundreds of millions of letters go through the post every year. Almost every article bought at a shop is wrapped up in paper. In a most literal sense we may say that all other manufactures in this or any other country have come to be dependent upon the manufacture of paper; it is an indispensable ingredient in every industrial and commercial process. (1)

Notwithstanding hyperbolic claims like “every one knows how to read,” Spicer’s depiction of the mass consumption of paper provides a good indication of its pervasiveness. His allusion to the professions’ dependence on paper is particularly relevant. In light of the cheap price of paper and the movement towards standardization and productivity, the number of clerks increases and new office technologies, related directly to paper, are invented. The anonymous telegraphists of Henry James’s *In the Cage* and the Leonard Bast of E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* are representative figures. The 1861 British census reveals there were 279 female clerks in Britain in 1861; that increased to 124, 843 clerks by 1911. Business colleges crop up across America and copying and typewriting offices are common in Britain; the *Business Woman’s Journal* is founded in 1889 and *Office Equipment Magazine* is in circulation; advertisements for office supplies such as “Hotchkiss Automatic Paper Fasteners” which boasts it has the capacity to staple over 50 sheets of paper or the “Support Brace & Belt Co. of London” that develops a specialized supportive shoulder brace because “All shorthand-typists have a tendency to stoop” are plentiful.<sup>15</sup> This is the period of the electric typewriter, filing cabinet, the paper shredder, and the photocopier. There is a demonstrated need to manage and direct the flow of documents.

Lyman Horace Weeks’s *A History of Paper Manufacturing in the United States: 1690-1916*, which considers the production of paper in America, also presents his

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<sup>15</sup> See Rodney Dale and Rebecca Weaver’s *Machines in the Office*, which contains reprints of these advertisements.

study as a timely publication: paper production and consumption has reached new heights by 1916. According to both authors, the perfection of the wood-pulp process in the late seventeenth century represents the major breakthrough in paper manufacturing. Wood-pulp makes cheap paper possible. Weeks points out that pulp-wood production resulted in “an overwhelming increase in output . . . and a corresponding demand for paper was developed” (288). The Fourdrinier machine introduces the next major shift in the production of paper at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The machine’s conveyor belt becomes incrementally bigger and faster across the 1800s. According to Spicer, however, despite the consistent improvements in machinery and the more “scientific employment of minerals and chemicals” (54), the paper mill of 1830 largely resembles the mill in England as he writes in 1907: “the whole art, as we now understand it, may be said to have been conceived in its broad outlines” in the early 1800s (66). Weeks corroborates Spicer’s observation: “Long before 1900 was in sight modern machinery had been the prime factor in the industry, and modern mills as they were to be for a generation at least were fully established in character if not yet in completest development” (293).

As the concept of the modern mill is not new, and the paper products they manufacture for purchase are common goods well before the turn-of-the-century, what emerges as important in this brief history is the drive towards efficiency and increased production of paper, which manifests in the office jobs and technologies created to manage them. Both Weeks and Spicer cite a rise in the tonnage of paper manufactured per year and higher annual profits as evidence of greater capital investment, imports and exports, and consumption. With the exception of notable spikes in newsprint sales under “abnormal conditions” like the Spanish-American war

and the Boer war which facilitated an unheralded demand for newsprint, the production of newsprint, book paper, fine writing paper, and wrapping papers of various kinds rises steadily (Weeks 297). From 1890 to 1900 in the United States, the annual product increases from 78, 937, 184 USD to 127, 326, 162 USD (Weeks 297). Spicer offers a long view of the increased output of paper in England and, in doing so, provides a suggestive interpretation of what this means for the nation:

If the consumption of paper is the measure of a people's culture, England during the last hundred years must have advanced a great way on the path of self-improvement. In 1800 we made about 10,000 tons of paper; at the opening of the twentieth century we have reached the respectable total of 800,000 tons. (86)

According to Spicer, the growth in paper production entails more than increased profits, higher employment, and overseas trade: it denotes social development. It manifests in industry, the modern office, the accessibility of the newspaper, the book trade, education, and government. The consumption of paper, for Spicer, indicates progress.

If we momentarily pause to juxtapose Spicer's assessment of paper's value in society with the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski's introduction to his influential ethnographic work on the Kula of the Trobriand Islands, we can see just what is at stake in the consumption of paper. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, first published in 1922, begins by introducing "The Subject, Method and Scope of this Inquiry." In describing the approach to his work, he discusses the difficulties he encountered—a major part of which seems to be the lack of documents to be found in the Kula district. In attempting to learn of their laws, the structure of their society, and their traditions, he complains that "though crystallised and set, [they] are nowhere *formulated*" and thus prove difficult for him to ascertain (11). For, he says, "in our society, every institution has its intelligent members, its historians, and its archives

and documents, whereas in a native society there are none of these" (12). Thus, he argues, the lot falls on the ethnographer to collect "concrete data of evidence" which should be "tabulated into some sort of synoptic chart, both to be used as an instrument of study, and to be presented as an ethnological document" (12,17). Malinowski detects a material lack in the native culture that he intends to fulfill by generating his own records, records that can "present" the Kula to the world.

It is therefore not so much that paper and the production of documents are new to Western modernity (though technologies of storage and reproduction might be) but that their ubiquity is understood to signify something regarding the culture in question. What I detect then in the works of Conrad, Ford, Cather, Larsen and Woolf is a recognition of documents in modernity that is attendant on their pervasiveness: they are interested in their object-status but also the ways in which their materiality can be usefully employed in the space of the novel. In their introduction to *Rethinking Media Change*, David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins suggest that although the transition between old and new media technologies is decidedly gradual, "the introduction of a new technology always seems to provoke thoughtfulness, reflection, and self-examination in the culture seeking to absorb it" (2). Crucially, this "self-awareness" can also take the "form of a reassessment of established media forms, whose basic elements now achieve a new visibility" (4). Perhaps for these authors then, in light of the telephone, cinema, and television, the document is seen anew. From the banal objects of the everyday, documents might become the subject of critical thought and represent forms of aesthetic experimentation.

The document may not have changed much from the letters that constitute *Pamela* or the decisive newspaper article incriminating Mary's lover in Elizabeth

Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), or even the "document"—a dying note—accompanying a map that sets Allan Quatermain on his adventure in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1886) (21). However, it is the recognition of the uses to which they can be put in the novel that change through their ubiquity. Whereas, for example, the numerous letters featured in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) are presented as decisive moments in which the characters can speak in their own voice in a heavily mediated text, or in Wilkie Collins's detective fiction *The Moonstone* (1868), a well-placed letter is used to divulge the great mystery of the thief of the prized diamond, documents are not invoked in the works considered here solely for the purposes of verisimilitude, revelations of character, or plot. Rather, the modernist novel makes a greater investment in its documents. As the series of readings that follow indicate, the document could be used to gesture outside the world of the novel, to probe the epistemological uncertainty facilitated by modernity or acknowledge the imperial archive and African American race archive, respectively. In the novel, the document might also be used to contemplate the thematic potential of textuality through the possibility of its reiteration. Finally, the document may be deployed to facilitate a form of connectedness between characters in order to present their story—and the novel—as viable.

### **Generic Insistence: Joseph Conrad and the Document in Selected British and American Modernist Fiction**

The lengthy title of this thesis draws together the several lines of enquiry that this Introduction lays out. "Generic" is intended to capture two aspects of the modernist citation of documents. Firstly, it reflects, as I have already suggested, the ubiquity of

documents in the period: they are encountered as part and parcel of daily life. With the exception of the “Protest” document in Ford’s *The Good Soldier* and Tom Outland’s scientific formulae in Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, the documents considered in this study—diaries, letters, notes, newspapers, reports, and telegrams—are commonplace. In the second instance, “generic” reflects the document’s formal or technical differences from the novel in which it is reproduced. While documents constitute a number of genres of writing—telegrams, wills, and letters subscribe to different compositional or technical conventions— they are, in all cases, represented as distinct from the novel, which is another genre of writing. While inset documents are, of course, part of the work of fiction authored by Conrad, Ford, Cather, Larsen, or Woolf, these authors preserve the generic difference of the document through its quotation and reproduction *as if* it is an extant text and not a product of the novel.

The question of generic difference that the citation of the document in the novel raises, and that my title foregrounds, is an important one. The relationship between the document and the surrounding narrative, perhaps, paradoxically, is characterized by both sameness and change. The document is part of the novel insofar as it is written into it and yet it also represents an interruption or a departure from the narrative that comprises the novel. In addition to the specific theoretical frameworks that each chapter enlists to help uncover the complexity of the documentary presence, Edward Said’s theory of the contrapuntal is helpful as a general approach to discerning what I describe as the narrative’s opposition to and dependency on the document:

In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, and organized interplay that derives from themes,

not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. (*Culture and Imperialism* 59-60)

As Said extends this description of musical composition to the contrapuntal reading of texts, especially colonial literatures, we are asked to read for the interrelationship between the primary narrative and “alternative or new narratives” which appear as “institutionalized or discursively stable identities” (60). The practice of contrapuntal reading is to engage narratives, which can be historically contextualized, alongside and against each other to discover forms of complicity and resistance. Each case study in this thesis therefore attempts to read the document with and against the grain: as part of and yet resistant to the novel. Each fiction imagines the intersection of the document and the surrounding narrative in different ways. In all cases, however, this “organized interplay” between genres—the document and the novel—produces rich and diverse effects.

Although I focus on modernism exclusively, “generic insistence” serves as an important reminder that documents are a perennial literary concern. The citation of documents has a firm place in the history of the novel.<sup>16</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, largely cited as the first English language novel, in addition to *Pamela*, whose success inspired the epistolary novel tradition in English, are fictions rendered *as* documents. As pointed out earlier, *Crusoe* is presented as a survivor’s record and *Pamela*, a collection of found letters. In both cases, Defoe and Richardson adopt the pose of editors rather than authors. Although the reasons for Defoe’s and Richardson’s perpetration of their

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<sup>16</sup> In “The Rise of Fictionality” Catherine Gallagher rereads the novel genre as a development of fictionality. Whereas Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* reads fictionality as a “transhistorical constant,” Gallagher argues that it actually emerges simultaneously with the novel (340). “Fictionality . . . became visible when it became credible, because it only needed conceptualizing as the difference between fictions and lies became less obvious, as the operators of fictionality became multiple and incredibility lost its uniqueness” (340). Defoe’s and Richardson’s attempts to present their fictions as fact emerges, therefore, from the pressures of the marketplace: fiction was not yet credible.

fictions as documents vary considerably from the inclusion of documents in Conrad, Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf, it is, I think, important to recognize the appeal of the document as persisting beyond these early fictions and also the works considered here. As the concluding chapter of this thesis will suggest, the citation of the document remains an important literary strategy for the contemporary novel.

Finally, this thesis is comprised of a series of readings of “selected” English and American modernists in conversation with Conrad. Novels by Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf are selected because they are exemplary in revealing the narrative work the document can perform in the novel. From *The Good Soldier* to *The Voyage Out*, documents are presented with urgency: their narratives depend on them. Moreover, these are novels I see as in dialogue with Conrad and yet crucially, when brought alongside him, shed light on his strategies and provide new and compelling approaches to his fiction, particularly in the case of *The Secret Agent*. There are necessary and notable excisions in a project such as this one. I have, for example, excluded James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, E.M. Forster’s *Howards End*, and Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr* mainly because they do not share in Conrad’s sense of materiality and iterability, but also because I am interested in considering authors who do not share their canonical status.<sup>17</sup> My focus on Cather’s and Larsen’s formal experimentalism alongside Conrad, Ford, and Woolf is an attempt to test the limits of the citation of documents beyond a particular group of canonical writers. This thesis draws on the different contexts of its writers as a considerable strength: what emerges is a remarkable variety of visions of the document and the various ends to which it may be used in the novel.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the use of newspapers in *Ulysses*, the letters, telegrams and will in *Howards End*, and the inset letters of *Tarr*.

Chapter 1 begins at the beginning: What do we know? How can we tell it?

“Epistemological Evidence: Readability in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ and Ford’s *The Good Soldier*” reassesses these fundamental questions in light of the document. I read “Heart of Darkness,” commonly acknowledged as establishing the hesitancy and recalcitrance that would come to characterize modernist fiction, alongside Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, which is an exemplary expression of epistemological uncertainty as both subject and formal constraint. In these narratives of opacity and doubt, documents form sites of “readability”: they do not present the protagonists with the dilemma of representation. While “Heart of Darkness” works to reveal the loss of meaning associated with empire, in part, through the disparity between official reports of the imperial project and day-to-day existence in the Congo, I argue that the novella’s language is conditional upon the imperial documents that preceded it. In part, Ford revisits and inverts Conrad’s problematic in *The Good Soldier* by granting his protagonists consciousness through their engagement with documents, alerting us to the possible privileged status of the material text at the extremity of doubt.

“Telling it Again: Reiterated Documents in Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* and Cather’s *The Professor’s House*” considers how the fundamental iterability of the document forms a structural strategy. This focus on repeated and recontextualized documents reveals that Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line*, typically regarded as one of the least demanding of his works, is, in fact, one of his most complex. While the innovativeness of Cather’s *The Professor’s House* has long been acknowledged, a focus on documents can decipher the novel’s central dislocation. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of the composition history of *The Professor’s House* and *The Shadow-Line* as a testament to the potentials of reiteration. While it is not certain

Conrad drew on pre-existing text for the diary entries that feature in *The Shadow-Line*, “Tom Outland’s Story”—the central section of Cather’s novel—predates the text that comprises *The Professor’s House*.

Whereas Chapters 1 and 2 establish the necessity of the document in order to, in the first case, reveal its role as evidence in modernist narratives clouded by epistemological uncertainty, and in the second, demonstrate its reiterability as contributing to the formal innovation and complexity associated with modernism, Chapter 3, “Violence and the Archive: Conrad’s Early Imperial Fictions and Larsen’s *Quicksand* and *Passing*” considers the tearing, burning, and dilapidation of documents: scenes of their abandonment, abuse, and rejection. I revisit “Heart of Darkness” and consider *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* alongside Larsen’s *Passing* and *Quicksand* to demonstrate that scenes of superfluous violence enacted on documents form a response to what I call the imperial archive and the African American race archive, respectively. I draw upon Foucault’s concept of the archive especially but also the archival work of Ann Laura Stoler to develop the relationship between Conrad’s and Larsen’s destroyed documents.

The final chapter of comparative readings, “A Case for Connection?: The Newspaper in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* and Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*” reverses my approach thus far, which has been to read the works of these selected modernist authors directly through Conrad’s example. Instead, this chapter employs Woolf’s *A Voyage Out* and her extended essay *Three Guineas* to uncover the document’s work in establishing community and collectivity in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*. I use Benedict Anderson’s influential study *Imagined Communities* and Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of serial collectivity to explore how Woolf’s use of depersonalized texts and objects like

the newspaper facilitates connections between her characters and the perspectival shifts in her narrative. This comparison presents an opportunity to shed new light on and redress interpretations of *The Secret Agent*, which is often read as an outright condemnation of the newspaper.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of Julian Barnes's Man Booker Prize-winning novel *The Sense of An Ending* (2011). This contemporary novel references nearly every document cited in this thesis: the newspaper, letter, will, legal contract, and diary, and treads into new territory with its citation of the email. Barnes's novel asks the degree to which any story requires "documents" to be told. Life is caught up in documents. His protagonist remembers writing letters when they were in fashion and, by the conclusion, is shown contending with the dilemmas of email: what should one write in the subject line heading? How soon is too soon to respond? Barnes's novel suggests that although the pace of the transmission and production of documents has changed, and although some documents may become obsolete with the advent of new technologies, documents remain a pressing subject for the novel. The Conclusion considers how Barnes's invocation of documents recalls and reinvents the documents in Conrad, Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf discussed across this study. *The Sense of an Ending* reveals that the citation of the document was and still is a compelling literary strategy.

## Chapter 1

### Epistemological Evidence: Readability in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and Ford's *The Good Soldier*

In the modernist narrative overwhelmed by epistemological doubt, the document provides much sought-after information—even if the veracity of this information is ultimately contested. Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1899) and Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) feature documents as moments of respite from the hesitancy that characterizes their narratives. What I call the "readability" of documents comes into view in the context of the novels' laboured obscurity. Despite the fact that Marlow initiates the yarn that comprises "Heart of Darkness," he repeatedly interrupts himself with claims that his efforts are futile. The men on the *Nellie* cannot comprehend his experience sailing a steamer in the centre of Africa for a trading society known simply as the "Company." The Director, the Lawyer, the Accountant—and the narrator—cannot grasp the difficulties he encountered in his journey to the interior to retrieve the Company's most successful and notorious ivory collector: Kurtz. Marlow's frequent, unprompted outbursts: "Do you see [Kurtz]? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt . . . It is impossible; it is impossible to convey" (82); "I've been telling you what we said—repeating the phrases we pronounced—but what's the good?" (144); and "You can't understand. How could you? . . . how can you imagine . . ." indicate his anxiety that the story of his past will not be understood this evening on the Thames (116).

The novella implies that Marlow's skill as a storyteller and the attentiveness of his listeners has little bearing on whether or not he will be understood. Rather, aspects of Marlow's story seem to defy narration: they are not easily translatable into speech. Instead of naming or quantifying, Marlow expresses himself through suggestion. The repetition of words including *immeasurable*, *inarticulable*, *inscrutable*, *unknowable*, *unspeakable*, and *unutterable* across the narrative—what F. R. Leavis calls the novella's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery"—indicates the impossibility of direct description.<sup>18</sup> In *The Uses of Obscurity*, Allon White argues that "the search for 'a magic word that would make the enigma clear'" in the novella is "pre-empted from the outset by the fact that 'there is no such word'" (128). When Marlow takes a break from working on his boat at the station and observes the parade of men "strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard," it strikes him that the "silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth" is "something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion" (76). Whether Marlow intends that evil and truth should be antonyms or synonyms is unclear: is the wilderness like something evil, like something true, or both? Chinua Achebe describes this imprecision as a failure of the novella. Non-descriptions of the African wilderness such as this perpetuate "comforting myths" about the continent's blankness (784). On their approach to the inner station, Marlow describes his steamer as it toils along "on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings . . ." (96). In the

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Great Tradition*, published in 1948, F.R. Leavis described Conrad's "adjectival insistence" as, in fact, betraying "absence" (177-80). Leavis reads Conrad's use of negative modifiers as evidence of the novella's superfluous impenetrability: Conrad is "intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means" (180).

absence of an omniscient narrator who could elucidate Marlow's narration—confirm the 'correct' reading of the wilderness or fill in the blank represented by "incomprehensible"—the novella limits the potential for settled meanings and instead invites questions. The novella's negative modifiers and Marlow's scepticism form a meta-commentary on the text: "Heart of Darkness" is offered to readers as an interpretive challenge.

The novella's gestures to its own inconclusiveness raise questions that later modernist texts would continue to grapple with: what can we know? How do we tell it? White argues that Conrad "constructs narratives in which 'impenetrability,' literal and metaphorical, is profoundly important. There is a certain epistemological threshold which he refuses to cross" and it is this obscurity that represents a departure from the realist novel of his literary predecessors (111).<sup>19</sup> Peter Brooks's chapter on "Heart of Darkness" in his influential *Reading for the Plot* argues that Conrad's difficulty reveals "an acute self-consciousness about the organizing features of traditional narrative, working with them still, but suspiciously" (238). The foreclosure of definitive meanings, what the narrator identifies as another one of Marlow's "inconclusive experiences," is, for Brooks, a modernist feature of "Heart of Darkness" (51). If, as Brooks, White, and others have argued, "Heart of Darkness"

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<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that like F.R. Leavis, E.M. Forster thought Conrad's obscurity was meaningless. In his essay "Joseph Conrad: A Note," collected in *Abinger Harvest*, Forster wrote: "Behind the smoke screen of [Conrad's] reticence there may be another obscurity, connected with the foreground by wisps of vapour, yet proceeding from another source . . . a suggestion that our difficulties with Mr. Conrad may proceed in part from difficulties of his own" (134). The difficulty, for Forster, was that Conrad had nothing to say. In an often-quoted passage on Conrad's *Notes on Life and Letters* he elaborates: Conrad "is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel . . . we need not try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this particular direction, nothing to write" (135). After Leavis's criticism, critics would tend to respond in the vein of Jeremy Hawthorn: "Dr Leavis associates Marlow's incoherence with a failure of meaning in the book, whereas it is part of that book's meaning" (30). See Hawthorn's *Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness*.

heralds the end of realism and the beginning of the subjective, recalcitrant, and indeterminate narrative associated with modernist fiction, then Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* might be described as its culmination.

John Dowell, the narrator-protagonist of *The Good Soldier*, takes Marlow's doubt to its extreme. Whereas Marlow is shown to possess a set of beliefs and values against which he measures his own conduct, the work of the Company, and the actions of the Africans and agents he encounters in Africa, Dowell is virtually incapable of judgment of any kind. Thomas Moser observes that "forms of 'to know' occur 289 times" in the novel; "the telling phrase, 'I don't know,' itself appears about fifty times, and other negations of 'know' some forty times more" ('Introduction' xx-xxi). Roughly two-thirds into his circuitous narration, Dowell states: "For who in this world can give anyone a character? Who in this world knows anything of any other heart—or of his own?" (155). This is a surprising claim for Dowell to make in his role as a narrator, and at this late stage in the novel. As the author to the story that comprises *The Good Soldier*, we have been subject exclusively to his account of his wife Florence and their friends Edward and Leonora Ashburnham. Dowell's comment points to the text's avowed incompleteness: there will not be a final verdict on Florence, Edward, or Leonora in this story of loss and betrayal. Ford's novel is exemplary in its searching exploration of doubt as its subject and also a formal constraint.

For all this attention to the indescribable and the unknowable, however, Brooks usefully reminds us in his discussion of "Heart of Darkness" that "certain minimum canons of readability remain necessary if we are to be able to discern the locus of the necessarily unreadable" (242). This is to say that for the strategic obscurity of Conrad's novella—and Ford's, too—to be recognizable and meaningful, there must also be

moments in the narrative that are clear. Though expressed in different terms, Samuel Hynes makes a similar point in “The Epistemology of *The Good Soldier*.” Hynes argues that for a novel to pose the question “How can we know what is true?,” it must either devise strategies to introduce the truth, or, alternatively, reveal the truth that there is no truth (228). According to Hynes:

There are . . . two indirect ways in which a sense of truth can be introduced into such a novel without violating its formal (which is to say epistemological) limitations: either through ironic tone, which will act to discredit the narrator’s version of events and to imply the correctness of some alternative version, or through the development of the narrator toward some partial knowledge, if only of his own fallibility. (228)

Hynes importantly points to the necessity of having strategies in place to counter the epistemological uncertainty of a text in order to make its expressions of doubt—as thematic and formal concerns—intelligible.

“Readability” according to Brooks, or “a sense of truth” in Hynes’s formulation, suggest that what is legible or known supplements the unknown, the obscure, and that which defies narration. However, as sites of readability or truth form exceptions to the *modus operandi* of Conrad’s and Ford’s narratives, they acquire an exceptional status and hence, this chapter argues, are worth exploring in detail. This chapter considers Conrad’s novella alongside the even more tentative, unreliable, and hesitant narrative of *The Good Solider*. Specifically, I use the concept of the readable as it emerges in “Heart of Darkness” to diagnose the documents of *The Good Soldier*. In these works of uncertainty and doubt—the first cited as instantiating the limited narrative perspective that would become a cornerstone of the modernist novel, and the second, taking the concept of the subjective narrator to new heights—documents represent the loci of the readable.

Reports, newspaper articles, letters, and telegrams are quoted and referenced without the dilemma of representation and communication that Marlow and Dowell typically face. Kurtz's Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs and the newspaper Marlow's aunt reads in "Heart of Darkness," like Leonora Ashburnham's telegrams and the Protest document in *The Good Soldier*, are authored by others at a time or place distinct from the point of Marlow and Dowell's narrations. As a result, these documents seem to be exempt from their characteristic hesitancy and indecision. However, this is not to say that the document's appeal to accuracy or truthfulness is faithfully accepted. In "Heart of Darkness" especially, the document's capacity to dissemble the work of the Company as Marlow knows it, is one of the most powerful acts of disclosure in the novel. For this reason, Brooks's term "readable" is perhaps a more apt description of the document in these works than Hynes's notion of "truth." However, the fact of the material reality of documents remains indisputable, and the possibility of their direct reproduction on the pages of the narrative positions them uniquely against the indeterminacy of the primary narrative.

Whereas Marlow and Dowell range over meanings and emphasize the limits of their ability to interpret events and people, the readability of documents ensures that they are treated as sources of knowledge—by Marlow and Dowell but also readers. The document's capacity to impart knowledge is envisaged differently in each text. While, for example, the content of Kurtz's Report and the newspaper are paramount in Conrad's novella, it is primarily the document's materiality that forms its contribution to knowledge in *The Good Soldier*. In both cases, however, documents are relied on as forms of evidence. *The Good Soldier's* telling reference to Leopold von

Ranke—considered the father of historiography—is illustrative of the evidential status of the document in the novel. Florence reads a number of books including Ranke’s *Histories of the Popes During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1840) in preparation for the group’s visit to “M—” (likely referring to Marburg), to see what she believes is Martin Luther’s “Protest” document in the archives of the Schloss. Florence’s reliance on Ranke’s history—itsself based on documents—to interpret the document she is about to see, brings the evidentiary status of the document to the fore and also, I argue, forms the conceptual core of the novel.

In an often quoted passage from *Histories of the Latin and German Nations from 1494-1514* (1824), Ranke describes what would become a new methodological approach to history. He argues that the study of history, the attempt to tell a past “as it actually happened,” relies on the documents originated in that past as its source material: “The basis of the present work . . . are memoirs, diaries, letters, diplomatic reports, and original narratives of eyewitnesses; other writings were used only if they were immediately derived from the above mentioned or seemed to equal them because of some original information” (qtd. in Stern 68). Ranke’s interpretation of the document recognizes the significance of its materiality, but also imbues it with an explicit epistemological value. Ranke’s elevation of the document as a text from the past that has the capacity to reveal information in the present is relevant, despite their not being historical works, to both Ford’s and Conrad’s narratives. As readable texts capable of being reproduced directly in their otherwise recalcitrant narrations, the documents of “Heart of Darkness” and *The Good Soldier* act as touchstones. In Conrad, Marlow’s narration is indebted to the documents that chronologically and conceptually precede his narration at the same time that his story aboard the *Nellie* is

an attempt to circumvent them. In the context of Ford's novel of hyperbolic uncertainty, the assured document is used to counter the effects of Dowell's disorienting impressionism, though with devastating results.

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Although I am not interested in positing a relationship of influence between Conrad and Ford in any conventional sense, Ford, unlike the other authors considered in this study, described himself as a descendant of Conrad in terms of a literary genealogy.<sup>20</sup> He claimed Conrad as a literary forefather and hence welcomed, if not encouraged, a derivative association. A self-labelled Impressionist, Ford acknowledged Conrad's techniques as pertinent to the development of his own style. He commented on the period of their acquaintance: "If I know anything of how to write almost the whole of that knowledge was acquired then" (*Return to Yesterday* 203). In addition to these expressions of adulation, Ford collaborated with Conrad on fiction. They embarked on a literary partnership that lasted a near decade, producing three novels: *The Inheritors* (1901), the considerably longer pirate adventure *Romance* (1903) and *The Nature of a Crime* (1909), serialized under Ford's editorship at *The English Review*.<sup>21</sup> While the standard of these works does not approach their individual literary achievement, they importantly represent the continuation of earlier preoccupations or, in the case of Ford, appear as bridge texts to later fictions. Moreover, these collaborative novels

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<sup>20</sup> In his 1938 *March of Literature: from Confucius to Modern Times*, Ford cites Conrad and Henry James as the English "impressionist predecessors" of contemporary modern writing (844-847). Ford labeled himself an Impressionist and wrote on the technique in his essays "On Impressionism" and *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*. Though it must be noted that this is a term Conrad avoided in reference to his own writing. See Michael Levenson's chapter, "Ford: the Passing of Great Figures" in *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 48-62. See also Ian Watt's *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 169-180.

<sup>21</sup> Ford also published Conrad's *Some Reminiscences* in *The English Review*, 1908-1909.

might be used as an index of the complexity of documents in “Heart of Darkness” and *The Good Soldier*.

According to Ford, *The Inheritors*:

was to be a political work, rather allegorically backing Mr. Balfour in the then Government; the villain was to be Joseph Chamberlain who had made the war. The subvillain was to be Leopold II, King of Belgians, the foul—and incidentally lecherous—beast who had created the Congo Free State in order to grease the wheels of his harems with the blood of murdered negroes and to decorate them with fretted ivory cut from stolen tusks in the deep forests. (*A Personal Remembrance* 133-4)

Ford’s description indicates explicitly the continuity between the critique of colonialism in “Heart of Darkness” and this “Extravagant Story.” The Congo is replaced by Greenland as the site of conflict and Leopold II by the Duc de Mersch.<sup>22</sup> The Duc campaigns for financial support from the British government to run a railway across Greenland. The project promises to be profitable for both parties with the additional benefit that Britain can claim she “aided in letting the light in upon a dark spot of the earth” (32). The echoes of Marlow’s first words aboard the *Nellie* are difficult to miss: “And this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth” (YOS 48). The Duc explains to Granger, the protagonist, that the altruistic work of the “great international society for the preservation of Polar freedom” (recall the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs in “Heart of Darkness”) ensured that “the Esquimaux . . . lived and moved in harmony [with colonizers], employed, happy,

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<sup>22</sup> See Mario Curreli on the relationship between *The Inheritors* and “Heart of Darkness.” Curreli offers a persuasive reading of *The Inheritors* as another satire of European colonialism. The novel’s curious mention of black inhabitants and cannibalism in Greenland suggests the pair were still thinking about “Heart of Darkness.” See “*The Inheritors*: Conrad and Ford’s Extravagant Story” in *Collaboration in the Arts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Eds. Silvia Bigliuzzi and Sharon Wood (Hampshire, Ashgate, 2006) 103-119. However, the “extravagant” aspects of the novel are not to be dismissed; Ford and Conrad seem to be engaging in generic experimentation. See also Curreli’s “Invading Other People’s Territory: *The Inheritors*” in *Conradiana* 37 (2005): 79-100.

free labourers, protected by the most rigid laws. Man-eating, fetich-worship [sic], slavery had been abolished, stamped out” (99).

With respect to documents, *The Inheritors* is consistent with Ford’s non-fiction writing on the press in addition to Conrad’s position on the newspaper in “Heart of Darkness,” which I discuss in the following section in detail.<sup>23</sup> Conrad condemned the press’s uncritical facilitation of the imperial project but also its occlusion of the material consequences of colonialism. In *The Inheritors*, the Duc creates a paper, the *Hour*, to “advance the cause of the System for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions,” not in the sincere interest of “regenerating” Greenland, but to justify his lucrative railway project (32). Articles are written for those who are willing to pay for them, irrespective of the facts (recalling, perhaps, Henry Morton Stanley’s dispatches for the *New York Herald*, which justifiably repulsed Conrad). However, unlike “Heart of Darkness” or Conrad’s later novel *The Secret Agent*, as discussed in Chapter 4, *The Inheritors* does not take up the newspaper as a formal interest: its citation is limited to its role in producing and disseminating propaganda.

The last of the co-authored novels, *The Nature of a Crime*, does show a formal interest in documents. The novel is structured as a collection of letters in the vein of Richardson’s *Pamela*. Though there is an important difference between them: whereas Pamela transcribes all the letters she receives from different characters in her correspondence with her parents—thereby giving readers access to them—the narrator in *The Nature of a Crime* does not post his letters to his beloved until the conclusion of the novel. To this end, the novel explores the formal potentials of the epistolary novel. There is no opportunity to assess the response he receives—if he

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 4 for more on Ford’s criticism of the press in the context of other modernist authors during the period.

ever gets one. In these letters, the narrator confesses his love to his addressee, an unnamed married woman who, as far as can be ascertained, has no relationship to the narrator whatsoever. He also takes this opportunity to disclose that he is guilty of stealing money from his ward, Edward. Her non-existent or withheld letters become thematized. The urgency of the narrator's situation, including his isolation and the loneliness of his secret guilt, are compounded by her literal and figurative silence. The narrator presents an ultimatum to his beloved: if she does not respond to the package of letters he posted, he will kill himself. The novel ends without her reply.

While there are details of *The Nature of a Crime* that anticipate *The Good Soldier* (like an adulterous "Edward," or a neurotic, eunuch figure for a narrator), perhaps what most closely aligns the novels is their first-person narration via documents. Though the documents in the novels differ, there is a shared recognition of writing as an opportunity to circumvent solitude. Both the narrator and Dowell imagine themselves in dialogue with another person. In *The Nature of a Crime*, the narrator writes: "I have never had so long as ten hours in which I might talk to you" (26). *The Good Soldier's* Dowell visualizes himself speaking as he writes his "saddest story": "I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me. And I shall go on talking" (42). Yet Conrad and Ford's deployment of letters in *The Nature of a Crime* never achieves the level of complexity of Dowell's written record. There are moments in their melodramatic novel when the invocation of the document has the appearance of a gimmick.

The first letter in the novel features a passage that reads as an especially contrived attempt to generate suspense. The narrator writes:

I will tell you about it afterwards—but I forbid you to look at the end of what I am writing now. There is a piece of news coming: I would break it to you if I could—but there is no way of breaking the utterly unexpected. Only, if you read through this you will gather from the tenor, from the tone of my thoughts, a little inkling, a small preparation for my disclosure. Yes: it is a ‘disclosure.’ (16)

Another letter recalls one of Richardson’s epistolary devices in *Pamela*, which Henry Fielding explicitly satirized in his revision of Pamela, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741). When the narrator receives a letter from Edward, he interrupts the flow of his writing to announce the letter’s arrival: “. . . But I have just received an incomprehensible note from Edward Burden” (84). The technique of ‘writing to the moment’—observing an event and recording it virtually as soon as it occurs—strikes a note of insincerity. This type of writing occurs often in *Pamela*. In one of her letters to her parents, Pamela writes: “I am very sorrowful; and still have greater Reason; for just now, as I was in my Closet, opening the Parcel I had hid under the Rosebush . . . Mrs. Jewkes came upon me by Surprize” (sic) (197). It is difficult to conceive of Pamela’s ability to open her parcel, meet Mrs. Jewkes, and record these events, all at the same time. In another example, Pamela looks out her window and writes without any delay in recording what she sees: “I see at the Window, that Visitors are come; for there is a Chariot and six horses . . . Who can it be, I wonder?” (316). Fielding, Richardson’s contemporary, found this strategy implausible and mocked Richardson explicitly in *Shamela*. Thus Shamela writes in a letter: “You see I write in the present Tense” (247).

We can only speculate the degree to which Conrad and Ford discussed embedded or quoted document text as a narrative strategy, like, for example, their

theory of *progression d'effet*.<sup>24</sup> What this brief view of *The Inheritors* and *The Nature of a Crime* does reveal, however, is the richness and complexity of documents in “Heart of Darkness” and *The Good Soldier*, but also what must be the centrality of documents to these narratives. Conrad’s and Ford’s fictions, in contrast to the collaborative novels, depend on documents. Marlow’s narration is conditional upon the documents that, so to speak, have already been where he is about to go. Moments of clarity in *The Good Soldier* are facilitated by characters’ encounters with documents. Documents, representing sites of readability, give shape to these decidedly recalcitrant narratives.

### **The Readable in “Heart of Darkness”**

The idea of the “readable” emerges directly from the pages of “Heart of Darkness.” I employ it here as a term of critical inquiry which can be applied back on to Conrad’s novella and also to *The Good Soldier*. Marlow, losing patience with the manager’s criticism of Kurtz’s “methods,” sardonically suggests that the brickmaker—a man that neither makes bricks nor proposes to in the future—might instead “make a readable report” detailing Kurtz’s failings (138). Marlow’s use of this adjective refers, in the first instance, to legibility: the brickmaker, versed in the Company’s business, its “talk,” and its “government,” should be able to produce a document satisfying the generic expectations of those in “the proper quarter” (78, 138). This “readable” document will also perform the desired effect of removing Kurtz from his post, and in his absence the

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<sup>24</sup> In *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, Ford defines *progression d'effet* as follows: “In writing a novel we agreed that every word set on paper—every word set on paper—must carry the story forward and, that as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity. That is called *progression d'effet*, words for which there is no English equivalent” (210). Ford explains that he and Conrad formulated this technique while writing together.

Manager will acquire Kurtz's ivory. "Readability," as an expression of fidelity to discursive convention, also represents complicity with imperial commerce and the European exploitation of African natural resources in this context.

In the second instance, Marlow's use of "readable" underscores the perhaps obvious but equally crucial point that the report is a written artefact: it can literally be read. Therefore, "readable" also instantiates a text-speech dichotomy that overlaps simultaneously with Brooks's division of the novella along a readable-unreadable axis. As a document, the brickmaker's written report is distinct from the main event of "Heart of Darkness": Marlow's protracted narration aboard the *Nellie*. As I suggested in the Introduction, the document's materiality emerges forcefully in light of the novella's investment in speech.

Apart from the brickmaker's hypothetical report, there are several other texts which Marlow encounters prior to and during his journey in Africa—snippets of newspaper articles and letters, Kurtz's notorious report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, and *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*—that do not present him with the dilemma of representation. He refrains from the "adjectival insistence" that characterizes his descriptions of people, places, and events. If one of Marlow's difficulties is finding words that give something approaching an adequate expression of his African experience, documents are exempted from this process: the words already exist. As documents are read and quoted directly, they represent instances of readability in Marlow's narration.

Yet the relative ease with which Marlow is able to quote documents indicates the complexity of their inclusion. Before considering the ideological consequences of the readability of the novella's documents in relation to the novella's opacity, it is worth

rehearsing the point briefly that documents—particularly newspaper articles and Kurtz’s Report—disclose a crucial disjunction. The disjunction plays itself out between the self-conception of the imperial mission in print and the day-to-day practice of colonizers abroad. Grandiloquent sentiments expressed confidently in text are pitted against appalling actions bound up in Marlow’s looping, cautious yarn. It is perhaps this aspect of the novella’s documents that resonates most with Brooks’s “minimum canons of readability”; the documents represented in the novella allow us to acknowledge Marlow’s distinctly “unreadable” report of European imperialism in Africa.

A few sample phrases from these documents illustrate this chasm. Marlow’s aunt understands that Marlow’s work in Africa will be to wean “those ignorant millions from their horrid ways”; a phrase which Marlow contends is lifted directly from the press: “there had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet” (59). Kurtz’s Report, meanwhile, echoes and emphasizes such newspaper talk of Europe’s “civilizing” mission: “Whites,” Kurtz writes, “must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity” and thus “by the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded” (118). There is little evidence to suggest Kurtz practices the pseudo-missionary ideal he espouses, given the decorative use he makes of Congolese heads. Kurtz’s Report, in other words, is quite distinct from Kurtz’s practices. Insofar as there is any engagement with “those ignorant millions,” the Company enslaves or kills them in the service of ivory. If there is a God presiding over the imperial mission in the Congo, it is ivory: “you would think they were praying to it,” Marlow marvels (76).

Irrespective of other factors that prevent Marlow from revealing the precise details of Kurtz's and the Company's methods (including, as one possibility, self-censorship on account of the document he signs before departing for Africa) the newspaper and Kurtz's Report serve as indices of what the imperial mission is not. Documents form ethical markers insofar as the Company's reprehensibility can be gauged vis-à-vis its departures from the activities the documents describe. This carefully contrived opposition generates the exposé quality of "Heart of Darkness" that E. D. Morel noted when in 1909, he called it the "most powerful thing ever written on the subject" of the Belgian Congo (qtd. in Simmons 115). This same concept of disclosure, or evidence, will be traced through Ford's documents. But whereas documents occlude and elide in "Heart of Darkness," they are revelatory in *The Good Soldier*: they say what Dowell knows and suppresses or simply cannot know. Benita Parry echoes and elaborates Morel's claim: "by revealing the disjunctions between high-sounding rhetoric," which, as suggested here, Conrad introduces to the novella through his citation of documents, "and sordid ambitions . . . Conrad's writings [are] more destructive of imperialism's ideological premises than [are] the polemics of his contemporary opponents of empire" (*Conrad and Imperialism* 10).

Crucially, however, this productive juxtaposition of text and oral story also has a temporal component. Though the readable and unreadable elements unfold simultaneously in the novella—that is, Marlow quotes documents alongside his non-literary experiences during the protracted moment of his narration—the documents he refers to are written before his journey to the Congo. These documents form a version of the imperial project in Africa before Marlow has the opportunity to offer up his necessarily belated oral report. The documents of "Heart of Darkness" present a

story already told, while Marlow's description of his experience might be described as a story in progress. The temporal disjunction between each version—particularly as it is mapped on to the readable-unreadable axis of the novella—bears consequences. Because Marlow contends with a “read” Africa, that is, an extant discourse on the continent generated by the West, which, at the same time, instantiates the justification of Western imperialism—he responds with a language of ambivalence that produces the novella's notorious opacity.

The language of the newspaper and Kurtz's Report does not originate with “Heart of Darkness” but belongs to an imperial lexicon, or what Parry refers to as the novella's “received phrases” (*Postcolonialism* 132). The pseudo-religious rhetoric, for example, that appears in appraisals of the Company's agents and their work—“Emissary of light,” “lower sort of apostle,” “noble cause,” and “heavenly mission”—alludes to what the contemporary chronicler of empire, J. A. Hobson, describes as the “selfish forces which direct Imperialism” coopting earnest projects; in this case, a desire to spread Christianity (208). These forces “simply and instinctively attach to themselves any strong, genuine elevated feeling which is of service, fan it and feed it until it assumes fervour, and utilize it to their ends” (208).

Barbara Harlow's *Imperialism & Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook* further reveals the cultural currency of Conrad's “received phrases.” In this collection of primary texts that Harlow identifies as providing the framework for the European colonial project in the 1800s, Hegel's 1822 lectures collected as *The Philosophy of History* are notable for establishing the “grounds for a narrative of development that will significantly overdetermine Europe's imperial and imperious relation—and the rationales for her territorial claims—with Africa for the next two centuries” (244).

Hegel's invocation of child/adult and night/day paradigms in describing Africa's lack of history and civilization—binaries appealed to in explanations and justifications of the imperial project long after its publication—are particularly relevant to the documents of "Heart of Darkness." As one example of the cultural legacy of Hegel's model, Walter Bagehot, then editor of the *Economist*, recapitulates the argument for Africa's thwarted development in his *Physics and Politics*, first published in 1869. Bagehot makes a distinction between civilized people who have the ability to generate ideas and beliefs independently and savage people who can only imitate:

A savage tribe resembles a herd of gregarious beasts; where the leader goes they go too; they copy blindly his habits, and thus soon become that which he already is. For not only the tendency, but also the power to imitate is stronger in savages than civilized men. Savages copy quicker, and they copy better. Children, in the same way, are born mimics. (104-15)

Similarly, according to Marlow's Aunt, the Company has the task of "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (59). Her description, borrowed from the papers, evokes children or small animals that must be taught to accept the loss of their mother's milk (59). Kurtz's Report argues that "we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings'" (118). Europeans, in their advanced state, are like gods to Africans who cease to mature intellectually past the point of childhood.

Like Marlow and his Aunt, Conrad and his contemporaries would have encountered these formulations in the press. *The Spectator*, one of the many papers Conrad acknowledged reading, featured an article titled "The Mystery of Africa," dated 15 February 1890. It is exemplary of the language and sentiment evoked in the inset texts of "Heart of Darkness," and is particularly relevant to the novella's subject.

The arguments for Africa's absent history and civilization resurface, and we are reminded again that Africans are comparable to children. It begins:

It is impossible to read Mr. Stanley's reports of his adventures, and especially the official one published this week . . . without reflecting once more upon the great mystery of Africa. What is it that through all ages has rendered the mass of that grand continent, five times the size of Europe, full of extravagantly fertile regions and mineral treasures, so useless to mankind? (230)

The author cites British explorer and journalist H. M. Stanley's descriptions of the Congo from his recently published book of African adventures, *In Darkest Africa* (1890), and concludes that "Negroes" cannot learn from Stanley's example and direct themselves in his absence because they "undoubtedly forget with the rapidity of children" (231). The article ends with an allusion to the cruel practice of collecting ivory in the Congo, blaming Arabs and Zanzibari "half-castes" for their exploitation of hopeless "Negroes."

It is no coincidence that the newspaper also figures in "An Outpost of Progress" (1898), Conrad's bitter portrayal of European trade in Africa. This civilizing farce of Kayerts and Carlier—chief and assistant to the chief of a trading station in the centre of Africa—culminates in the narrator's account of the pair reading copies of a home newspaper:

That print discussed what it was pleased to call 'Our Colonial Expansion' in high-flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the Sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. Carlier and Kayerts read, wondered, and began to think better of themselves. (94-5)

The men are unaware of their status as paragons of virtue until they read the newspaper; they are captivated and convinced by the exposition that the press offers of their work. What is most striking about this passage is not their response to the article, which recalls Marlow's impressionable Aunt. Rather, it is the text of the newspaper: it might be transposed seamlessly to the pages of "Heart of Darkness."

Kurtz's "an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence" and the newspaper's "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways," are reiterated here in the newspaper's invocation of religious and secular "duty." The relevance of this language to both "Heart of Darkness" and "An Outpost of Progress" not only suggests the cultural embeddedness of these phrases but indicates the portability of this language.

The particularity of Marlow's narration, its hesitancy and recalcitrance, I suggest might be cast as a response to such documents. The novella can then be seen as illustrative of Marlow's—and perhaps, Conrad's—struggle with an imperial lexicon. Part of what makes the novella "powerful" in Morel's words, or "destructive of imperialism's ideological premises" in Parry's articulation, is Marlow's shock. The already told—those newspaper articles in circulation and Kurtz's Report—engenders expectations that are not merely frustrated, but categorically denied. If Marlow's journey into Africa at all resembles Conrad's experience, then as Andrea White notes, "by the time [Conrad] found himself aboard a Congo steamer, he was at least partially a victim of 'the Victorian myth of the Dark Continent'" (181). That is, Conrad's reading of David Livingstone's accounts amongst other explorers' adventures in Africa "had already powerfully created 'Africa' for him" and this version did not correspond to his experience (181).

In an often-cited passage from his essay "Geography and Some Explorers," Conrad writes about his disappointment at visiting "the then white heart of Africa" (16) of his childhood daydreams to find it was nothing like what the journalist Stanley described:

A great melancholy descended on me. Yes, this was the very spot. But there was no shadowy friend to stand by my side in the night of enormous wilderness, no great haunting memory, but only the unholy recollection of a prosaic newspaper 'stunt' and the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history

of human conscience and geographical exploration. What an end to the idealized realities of a boy's daydreams! (*LE* 17).

The "stunt" presumably refers to Stanley's fictitious accounts of central Africa and Livingstone for the *New York Herald*, and the "scramble for loot," King Leopold's avaricious empire in the Congo.<sup>25</sup> Conrad's 1890 "Congo Diary" confirms the discrepancy between Stanley's descriptions and what he saw directly.<sup>26</sup>

Yet as Marlow—and Conrad—undertake to communicate their knowledge of imperialism in a language beyond that provided by documents, they do not introduce or discover a new language. Achebe's criticism of the novella's lack of interest in articulating an African landscape or realizing African characters gathers particular force in this respect. On route to the station, Marlow notes that the coast "was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness" (60). Achebe argues that the unknowability of Africa in "Heart of Darkness" is Conrad's failure—not on Leavis's terms, but on account of Conrad's racism. Through "a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery," Conrad's prose induces a "hypnotic stupor in his readers" that enables him to perpetuate the idea of Africa's absent history and humanity (784). If, as Christopher Miller argues in his discussion of Africanist discourse, "'Africa' has been made to fill with its emptiness," then Marlow's telling does little to undermine a history of enforced blankness with local detail (169). Instead Marlow negotiates his experience with the language at hand, which is the language of documents imported to the Congo.

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Donovan argues that while critics have tended to read the 'stunt' as Stanley's fantastic descriptions of Livingstone and the Congo, the "unholy recollection" refers to Stanley's second trip to Africa in 1874 in which his thousand-day trek involved killing and injuring many Africans. When news of Stanley's atrocities reached Britain, he was publicly condemned. See Donovan's "Conrad's Unholy Recollection." *Notes and Queries* 49 (2002): 82-4.

<sup>26</sup> The "Congo Diary" is included in *Last Essays*. It is one of two notebooks that Conrad kept describing his time the Congo in 1890.

“Darkness” is Conrad’s most blatant and frequent borrowing from the readable in the formation of Marlow’s unreadable report. Contemporary invocations of darkness, typified by the titles of popular works including Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) and *In Darkest Africa* (1890), connote a continent not yet discovered; a part of the world devoid of the light of civilization. As an epithet for Africa, dark or darkness is entrenched to the degree that Marlow can by-pass its naming. Marlow describes his fascination for maps and exploration as a child, and he remembers hankering after the “biggest, the most blank” space that has since “become a place of darkness” (52). “Africa” is never named as such. However, as Parry and many other critics note, Conrad evokes darkness in many competing contexts in the novella, which serve to undermine its “established significations” (*Postcolonialism* 136). The word appears nearly thirty times across the text and variously refers to European history, Africa, Kurtz’s heart, the Company’s headquarters in Belgium, a moral void (largely attributed to European enterprises and characters), and the sky over the Thames and the unnamed Congo River.

For Parry, Conrad reveals an abject colonialism through this inversion of darkness’s “received usage,” which serves to “alienate the inflated language of imperialist rhetoric” (*Postcolonialism* 136). Though Conrad’s striking pronouncement of darkness at home and within is notable for its potential to undermine the professed aims and practices of imperialism, what has garnered significantly less critical attention is the resulting instability of the word. In a more recent essay, Parry addresses the “chiaroscuro” effect of the novella’s deployment of light and dark imagery (*Conrad in the Twenty-First Century* 43). She argues that “Heart of Darkness” simultaneously “reiterates and compromises the customary evaluation attaching to

white and black" (43); however, Conrad does not seem so much to unmoor "darkness" from the grips of Africanist discourse—Africa remains dark throughout the novella—as suggest that darkness also embraces Europe. As an all-encompassing term, darkness produces deep ambiguities. The process by which *both* Africa and Europe come to share this epithet and the question of the commensurability of their darkness is suggested but left unexplored.

Conrad's treatment of "light" further complicates the potential for a redefinition of darkness. According to the newspaper articles mentioned by Marlow and his Aunt, the Europeans who undertake to civilize Africans are emissaries of "light." Marlow's yarn aboard the *Nellie* quickly exposes this description of European benevolence to be one more in a series of hollow phrases. To complete the novella's startling disavowal of imperialist rhetoric then, Marlow might describe Africans as already the bearers of light: perhaps, possessing the illuminating power of knowledge or goodness. However, this inversion does not occur; Africa is as devoid of light as Europe. "Light" seems to be the illumination of experience that reveals, at bottom, a profound darkness. Marlow's meeting with Kurtz "seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything" (51). In this context, light that does not expose moral depravity represents ignorance. We suspect that if Marlow had divulged Kurtz's last words to his Intended, there would be no room for "all the sad light" to take "refuge on her forehead" (157). Marlow admits "he could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether" (162).

That "light" and "darkness" are no longer antonyms presents an interpretive problem. If Marlow's ambiguous deployment of light and dark can be described as undermining the perceived antithetical relationship between Africa and Europe that serves to justify Western imperialism, then he does little to intimate what replaces this

dialectic in the process. The discomfiting proximity of darkness and light is suggested evocatively and succinctly in his observation of Kurtz's gift of expression. It is: "the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (113-114). Hinging merely on the conjunction "or," the "pulsating stream of light" is revealed to be menacingly close to "the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness."

Marlow's description of Kurtz's writing as "noble" presents another instance of a highly charged adjective, rich in associations, rendered ambiguous through his usage. While there is little doubt as to the irony of Marlow's account of his predecessor Fresleven, who "had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause" before he attacks the chief of a village to assert "his self-respect" (54); or, Marlow's description of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, a "noble enterprise" that has "no moral purpose" at the back of their trade (87), Marlow also invokes "noble" in an apparently sincere description of Kurtz's imperialist document. Though Kurtz's Report comprises the rhetoric that Marlow's unreadable narration at other moments exposes as duplicitous, the experience of reading the Report induces Marlow to speak in superlatives: Kurtz's words are "magnificent," "he soared and took me with him," and they make him "tingle with enthusiasm" (118). This document, according to Marlow, illustrates the "unbounded power of eloquence—of words—burning noble words" (118).

Crucially, however, this praise is cut short by the following observation:

there were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method . . . 'Exterminate all the brutes!'. (118)

This “terrifying” postscriptum indicates the degree to which Kurtz’s utopian “noble” words are untethered from action. Yet despite making this observation, Marlow will not lay it in the “dust-bin of progress,” where, according to Marlow’s notion of “progress” in the Congo, the Company and the Eldorado Exhibition rightfully belong (119). Rather, Marlow safeguards the future of Kurtz’s noble Report by ensuring its publication—without its postscript.

Similarly, “progress,” as it is borrowed from the category of the readable, undergoes modulations across Marlow’s narrative without cultivating a new, stable signifying power. In one invocation, the brickmaker explains to Marlow that people describe, “even write” of Kurtz as “an emissary of pity, science, and progress . . . for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe” (79). While the events recounted by Marlow—including the “incomprehensible . . . firing into a continent” of a French gunboat (62), the “objectless blasting” of a cliff (64), and even the more benign fetching of water in a pail “with a hole in the bottom” (76)—test the Company’s model of progress, Marlow’s insistence on his ship’s progress “towards Kurtz—exclusively” is difficult to assimilate (95). Marlow’s journey along the unnamed African river induces in him a feeling that he is “travelling in the night of first ages” (96). The notion of progress, dually epitomized by the ship’s and the narrative’s forward movement towards Kurtz’s voice, functions in contradistinction to “the primitive world into which one penetrates . . . where ‘backwards’ and ‘forwards’ have no more meaning” (Miller 172). Africa represents “the loss of directionality” that Marlow must circumvent (Miller 172). At the same time that the “progress” of imperialist rhetoric seems to be disavowed, it is counterbalanced through the successful movement of Marlow’s steamer through a “prehistoric” Africa (96).

The repositioning of words such as “darkness,” “light,” “noble,” and “progress”—words resounding with moral implications—from documents to Marlow’s unreadable report position “Heart of Darkness” as an epistemological challenge in a decidedly subtler and perhaps more complex manner than Marlow’s appeals to his listeners, or his use of negative modifiers. As these overdetermined words resurface in Marlow’s narration, their inherited meanings are destabilized and ultimately unanswered. Robbed of their moral significations, they no longer become points of orientation for the ethical dilemmas that feature across Marlow’s narrative. The possibility of arriving at definitive conclusions is thus forestalled. It is this unresolved tension between the already told and the telling, the readable and the unreadable, which may account for the spectrum of critical responses to the question of the novella’s position on imperialism, from Parry to Achebe.

While it is possible to trace negative modifiers or the modulations of select words across the novella, it is a less precise science to argue for the mood conveyed through Conrad’s various invocations. However, to the extent that Marlow’s deployment of language has thematic resonance, his negotiation of received language seems to generate a claustrophobic effect. The discursive limits imposed on Marlow’s articulation are felt. The recycling of words from documents realizes a restricted linguistic universe. Nowhere does the oppressiveness of the narration emerge more powerfully than at the moment of its disruption with the discovery of Towson’s (or Tower’s) *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*.

*An Inquiry* presents Marlow with a brief moment of respite. Towson, the “simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases,” allows Marlow to “forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably

real" (99). While Homi Bhabha reads *An Inquiry* as an instance of the "fortuitous discovery of the English book" in the colonial world, this observation erroneously suggests that Marlow's Africa is bereft of text (144). Bhabha's tropological reading relies on "the wild and wordless wastes of" the likes of "colonial India, Africa, the Caribbean" as vital to the sudden discovery of text (144). He argues that the book functions "as an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline" (144). But Conrad's Congo is emphatically not wordless: while the African voice is almost completely silenced, Towson's book is not the only text either generated in or translated to the Congo, as we have seen. Moreover, Marlow does not seem to celebrate the unlikely presence of the book because it is English; he refers to the author of the "cipher" on the book's pages as "English" rather than Towson (100). Marlow learns shortly thereafter that the cipher is, in fact, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, and we might consider further its professed significance as an "English book," for the Russian text inscribed on the margins of Towson's "illustrative diagrams" and "tables of figures" unsettles the apparent Englishness of what Bhabha argues is a pre-eminently "English" text.

Rather, Marlow's enthusiasm for *An Inquiry* seems to be a result of the momentary break in one discursive universe—the jungle and the pilgrims and those documents that inscribe them—and the opening up of another. The copy, "sixty years old," and with its references to "chains and purchases" represents an entirely distinct referential world from Marlow's experience in the Congo (99). Crucially, *An Inquiry* is presented as the antithesis to Kurtz's pamphlet: it is replete with "practical hints." That is, the "breaking strain of ships' chains and tackle" can be measured and recorded with exactitude while the metaphorical "breaking strain" of Kurtz, and the

imperial project more generally, must be inferred from confounding footnotes scrawled in “an unsteady hand” (118). Ann Laura Stoler’s work in the colonial archives, which I consider in detail in Chapter 3, characterizes these “uncensored turns of phrase, loud asides in the imperative tense, [and] hesitant asides in sotto voce” as registering forms of confusion and uncertainty (*Along the Archival Grain* 23). It is at this point, therefore, with the brief opening up of the narrative to another language, technical and precise, that the limitations of the narrative seem their most pronounced. The opacity and oppressiveness of the novella is therefore achieved through this glimpse of a direction it cannot pursue. *An Inquiry* is returned to the Russian, and Marlow’s narrative voice reinstated.

The novella relies on documents to give shape to Marlow’s narrative at the same time that Marlow attempts to circumvent them in the form of his unreadable report. Ultimately, the novella cannot or chooses not to discover a language beyond that which documents circumscribe. As it stages these limits, especially through the select reissue of words from documents to Marlow’s unreadable report, the novella is instructive: it exemplifies the discursive hold of the already told over future narration. Even after Marlow’s tale aboard the *Nellie* ceases, it thus seems to continue. The concluding words of “Heart of Darkness” are spoken by the narrator. Not coincidentally, he repeats one of Marlow’s most pronounced phrases: “the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the *heart of an immense darkness*” (emphasis added 162). In these final words, too, though in an altogether more benign manifestation, Conrad illustrates the process by which the already articulated exerts its reach.

### Epistemological Evidence in *The Good Soldier*

The uncertainty and hesitancy of John Dowell's story exceeds that exhibited by Marlow's narrative. As a result, *The Good Soldier* places different, though not entirely dissimilar demands on the document. Readability, as formulated in "Heart of Darkness," denotes texts which can be read and directly reproduced, but also texts that appeal to certain generic conventions which render them predictable and stable. In this sense, inset documents offer temporary relief from the circuitousness of *The Good Soldier*. They present moments of rest from the difficulty Dowell faces when he attempts to communicate immaterial events. Consider, for example, his response to being cuckolded after Florence has an affair: "You ask how it feels to be a deceived husband. Just Heavens, I do not know. It just feels nothing at all. It is not Hell, certainly it is not necessarily Heaven" (89). In contrast, his description of a telegram that Edward receives from Leonora is direct and assertive: "He found at his hotel in Monte Carlo a telegram from Leonora, dispatched from London, saying: 'Please return as soon as convenient'" (162). Perhaps more interesting are the ways in which *The Good Soldier* seems to depart from "Heart of Darkness." The documents of Ford's novel facilitate a different kind of disclosure; they are used to reveal there are no objective facts. So while documents offer respite from Dowell's Impressionist modality, they also serve to undermine the intent of his impressionism: to acquire knowledge. The document becomes evidence of secret liaisons and suppressed feelings which ultimately proves to Dowell that all the old formulations about "quite good people" no longer hold (35). If "Heart of Darkness" recognizes that documents pre-empt what we

know, the documents of *The Good Soldier* dramatically suggest that there is nothing we can know with certainty.

This “saddest story” is presented as Dowell’s written record of his wife Florence Hurlbird, and their fateful meeting with Edward and Leonora Ashburnham in Bad Nauheim. The story is comprised of a series of recollections that abruptly shift back and forth in time, replete with repetitions and revisions, covering broadly the years 1892 through to 1916. There are several intrigues and tragedies during this period. The most notable of these events, and those that make the greatest impression on Dowell, include Florence’s affair with Edward, her suicide, Edward’s declaration of love to Nancy Rufford (Edward and Leonora’s surrogate daughter), Edward’s suicide, Leonora’s remarriage, and his current relationship with Nancy. The problem of Dowell’s inability to comprehend why or how these affairs and deaths occur appears to be embedded in broader, historically informed questions that he intimates during the course of his narration but is incapable of exploring critically, including: what, if any, is the relationship between character and nationality or profession and identity?

Because of Dowell’s elaborate digressions on these questions and others, it is difficult to state precisely the novel’s subject. Is this the story of John Dowell? Or is the novel about “the good soldier” Edward Ashburnham who has an affair with Dowell’s wife, but whom Dowell nonetheless claims to “love . . . because he was just myself” (229)? Perhaps, as Caroline Patey and Karen A. Hoffman suggest, the novel is illustrative of anxieties over the decline of the British Empire. The imperial soldier Edward’s degradation throws into flux the shiny exterior of the English colonial administrator. Edward is the “fine soldier, the excellent landlord, the extraordinarily kind, careful and industrious magistrate, the upright, honest, fair-dealing, fair-thinking,

public character” but he is also engaged in a string of extramarital affairs and deals in lurid financial exchanges (107). Patey argues that Edward thus “embodies, and at the same time, deflates the official discourse of nationality” that Dowell depends on to interpret the dissolution of the coterie (86). Hoffman suggests that Edward’s attempt to possess women “is like the scramble for colonies among colonial powers” (30). It is notable that the affair with Mrs. Basil begins in Burma and his relationship to Maisie Moidan develops in India. She explores the interrelationship between the novel’s discourse of masculinity and the assumptions and practices of imperialism. On this basis it can be contended that the form of *The Good Soldier* on one level constitutes its subject—Dowell’s response to a world in which nationality no longer produces character is impressionism. His knowledge is limited to the appearance of things. Ford published his theory of Impressionism, “On Impressionism,” before writing *The Good Soldier*. He extolled the Impressionist method as a means of achieving verisimilitude. In this respect, his novel could be explained as theory put into practice.

In his Introduction to the Folio edition of *The Good Soldier*, Julian Barnes describes Dowell as a “storyteller” who “isn’t up to the level of his own story” (qtd. in Childs 56). Ford has entrusted his narrator with a task he cannot perform: Dowell “is a bumbler obliged to convey an intrigue of operatic passion which he himself only partially understands” (qtd. in Childs 56). What Barnes seems to suggest, but does not say explicitly, is that in addition to what might be Dowell’s neurosis or general obtuseness, he cannot contend with the complexity of his story because he is implicated in it. That is, he does not have the ability to situate “the breaking up of [the] little four-square coterie” in the context of the political and social changes taking

place at the turn-of-the-century because he is immediately involved in those changes (36).

Although, as I have argued, Marlow is not exempt from the discursive reach of the documents that precede his journey to the Congo, he has enough critical distance from the imperial project—unlike Kayerts and Carlier, for example—to recognize that once he agrees to take charge of the Company’s steamboat, he, too, will be perceived as of “one of the Workers” (59). He concedes to his precarious position both inside and outside this story of rapacious colonialism: Kurtz “had stepped over the edge” while he “had been permitted to draw back [his] hesitating foot” (151). Insofar as this distinction is maintained, he can acknowledge the production of documents as one of empire’s technologies of occlusion and thus attempt to circumvent them even if he is ultimately unsuccessful. Dowell, in contrast, lacks the requisite distance to not just see the terms of the transition he faces, but name it. Dowell cannot make direct assertions or lay out the facts of “the saddest story [he has] ever heard” in the context of a world he no longer understands (34).

From the time of his marriage to the present point of narration, Dowell is witness to an epochal transition between the old and the known, and the new and disconcertingly unknown. To say that he fails to negotiate this transition would be an understatement. According to Michael Levenson, the difficulty of ascertaining “whether convention and tradition or instinct and desire constitute the ground of human behaviour” presents Dowell with interpretive difficulty (Levenson *Individuality* 107). In *Paranoid Modernism*, David Trotter identifies this epochal transition with the “death of liberal England,” when “a particular social and political consensus was indeed on its last legs” (201). Trotter suggests that the novel becomes a “parallel

universe” for enacting this shift, where “neither wealth, nor status, nor nationality, nor gender has any meaning *in itself*” (210). Ford’s personal and political beliefs—pro-Boer, supporter of Irish Home Rule, and sympathiser with the Suffragist movement—indicate that he not only perceived a change at hand, but was part of voicing that transition.<sup>27</sup>

The problem of epistemology in Ford’s novel is thus, in one sense, the problem of knowing and inscribing the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the American, Briton, or Other, which are rendered relational categories of value. The novel’s first pages, with their attention to the origins of the Ashburnhams and Powys in England and Dowells and Hurlbirds in America (though, importantly, descendants of English families), intimate that beginnings can explain endings: there is a cause and effect relationship between nationality and character. Dowell repeatedly and mistakenly conflates his wife and friends with their nationality and religion, and sees those close to him as representatives of these groups and identities.

The trajectories of Florence, Edward, Leonora, and even Dowell are thus surprising in the context of Dowell’s false link between character and nationality. Dowell is not only surprised at Florence’s infidelity and suicide as her husband, he is also shocked because she is American: “she was an American, a New Englander. She had not the hot passions of these Europeans” (90). The “good” English soldier Edward is forced by his wife to move to India to economize. The Ashburnhams let their manor

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<sup>27</sup> For Ford’s critical and sometimes contradictory opinions on contemporary politics, see *Return to Yesterday: Reminiscences 1894-1917* (1931). See also his war propaganda including *When Blood is Their Argument* and *Between St. Denis and St. George*, both published in 1915. For critical discussions of his politics see Michael Levenson’s *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Mark Wollaeger’s *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), in addition to Trotter’s *Paranoid Modernism*.

house at Branshaw Teleragh and give up a few English treasures including “a picture and a relic of Charles I” (84) in addition to paintings by the English artist Vandyke in an ironic attempt to preserve Edward’s aristocratic status. With the suicide of Edward, however, the American Dowell purchases the English manor, which could be read as the new financial independence of the formerly colonized. Leonora, Edward’s Irish Catholic widow, is remarried and with child to “be brought up as a Romanist” (230). The Englishman commits suicide; the nouveau riche American inherits the English legacy but also a mad girl-wife; the Irish Catholic woman emerges as the character with the “happy ending” (226). These are, for Dowell, random and therefore inappropriate outcomes for what began as a suitable friendship between “leisured Americans” and an aristocratic English couple (35-6). Dowell explains that the coterie had the predictability of a highly stylized dance or piece of music: “our intimacy was like a minuet, simply because on every possible occasion and in every possible circumstance we knew where to go, where to sit, which table we unanimously should choose . . .” (36). Thus the break-up of the group can only mean the opposite: “Permanence? Stability! I can’t believe it’s gone” (36).

While the unpredictability of Dowell’s context likely contributes to his inability to recognize and order the events that led to Florence’s affairs or her suicide, as I have also suggested, the uncertainty of his narration can be attributed to Impressionism: Ford’s theory for the development of verisimilitude in the novel. Ford sought to write in a manner that would simulate the way one perceives and recalls people, places, and things, hence the emphasis on impressions and the particular unchronological (and challenging) sequencing of events in *The Good Soldier*. In *Joseph Conrad: A Personal*

*Remembrance*, Ford describes how Impressionism is true to life, unlike the more conventional approaches to narrative:

. . . what was the matter with the Novel, and the British novel in particular, was that it went straight forward, whereas in your gradual making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straight forward. You meet an English gentleman at your golf club. He is beefy, full of health, the moral boy from an English Public School of the finest type. You discover, gradually, that he is hopelessly neurasthenic, dishonest in matters of small change, but unexpectedly self-sacrificing, a dreadful liar . . . To get such a man in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past. (129-30)

This passage speaks directly to the method of Dowell's narration. The novel is anti-teleological: it does not begin with an account of his marriage and end at the moment of his writing. There is no perceptible movement towards a resolution of Dowell's dilemmas. Rather, like Marlow, Dowell pauses on people and events that have made a strong impression on him and returns to them repeatedly. However, Dowell cannot settle on a particular interpretation of a past event. This is evident in his revisiting of the Protest scene, which I discuss later in this section. In "On Impressionism," Ford also describes Impressionism as "the record of the impression of the moment; it is not a sort of rounded, annotated, record of a set of circumstances that happened ten years ago—or ten minutes" (267). This passage stresses the significance of recording the observation immediately, before it can be narrativized or "rounded, annotated" in Ford's words. Dowell's record is unsettled and deeply unsettling. Though its construction is retrospective, unlike the diary Dowell kept at the time of the action, the composition remains Impressionist. The over-determination of Ford's Impressionism suggests that this is not only a mode of writing; it also constitutes the novel's subject.

If the novel is, in Trotter's words, a "parallel universe" for tracing an epochal shift where once firm categories of value and identity no longer hold true, or a direct

response to Ford's theory of Impressionism—or a combination of both—there is something, I argue, that is knowable or “readable” in this text.<sup>28</sup> The materiality of the document is irrefutable and is thus the antithesis to Dowell's Impressionist modality. Impressionism, for Ford, cannot undo the irreducibility of text. Documents like the “Protest” and the newspaper perform the material role of epistemological evidence in a novel where nationality cannot determine identity and familiar geographies become as obscure as the colonies appear to the characters. This is not to say that Ford feels any more congenial towards the newspaper than Conrad, for example. However, newspapers, like letters and telegrams, become evidence of repressed desire, secret plots, and hidden feelings. They help to disclose everything that Dowell cannot say out of genuine ignorance or self-delusion. Dowell may exhibit writerly freedoms in his transcriptions of documents, but as I will illustrate through the following examples, the novel is not invested primarily in their content.

Like Kurtz's Report in *Heart of Darkness*, the Protest announces the centrality of documents to *The Good Soldier*. This document is described as the pencil draft of Martin Luther's Protest and offered as the origins of Protestantism. At the bidding of Florence, Dowell, Edward and Leonora make a trip to M— to see the Protest document in the archives of the Schloss. Dowell explains that Florence spent time preparing for this trip reading Ranke amongst other historians, and its climax—the viewing of the document—seems equally contrived:

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<sup>28</sup> Ian Watt's description of Impressionism succinctly captures the relationship between the conditions of one's environment and the possibilities for how one perceives and records it: “the conditions under which the viewing is done are an essential part of what the pictorial—or the literary—artist sees and therefore tries to convey” (170). See Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*.

She told the tired, bored custodian what shutter to open; so that the bright sunlight streamed in palpable shafts into the dim old chamber . . . And then, in spite of the protest of the custodian, she threw open another shutter and came tripping back to a large case. "And there," she exclaimed with an accent of gaiety, of triumph, of audacity. She was pointing to a piece of paper, like the half-sheet of a letter with some faint pencil scrawls that might have been a jotting of the amounts we were spending during the day . . . Captain Ashburnham had his hands upon the glass. "There it is—the Protest." And then, as we all properly stage-managed our bewilderment, she continued: "Don't you know that is why we were all called Protestants? That is the pencil draft of the Protest they drew up. You can see the signatures of Martin Luther, and Martin Bucer, and Zwingli, and Ludwig the Courageous..."

. . . She continued, looking up into Captain Ashburnham's eyes: "It's because of that piece of paper that you're honest, sober, industrious, provident, and clean-lived. If it weren't for that piece of paper you'd be like the Irish or the Italians or the Poles, but particularly the Irish..."

And then she laid one finger upon Captain Ashburnham's wrist.

I was aware of something treacherous, something frightful, something evil in the day. I can't define it and can't find a simile for it. (69-70)

This passage, detailing the minutes leading up to and following Florence's exposition on the Protest, is arguably the crux of the novel. While it is clear enough that the Protest document is of central importance—Florence both physically and verbally illuminates this fact—the "bored" custodian and the "stage-managed bewilderment" of the remainder of the coterie problematize Florence's enthusiasm. Why should Florence recognize the significance of this piece of paper while the others gape in ignorance? At this point in the narrative, Dowell has already revealed several facts pertinent to this "saddest story." We know that Florence and Edward are dead; Florence does not, in fact, have a heart condition; there are various sexual intrigues; and Leonora has met another man. Yet it remains unclear how this particular episode contributed to any one of these revelations. Dowell does not seem to have the interpretive faculties to explain its significance.

Dowell's description of the way in which the group journeys to the document introduces a physical-spatial component to the scene as well, whereby the document occupies the centre. The group exits the train and then takes a carriage "right up to

the castle.” Dowell continues, “And we were taken through the museum . . . And we went up winding corkscrew staircases and through the Rittersaal, the great painted hall . . . And we went through chapels, and music rooms, right up immensely high in the air to a large old chamber, full of presses, with heavily-shuttered windows all around” (68-70). Our physical progression through a series of spaces until we reach the document, finally, encased in glass, also becomes a symbolic search for meaning—mirroring the process of reading as we press forward with a view to knowing what is at the core of the problem that Dowell’s description intimates but does not articulate. This passage is remarkable for telling us so much and yet so little. It is only through Dowell’s revisiting and revision of his initial impressions of that fateful day, August 4, 1904, that we know the curious actions surrounding the Protest document mark Florence and Edward’s affair and present Leonora’s religion as that which will permit this affair—as it has been the case with several others. The Protest symbolizes the conflict between Catholic and Protestant perspectives and morality. Leonora is the only Catholic character and crucially, her religion prevents her from divorcing Edward. Leonora explains to Dowell that the Protest document is “the cause of the whole miserable affair . . . of the eternal damnation of you and me and them” (70). After Leonora explicitly confirms the affair for Dowell, he understands the viewing of the Protest to be the moment when everything “went to pieces” (181). Florence’s act of touching is thus acknowledged as the pronouncement of desire and Leonora’s violent iteration of Florence’s gesture, causing a pain in Dowell’s left wrist “by...clutching it,” suggests her cognizance (70).

To this end, the Protest document becomes evidential. While the religious dimension of the document is also crucial, we know the Protest is important through

its treatment as a physical text before there is any allusion to its content. Physical engagement with the document is presented simultaneously as the unravelling, the development, and the manifestation of a number of hidden plots and desires otherwise difficult to locate amidst Dowell's absurd narrative assumptions, circuitous chronology, and recourse to undermine his already tentative judgments with the utterance: "I don't know." In this respect, it is surprising that there has been virtually no recognition of the Protest document as a *document*—as a text, at the centre of Dowell's text. Since the characters do not read this document—a point that perhaps, takes on further significance in that it is not the draft of Luther's Protest nor is it, as Dowell's description suggests, a half-sheet of pencil scrawl, a point to which I will return—the generic significance of the Protest as a document becomes increasingly important.

Dowell returns to this document in his narrative, over a hundred pages after his initial description of the coterie's trip to M—. In this re-visitation, Dowell reverses his order of perception: "It went to pieces at the moment when Florence laid her hand upon Edward's wrist, as it lay on the glass sheltering the manuscript of the Protest, up in the high tower with the shutters where the sunlight here and there streamed in" (181). While the document still occupies the centre of this description, there is one crucial difference: the document now shares its emphasis with the moment of touching. The touching, which Dowell finally recognizes as the outrage—Florence's declaration of her availability to Edward—is facilitated by the physical proximity of the document. Edward's hand rests on the glass protecting the Protest as Florence initiates contact. The document performs the role of corroboration and invitation. Invoking the Protest permits Florence to physically announce her desire as well as

reveal to Leonora what Leonora ostensibly suspected of her husband all along: yet another affair.

Carol Jacobs describes the Protest as a “study in illegibility” (86). She argues that Florence “never bothers to elaborate on its content . . . and [it] thereby claims the same insignificant innocence as the chatter of Florence” (86). In fact, the document Dowell is referring to is probably the document that Ford and Violet Hunt went to see in Marburg in 1910. Martin Stannard describes that document as not the pencil draft of the Protest, but actually something called the “protocol”: a “fifteen-point doctrinal statement drawn up at the Marburg Colloquy” in 1529 (36).<sup>29</sup> The central importance of the document lies in its last point, the interpretation of the Eucharist, on which Luther and Zwingli did not agree. This document is not, as Dowell describes, “a half-sheet of a letter with some faint pencil scrawls” but a large document in bold ink.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the lack of explanation that Jacobs cites, the document housed in Marburg is not the document that Florence refers to at all. Yet even with this knowledge, the invocation of the document is no less effective. Rather than a “study in illegibility,” it represents a moment of readability in the novel. Florence invokes it as authoritative, authentic, and stable—as that material object that she can point to, that the coterie can behold, which will incite her to perform her hidden passion.

Even if we attribute Jacobs’s claim of illegibility or insufficient explication to Dowell’s impressionistic rendering—which must be allowed as a possibility—the fact of the document’s evidential status does not change. In fact, Dowell cites Ludwig the Courageous as one of the signatures on the document, who had been dead for three

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<sup>29</sup> See Stannard’s footnote to the Protest in this scene.

<sup>30</sup> Stannard’s edition of *The Good Soldier* includes an image of the protocol, which reveals it is very different to the document Dowell describes.

hundred years. On the technique of Impressionism, Ford writes: “an Impressionist in a novel, or in a poem, will never render a long speech of one of his characters verbatim, because the mind of the reader would at once lose some of the illusion of the good faith of the narrator” (“On Impressionism” 267). Ford vocalizes his distaste for the ‘facts’: “so delusive are reported facts . . . There are so many contradictory facts; there are so many reported interviews, each contradicting the other” (264). When Dowell sets up this scene for his readers, he tells us as an aside: “(I’m not really interested in these facts but they have a bearing on my story)” (68-9). We might credit Dowell (or Ford) with employing the techniques of a good Impressionist, but the aversion to claims for veracity should also reveal that the accuracy of the document is subservient to its form. The document becomes a narrative touchstone through Dowell’s re-visitation and rereading.

The features of the Protest that establish it as evidential—its will-to-action and the irreducibility of its form—are shared by the many letters, telegrams, and newspapers of the novel. Unlike the Protest, these documents are critical to the novel’s conscious concern for representing the modern moment. A suicide that occurs in England is reported in newspapers in the colonies; one can order a subscription of an English paper to the continent; and telegrams are sent from Italy to England or India to England as a matter of course. If we are unsure of many things in Dowell’s world, one thing is certain: documents are a fact of modern existence upon which the characters—at one time or another, in America, England, Germany, France, Italy, and India—depend. In this respect, Patey’s argument for the significance of the “imperial geography” of the novel gains further resonance (86). As Daniel Headrick argues, telegraph lines were a major factor in the consolidation of empire. That Britain was

linked to India by telegraph before a line was built to America indicates the priority of a connection to the colonies.<sup>31</sup> By 1870, it only took about five hours to send a message from Britain to India (Headrick 160). Dowell and Nancy are corresponding between the countries in 1913. What is relevant from this picture of an increasingly networked world is the inescapability of documents and the ease with which they are sent and received. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow's description of Jim's new life in Patusan includes the crucial detail that he lived "three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables." Jim can live a different life—a life of romance—now that he is severed from contact with "civilization" (282). In *The Good Soldier*, however, documents cannot be avoided. While "Heart of Darkness" considers the discursive reach of the content of documents, it is the physical document that cannot be avoided in *The Good Soldier*. Characters produce documents, but documents seem to find them, too. The document's arrival forces Dowell, Leonora, Edward, and Nancy to depart from "pure exercises of imagination" and instead confront and respond to lies and delusions (LJ 282).

There are three telegrams worth considering in this context. Dowell states that he received a cable from Edward Ashburnham saying to "come and have a talk" (49). The second cable, received immediately after from Leonora says, "Yes, please do come. You could be so helpful" (48). Both the necessary brevity of the cable and the Ashburnhams' choice of words reveal very little. However, the urgency of the form is recognized by Dowell; he leaves America just after having arrived. Recalling the telegrams pages later, Dowell slightly revises his transcription: "Yes, do come. You could be so helpful" (189). The alteration is slight: Dowell does not include "please" in

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<sup>31</sup> The telegraph linked Britain with India in 1865 and Britain with America in 1866 (159).

this description of Leonora's cable. The use of quotations, however, suggests Dowell is recording verbatim, as if he has the telegrams in his possession as he writes. He is perhaps relying on his faulty memory; it is perhaps an effect of Impressionism. In any case, Dowell's second record should raise suspicion. There are other transcriptions of documents that prove even more disingenuous. An early example is a long passage that Dowell cites from a letter Maisie Maidan wrote to Leonora yet there is no indication that he had an opportunity to read it (92). However, these discrepancies do not impinge on the work that documents perform in the novel.

After receiving these messages from the Ashburnhams, Dowell finally journeys to the country that he has idealized via Edward's exalted Englishness and the title deeds to his farm. He proudly explains that his farm is in Philadelphia where there are "more old English families than you would find in any six English counties taken together" (35). Leonora, characterized by reserve and restraint which Dowell attributes to her Catholicism, needs this opportunity to tell Dowell about her marriage history, including Edward's affair with Florence. At the same time, Dowell is forced to confront his delusion about the normalcy of a marriage that has never been consummated. Leonora's speech act facilitates the creation of this final document, the novel, which is a combination of the information she imparts to him and the diary Dowell kept at the time. Levenson observes astutely that the physical text Dowell writes is the only thing we, in fact, know of him: "one thing is certain—he writes . . . the act of writing is prior" (*Individuality* 118).

The third telegram is written by Nancy, with whom Edward falls in love and sends to India once her presence at Branshaw becomes unmanageable. She simply writes from Brindisi: "Safe Brindisi. Having rattling good time. Nancy" (231). Insofar as India

has become a place of punishment and repentance—the Ashburnhams move there when they are in debt and Nancy is forced to live in India when appearances can no longer be maintained at home—the telegram’s arrival from the colonies seems to disrupt a carefully cultivated reticence that Dowell contends is “only possible with English people” (34). Immediately after reading the telegram, Edward commits suicide. The contact is what inspires the admission of repressed desires and passions that Edward no longer has the fortitude to master. Soon thereafter, the report of Edward’s suicide reaches Nancy in a “local paper” at Aden (215). Again, that the news reaches her in the colonies points to a networked world in which documents are easily produced and also unavoidable. After reading of his death, she goes mad and her father moves her to Ceylon. Nancy’s madness, like Edward’s suicide, is likely to be the result of intolerable love. She could not help him, is appalled of what she learns of him, and is profoundly shocked by his death.

Initially, it is the newspaper that forces Nancy to acknowledge Edward’s sexual love for her, though, again, we must be sceptical about Dowell’s representation of Nancy’s thought process as she reads the newspaper about a divorce case. Dowell could only know about the newspaper if Nancy described her experience to Leonora who then shared it with him. Nonetheless, the newspaper reifies Nancy’s role as the other woman in an affair. The article describes, “in black and white,” that a certain Mr. Brand is guilty of adultery. After Nancy poses several naïve questions to Leonora, Nancy concludes that a married couple need not love each other and that now, “Mr. Brand will be able to marry Miss Lupton,” his mistress (204). Gradually, after some weeks of introspection, she realizes that Edward, whom she has hitherto regarded as a

father figure, does not love Leonora despite being married to her. She recognizes herself as the object of Edward's desire.

*The Good Soldier* is arguably more ambivalent about the nature of its documents' disclosures than "Heart of Darkness." The document forms evidence of repressed desire, secret plots, and hidden feelings in one capacity; ironic reversals and cross-commentaries in another. The moments of revelation and realization it facilitates in the process have terrible consequences: suicide, madness, and despair. Despite these tragic outcomes, Ford does not mourn the loss of the old, stable categories of identity including the aristocratic Englishman, the well-to-do American, the Protestant, or assumptions about the roles and duties of the friend, daughter, father, husband, and wife that once gave meaning to Dowell's world. Moreover, Ford does not recognize the document's capacity for disclosure as an opportunity to present a reinvigorated vision of the nation. Once Dowell's exalted Edwardian England is rendered untenable, there is nothing offered to replace it but this record of its loss, like the "sack of Rome by the Goths" (36).

Ford's ambivalence is also a result of his disavowal of content—a point that marks his dramatic departure from Conrad. From the more subtle to the glaring incongruities in Dowell's representations of documents, there is no pretention to truth or facts. Dowell's Impressionism renders the question of accuracy gratuitous. Rather, the novel's cultivation of the materiality of the document and relatedly, the irreducibility of its form take precedence over content. In this respect, there is a discernible difference in tone between the readable and unreadable, or the document and the primary narrative in Ford's and Conrad's fictions. Marlow's judgement on what amounts to the failure of the document's potential for mimetic referentiality

suggests there is a knowable world to refer to. The “read” imperial mission is, according to Marlow’s narrative, evidence of misreading and misrepresentation. He is thus defiant in the face of the document, even as his language is indebted to it. Ford’s crucial reimagining of Conrad is thus to rebuke the nineteenth-century belief in an intelligible world with standards and morals—to discard its positive capabilities completely. There is no convention to rely on any longer with which to interpret the present and predict the future. Ford’s readable documents indicate ultimately that “there is nothing to guide us” (41).

## Chapter 2

### Telling it Again: Reiterated Documents in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* and Cather's *The Professor's House*

In 1909, as the new editor of *McClure's* magazine, the Virginia-born Willa Cather went to London to solicit material for publication from established authors—including Joseph Conrad. But Joseph Conrad and Willa Cather never met. Rather than write to Conrad, Cather contacted Ford Madox Ford, whose wife Elsie, in turn, sent Conrad a note: “Dear Conrad, Miss Cather—the literary editor for McClure[’s] magazine—now over here for a short time—intends descending on each of us tomorrow. She apparently wants to get a story out of you.”<sup>32</sup> Conrad declined to see her. He wrote to Elsie that he had: “no story for McClure, that this is not the way to do serious business—that the whole thing looks like an intrusion.” He continued, “the proper thing for Miss C was to ask for an interview. She did not because she did not want it. She was clearly coming casually. I am not to be treated like that” (*CL* 4: 236-7).

There is, of course, more to Conrad’s embittered response than Cather’s informal proposal. Ford wrote Conrad a letter rebuking him for refusing to see Cather. Conrad claimed he had no way of knowing that Cather was Ford’s acquaintance: “*Are you aware* that it is *the first* I hear of Miss C being a particular friend of yours. You mentioned her once months ago, if I remember rightly. I didn’t even remember the name” (236). Furthermore, Ford seems to have forwarded Conrad’s letter of refusal to Cather. Upon learning this, Conrad replied irately to Ford:

since my letters are to be sent about, I consider myself at liberty to forward the copy of all the correspondence: *Elsie’s first* note—your extraordinary letter, the material parts of this letter and Elsie’s note received this morning to Miss Cather c/o McClure in New York—with my explanation of the episode . . . What’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the

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<sup>32</sup> See footnote 6 to Conrad’s May 20 1909 letter to Ford Madox Ford (*CL* 4: 236-237).

gander and I will do it unless you are pleased to take back your most unfair letter of reproaches without any reserves whatever. (CL 4: 236-7)

Cather ended the episode by writing a letter to Elsie apologizing for the irritation that Conrad's complaints must have caused—she had not thought meeting with Conrad would be so difficult.<sup>33</sup>

Although Conrad's annoyance is more likely a symptom of his dwindling friendship with Ford than an index of his relationship to Cather, the near Conrad-Cather encounter is not entirely without context. Conrad claims he does not know "Miss C": by 1909 Cather had published only a few short stories and poems in periodicals and magazines. While it is true that Cather would have been better known for her shrewd reviews and editorial skills, pieces by Conrad and Cather did appear in the same volume of *McClure's* in 1907.<sup>34</sup> For Cather, Conrad was a familiar name. McClure "had been Conrad's principal promoter in the United States" up to the time Cather began working for the magazine (Mallios 183). As Peter Mallios observes, "Cather's literary career unfolds over a period that strikingly overlaps Conrad's (1895-1925)" (177). He emphasises the institutional importance of *McClure's* for Conrad's reception in America. Mallios argues that "Conrad was not a private whim but a central public condition of Cather's struggle to emerge as a novelist" (184).

Mallios's *Our Conrad* offers one of the few readings of Cather that acknowledges the impact of Conrad on her writing.<sup>35</sup> His study, which charts the development of Conrad as a master literary figure in America, reads Cather's early short stories

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<sup>33</sup> See Cather's May 20 1909 letter to Mrs. Ford Madox Hueffer in Stout, *A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Conrad's short story "The Brute" and Cather's poem "Autumn Melody" appeared in the November 1907 issue of *McClure's*.

<sup>35</sup> See also a short article by Joan Wylie Hall published in 1989. Hall reads Cather's short story "Behind the Singer Tower" as indebted to Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," most obviously with respect to its framing devices. See "Cather's 'Deep Foundation Work': Reconstructing 'Behind the Singer Tower'" in *Studies in Short Fiction* 26.1 (1989): 81-86.

“Behind the Singer Tower” and “The Sculptor’s Funeral”—the first a transparent reworking of “Heart of Darkness” and the second, a subtler revision of *Lord Jim*—as evidence of both Cather’s incisive reading and what he describes as Conrad’s “heterotopia.” If Cather was discerning enough to see Conrad’s themes of economic exploitation and alienation as a version of American imperialism, it was also the case that Conrad’s fiction yielded to this form of reinterpretation.<sup>36</sup> This chapter, however, traces a more understated affiliation between the authors: one that is not characterized by influence. Both Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* (1917) and Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925) explore the iteration and reiteration of documents in their narratives as a structuring device that, at the same time, bears thematic significance. The diaries, notes, and letters that resurface in their narratives acquire meaning through their repetitions. I read the documents of *The Professor’s House*, perhaps Cather’s most experimental novel, as a response to the innovativeness she recognized and celebrated in Conrad.

What was at stake in Cather’s insistence on Conrad’s innovativeness? How might his example have facilitated or enabled her own sense of her writing? Cather’s stories of the American Midwest and Conrad’s tales of seafaring and seamen occupy distinct worlds. Conrad’s many fictions of moral isolation stretch over locales as disparate as

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<sup>36</sup> Drawing on Foucault, Mallios defines Conrad’s heterotopia as “an irreducibly ‘outside’ (foreign) space compositionally possessed of the power intricately, extensively, and controversially to summon, interfere with, and even incite urgent reassertion of the boundaries and relations through which ‘home’ spaces are constructed, their worldviews transacted” (26). Of America’s particular investment in Conrad as a master literary figure: “Modern U.S. Americans in effect invented Conrad . . . through a dialogic cascade of oppositional engagements with Conrad’s heterotopic writings and persona, exploited both for their capacity to subvert and reinscribe (U.S.) ‘American’ boundaries, and for their specific application across a remarkably wide array of domestic and global domains of U.S. concern” (26). In Mallios’s book, Cather is presented as one of several American authors that deploy Conrad in the production of American modernity. Conrad facilitates her writing on U.S. immigrant politics in particular.

the Gulf of Siam, Central Africa, and fictional South American ports. This composite picture reflects Conrad's metropolitan status whereas Cather is largely regarded to be a provincial writer. There seems little potential for overlap in the fictions they produced, much less potential than a real-life Conrad-Cather encounter it would appear. And yet Cather would cite Conrad's example specifically in her vision of the American novel of the future. In light of the marked divergences between Conrad's and Cather's context and literary subject, which are significant, the novelistic compatibility of *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor's House* reveals the degree to which Conrad might be central to the prose experimentation of the 1920s, particularly as authors imagine the narrative potentials and possibilities in the citation of documents.

The earliest existing record of Cather's engagement with Conrad's fiction is a letter she wrote to the critic H.L. Mencken in response to the publication of Conrad's *The Arrow of Gold* in 1919.<sup>37</sup> Mencken, the outspoken and influential Baltimore literary critic and political journalist, was a great admirer of Cather—and Conrad. In his survey of the contemporary novel in the third series of his *Prejudices*, published in 1922, Mencken dedicates a lengthy passage to the wealth of talent that specifically female authors bring to the novel. He celebrates Cather's "experimental development of the novel form," which I take up in greater detail in my discussion of *The Professor's House* below. However, Mencken acknowledges Conrad as an exception to this parade of female ingenuity:

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<sup>37</sup> Cather insisted on privacy during her lifetime and attempted to burn her correspondence. Her will prevented the letters that survived her attempts at destruction from being published after her death. My references to Cather's letters are from Janis Stout's *A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather*, which summarizes and paraphrases her correspondence.

To-day it would be difficult to think of . . . two or three living Englishmen above May Sinclair, or more than two Americans equal to Willa Cather. Not only are women writing novels quite as good as those written by men—setting aside, of course, a few miraculous pieces by such fellows as Joseph Conrad: most of them not really novels at all, but metaphysical sonatas disguised as romances—; they are actually surpassing men in their experimental development of the novel form. (203)

This is no throwaway allusion: Mencken was a conscientious reader of Conrad.

As the literary critic and co-editor of the journal *Smart Set* where he regularly reviewed Cather, he also wrote frequently on Conrad. Mencken first made direct contact with Conrad in 1913 on the basis of his reviews though Conrad had been reading Mencken for several years already. Aware of Mencken's influence in the American literary market, Conrad was greatly relieved to have the support of the divisive critic. Mencken cited Conrad across his discussion of American fiction in *Prejudices* and he devoted a chapter to Conrad in his *A Book of Prefaces* (1917). He even sent an advance copy to Conrad for review. Although Conrad was later critical of Mencken for "harping on his Slavonism [sic]" as the wellspring of his artistic temperament, Mencken was a shrewd reviewer of Conrad.<sup>38</sup>

Mencken thus seems to have provided Cather with an opportunity to discuss Conrad's work informally. Their casual letters on the stylistic weakness of *The Arrow of Gold* indicate that they may have been discussing Conrad more extensively in other arenas.<sup>39</sup> Nearly two decades after the publication of *The Arrow*, this time writing to her friend and admirer Stephen Tennant, Cather described Conrad's novel as "weak" and faulted its artificial, florid prose style.<sup>40</sup> That Cather returns to the subject of

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<sup>38</sup> See letter to Knopf (CL 5: 304) and Eric Pinker (Conrad's agent after J. B. Pinker dies) (CL 7: 617-619). Conrad wrote to Mencken directly to thank him for sending *A Book of Prefaces*, but he also clarifies the issue of language that Mencken raises in his criticism: "If I hadn't the English to write I would never have written at all" (CL 6: 144-145).

<sup>39</sup> See Stout: letter to Mencken, May 30, 1919, 72-73; and July 2, 1919, 73.

<sup>40</sup> See Stout: letters to Tennant, June 26, 1937, 269; Jan 6, 1937, 204 and a letter not dated, 201.

Conrad twenty years later to again share her critical disappointment in his work is highly suggestive. Cather engaged in a long-term, and thus potentially significant, critical dialogue with Conrad's fiction over her writing career. Her observations of this late Conrad novel also indicate that she, like Mencken, considered Conrad's earlier work to be superior, possessing the qualities that she accuses *The Arrow* of lacking. In fact, she was equally, if not more, robust in her public accolades of early Conrad.

After the success of *My Ántonia* (1918) and especially after winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1922 for her novel *One of Ours*, Cather was established as an authoritative voice in American letters: she was the subject of several literary interviews that transcended her local appeal in Nebraska and Virginia, she was the recipient of literary awards and honorary degrees from the foremost American universities, and she was approached to give various speeches on the art of the novel. It is primarily in this forum that she expresses her admiration for Conrad most vigorously. Cather celebrated *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* as an example of innovative fiction. In her 1926 address to the Bowdoin Institute at Brunswick, Cather "told how [*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*] violated all canons of technical art; but breathed the force and beauty of the artist" (qtd. in Bohlke 165). In her speech "On the Novel," given at the celebration dinner for the 1932 Pulitzer Prize awardees in New York, Cather expressed disdain for novelists who merely recycle plots "fixed on youth, love, and success" (qtd. in Bohlke 170). Conrad, she explained, wrote "*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* without a woman in it, and no glory or promotions for anybody at the end of the voyage" and thus he was freed to say something more about life (170). *The Professor's House* is an indication that she took Conrad's invitation to re-shape the conventional novel form seriously.

## Cather's Modernism

Just short of her fortieth birthday, Cather moved to 5 Bank Street, New York—the address that would become the birthplace of her major literary output for the next fifteen years. It is here, through her writing, that she revisited the Red Cloud, Nebraska of her childhood and its pioneering people. The protagonist-story-teller of *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden, articulates Cather's experience of setting her eyes on the prairie for the first time as a young girl: "There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land . . ." (11). Some of her most memorable characters include heroines who exhibit a strong and fundamental attachment to the prairie. Ántonia Shimerda is a poor Bohemian girl who eventually marries, has several children, and with her characteristic unflagging strength tends to a thriving farm of her own. Alexandra Bergson of *O Pioneers!* is even more intensely connected to the land: she is an extension of the prairie. The novel depicts the Swedish farmer-pioneer as she successfully cultivates the untamed country and extends her value and respect for the land to the people of her community.

Cather was engrossed with the writing of *O Pioneers!*. She explained that unlike her first novel *Alexander's Bridge*: "it had to do with a kind of country I loved, because it was about old neighbours, once very dear, whom I had almost forgotten in the hurry and excitement of growing up . . ." (*On Writing* 93). Cather contributes knowingly to the perception of her writing as caught up with a charmed past, always preferable to the present. She was acutely aware of the tension of writing a novel about "heavy farming people, with cornfields and pasture lands and pig yards" set in Nebraska for a twentieth-century audience (*On Writing* 94). She justified her decision to write *O Pioneers!* on the basis that it would be a novel written for herself. Initially, she had

bowed to pressure and attempted to write to current tastes through the London setting of *Alexander's Bridge* (1912): London was "supposed to be more engaging" (*On Writing* 92). However, Cather regarded the novel as unsuccessful. She felt it was "unnecessary and superficial" (92). Cather's citation of documents in this short novel indicates how much more complex and nuanced the document would become in her fiction by the time she wrote *The Professor's House*. Whereas the letters and telegrams of *Alexander's Bridge* contribute to plot, the documents of Cather's later novel develop textuality as a concept with implications for how we interpret the story. The death of Bartley Alexander, the title character of her first novel, could have been avoided. "If only" Alexander, the chief engineer of the bridge project, "received the telegram" that explained the bridge's unexpected structural failure, then the construction of the bridge would have been suspended and the site evacuated (161). Alexander, like many of the workers, drowns. When his body is recovered, his wife Winifred discovers a letter folded into his pocket. In this letter Alexander wrote days before his death, he confesses to the affair he has been having with his first love in London, but he never sends it to his wife. And now, Winifred cannot read it because the text is illegible. But "because of its length, she knew it had been meant for her" (165). Telegrams that arrive too late and letters that are never sent result in drama and sentimentality.

Cather's unapologetic focus on the lives of America's pioneering people in novels like *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* has supported claims for her rejection of contemporary issues—an argument more difficult to make of Conrad who is noted rather for his prescient articulation of, among other things, the economic hegemony of the West in an increasingly globalized world. Though she acknowledged the social

inequalities associated with America's polyglot and multiethnic landscapes through her tracing of pioneers and settlers in the Midwest prairies, Cather's gaze might be described as nostalgic rather than critically attuned to the present or the future; interested in the making of contemporary America rather than what it is, or could be. The "Prefatory Note" to *Not Under Forty*, a collection of short pieces ranging from meditations on the novel to sketches of other writers, plainly states Cather's interest in the "backward." She describes *Not Under Forty* as recollections based on the last "seven thousand years" rather than projections into the future: "it is for the backward, and by one of their number, that these sketches were written" (*Stories, Poems, and Other Writings* 812).

Although Cather's preoccupation with backwardness is offered by her detractors as an example of her doggedness, her relation to the last "seven thousand years" is expressive rather of her value for the enduring and the immutable in art and life. To read, as Granville Hicks and Lionel Trilling did in the 1930s, Cather's nostalgia as precluding her interest in issues of contemporary fiction and its future is an oversimplification of Cather's aesthetic.<sup>41</sup> Phyllis Rose argues, for example, that the nostalgia in a novel like *My Ántonia* does not preclude it from formal innovation. The novel's experimentation in chronology and the perceived lack of interrelatedness between the narrated events becomes the structure precisely through which Cather's interest in the "recurrent impulses and attitudes" of peoples can be explored (135).

There are strong similarities between Cather's description of a successful modern novella like *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and the language of Virginia Woolf's

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<sup>41</sup> See Hicks, "The Case Against Willa Cather" and Trilling, "Willa Cather" in *Willa Cather and her Critics*, Ed. James Schroeter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

essay-manifesto “Modern Fiction” published in 1925. After elaborating on the merits of Conrad in her Pulitzer speech, Cather argues more generally that, “constantly putting the accent in the same place is a terribly degrading habit for a writer. It makes his book a barrel organ tune, and him an organ grinder. Life isn’t like that; it’s so disconcertingly unexpected” (170). Woolf, a self-proclaimed herald of the modern, argues that life cannot be contained adequately in the old forms of writing, and thus to be true to the sheer diversity of modern experience requires that “no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe” be written “in the accepted style” (9). She continues:

The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from the old” (9).

Though Woolf’s allusions to the “mind” and “impressions” suggest that she is more interested in the rendering of psychological vicissitudes, both women agree on the need for writing that will be courageously irreverent of the “old formulae” (qtd. in Bohlke 170).

Cather concludes her Pulitzer speech by referring to the status of contemporary American fiction. She includes herself as a member of the authors she addresses: “we have begun to look about us, but we have a long way to go,” and continues, “when we learn to give our purpose the form that exactly clothes it and no more; when we make a form for every story instead of trying to crowd it into one of the stock moulds on the shelf, then we shall be on the right road” (qtd. in Bohlke 170). Cather has, of course, already cited Conrad as an author who was successful in cultivating a form for his fiction that enabled its subject. That Cather recognized in Conrad’s work a yet

unexplored potential in American fiction is highly suggestive for how her writing might be approached.

Prior to this speech and even before publishing *The Professor's House*, Cather was advocating a more radical approach to the novel. In her 1922 essay "The Novel D meubl " Cather muses, "how wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window; and along with it, all the meaningless reiterations concerning physical sensations, all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre . . ." (*On Writing* 42). Cather condones a complete break with the old forms: there is nothing worth salvaging except perhaps, the room itself, which, continuing with her metaphor, suggests merely the covers of a book. Taken as a pair, her essays "The Art of Fiction" (1920) and "The Novel D meubl " call for a departure from realism's journalistic or reportage style of description in the service of verisimilitude, which, she suggests, cannot be an end in itself. Recalling Woolf's attack on materialists in her essay "Modern Fiction," Cather argues that writers should "present their scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration" to attain a "higher and truer effect" (*On Writing* 40).

Cather's resistance to write on topical social issues and current political debate, and yet, simultaneously, her demand for a break from traditional forms complicate her status. This seeming contradiction is part and parcel of the perplexity that Cather scholars face when approaching her fiction in the context of literary modernism. While, for example, Cather's vision for the novel very closely recalls Woolf's, she would not look favourably upon Woolf's fiction and the modernity she promoted. In her biography, *Willa Cather*, Hermione Lee sums up Cather's precarious position: "The modernism of this reactionary writer is as much of a paradox as the craftiness

underlying her apparent simplicity” (181). Maria Dibattista’s term “anti-contemporary modernism” forms one attempt to forge Cather’s conflicting authorial practices (1075).

My emphasis on the experimentalism of *The Professor’s House* has less to do with a desire to bestow the label ‘modernist’ to Cather’s work as a source of legitimacy than to approach her in the context of writers like Ford, Woolf—and Conrad. Cather responds to her own call to be deviant in the face of the formulaic novel with the overt structural opacity of *The Professor’s House*—a novel that puts her on par with the fictional experimentation of authors like Joyce and Woolf in the early 1920s. Through the Conrad-inspired reading of Cather that follows, however, I suggest that *The Professor’s House* might also be read as a response to Conrad’s celebrated innovative writing. Reading Conrad’s and Cather’s document-laced novels together sharpens our grasp of the narrative techniques in both.

### **The Beginning of the War and the End of Youth: Documenting the Divide**

The documents of *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor’s House* emerge through similar thematic contexts. Youth and all its connotations—arrogance and self-indulgence; courage and idealism; vigour and defiance—are central to both Conrad’s and Cather’s fictions. *The Shadow-Line* is the story of a man recollecting his first command at sea and simultaneously, a man confessing to his youth. That the word “young” is repeated three times in the first paragraph alone leaves little doubt as to the subject of the narrative. *The Professor’s House* is an elegy for youth. The novel equates the death of Tom Outland, the absent protagonist of the story, with the loss of that robust and

inspired period of early life. Just two years out of university, Tom drops his scientific experiments and joins the War. The narrative begins five years after Tom's death in Flanders, long enough for the characters to become involved in other preoccupations, and yet traces Tom's profound impact on the small community of Hamilton. His absence is felt most acutely by Professor St Peter, Tom's friend and mentor. The narrator explains how Tom's initial arrival in Hamilton saved St Peter from growing old: "Just when the morning brightness of the world was wearing off for [St Peter], along came Outland and brought him a kind of second youth" (214). After Tom's death, St Peter seems to age exponentially. St Peter's wife chides her husband: "You are not old enough for the pose you take" (130).

The Professor's mental exhaustion forms the basis of his growing disaffection for the things he once loved most: the first and third sections of *The Professor's House* detail the Professor's disillusionment with his university career, his marriage, and his daughters. The material competitiveness of his family and the commercialization of his university translate into his stubborn refusal to leave the uncomfortable study of his old house. Mirroring the withdrawal into his study is his inclination to recede into his past. The Professor indulges in memories of his youth, occasioned by thoughts of his beloved Tom, who entered and departed St Peter's life a young man. The novel concludes with the Professor surmounting the inarticulate fatigue that almost claims his life; though, significantly, he does not return to a prior, jovial self, but emerges as a man who can only accept that he has changed.

This fatigue that characterizes St Peter in his middle age finds its counterpart in the restlessness of Conrad's young narrator. *The Shadow-Line* takes the form of a confession whereby the unnamed narrator attempts to explain his relinquishing of a

berth on an excellent steamship in Singapore to return to Europe with no prospects. The narrator's shipmates interpret his decision in the first case, to be the result of a love affair: "I've been thinking it was about time for you to run away home and get married to some silly girl," while the chief engineer speculates it is a health issue: a "deranged liver" (6). Captain Giles, the highly respected and well-seasoned sailor, offers a third alternative: perhaps the narrator has gone "soft" in the Eastern climate. Immediately after making the following observations to the narrator: "things out East were made easy for white men . . . The difficulty was to go on keeping white, and some of these nice boys did not know how," Giles asks: "'Why did you throw up your berth?'" (14). The fourth guest of the Officers' Sailors' Home, the "supine stranger," serves as a warning for falling prey to Eastern temptation (14). However, the novella does not pursue any of these potential narrative trajectories. The narrator cannot explain his decision to quit the sea anymore than to suggest it is a result of that general period in one's life—youth—just as St Peter attributes his physical and psychological isolation to the loss of youth, or the onset of fatigue.

Although the War does not figure in Conrad's narrative directly, the dedication of the novella: "To/ Borys and all others/ who like himself have crossed/ in early youth the shadow-line/ of their generation/ with love" indicates Conrad's state of mind at the time of writing. Jacques Berthoud develops at length the relationship between the novella's dedication to Conrad's son Borys, who enlisted in 1915, and the narrator's inward struggle during his first command, based on Conrad's own experiences between 1887 and 1888.<sup>42</sup> The narrator's first command is, in part, what ushers him

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<sup>42</sup> Berthoud argues convincingly for reading the novel through the lens of Conrad's personal experience of having a son at war. He cites Conrad's "Author's Note" to the novel as well as his decision to rename the story from "First Command" to *The Shadow-Line* as arguments for the

over the shadow-line of youth as the War violently initiated so many young men into adulthood—perhaps, too young: Borys was only 17 when he joined. The dedication—which might be described as Conrad’s reinterpretation of his by now typical diegetic narrative frames—reveals that this story of a particular young man’s gruelling first command is also the story of Borys’ generation. Conrad outlines the relationship between his personal experience and that of Borys’s and his peers’ more explicitly in the “Author’s Note”:

Nobody can doubt that before the supreme trial of a whole generation I had an acute consciousness of the minute and insignificant character of my own obscure experience. There could be no question here of any parallelism. That notion never entered my head. But there was a feeling of identity, though with an enormous difference of scale—as of one single drop measured against the bitter and stormy immensity of an ocean. (x-xi)

Implicit in Conrad’s identification with Borys—though he is careful to explain that he is not suggesting complete commensurability with his son’s war experience—is the idea that the figurative passage from youth to adulthood requires a physical journey or trial. As this ‘event’ anticipates a necessary transition from the “care-free and fervent, to the more self-conscious and more poignant period of maturer life” it might be described as educative (“Author’s Note” vi). The transition is essential: “the region of early youth . . . must be left behind” (3). At first, the narrator apprehends his education—his first command—to be an exercise in complete self-reliance. But he learns through painful experience that his passage into adulthood is more than an individual pursuit and will require him to accept the mentoring of Captain Giles and the assistance of his crew. However, the use of documents in the novella, especially the narrator’s diary extracts that he reproduces in the confession, suggests a more dynamic educative process. Not only is the narrator’s successful passage across the

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necessity to interpret the novel through the First World War. See Berthoud’s “Introduction” in *The Shadow-Line* (London: Penguin, 1986): 7-24.

“shadow-line” of youth a result of his completed sea journey and newfound humility, but it also depends on his ability to document the story of his first command as an author.

For St Peter, on the other hand, a university professor, the question of education is manifest. The novel, which borders the beginning of one academic year through to the following September, records the many failures of formal education. From Professor Langtry’s unmerited professional success to Dr. Crane’s unrewarded intellectual commitment, the growing bureaucratization and commercialization of university education to uninspired and uninspiring students, St Peter’s grievances bring the inadequacies of a ‘standard’ education to the fore. He has little to offer in defence of his career on the grounds of its intrinsic value or practical benefit. Through the examples of Tom’s life on the mesa and the Professor’s summer in the Southwest country, the novel implicitly asks what might constitute an alternative. It is within the context of these shared concerns over aging and learning as transformative processes that *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor’s House* stage their documents. Like the narrator’s act of writing in *The Shadow-Line*, Tom’s mesa diary forms the nexus of the plot-driven questions arising from the interplay of youth and education.

I would suggest, however, that documents like the narrator’s diary and Tom’s diary are at their most compelling and innovative when considered as part of a constellation of documents that, stretching across each work, exert a shaping influence on form. In both *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor’s House* documents accrue meaning as they interrupt the narrative proper. The iteration and reiteration of documents refigures the otherwise linear teleology of the narratives and, in doing so, contributes to the theme of transformation as it manifests in each work. In other

words, the formal variations that these documents offer to the larger narratives in which they are positioned have thematic implications. In the case of *The Professor's House*, documents are incorporated additionally to explore transformation as a problematic; that is, Cather agitates the idealized version of self-transformation that preoccupies Conrad's novella.

Moreover, it is vis-à-vis the document that an opportunity presents itself to redress the well-established evaluation of *The Shadow-Line* as one of the less demanding works of Conrad's *oeuvre*. Norman Sherry accounts for the novella's "simplicity of form . . . straightforwardness of narrative, [and] the lack of more complex techniques of storytelling" with "the autobiographical influence" (211). *The Shadow-Line* is based, in part, on Conrad's experience of taking first command of the *Otago* in 1888. In a letter to his agent J.B. Pinker, Conrad went so far as to describe *The Shadow-Line* as "not really a story but exact biography" (CL 6: 25). However, Sherry's extensive research indicates that *The Shadow-Line* is not entirely faithful to Conrad's first command and is exaggerated for dramatic effect. As this novella rests somewhere between the fictional narrator and Conrad the author, one should not take too literally the claim that *The Shadow-Line's* pose as "biography" is likely to render it straightforward.

The lack of sophistication that critics have suggested of this short novel might actually underlie the measured praise it receives. Though Cedric Watts refers to *The Shadow-Line* as one of Conrad's "finest novels," he nonetheless regards the publication of *Under Western Eyes* in 1911 as the end of Conrad's major phase. Like Watts, Jakob Lothe calls *The Shadow-Line* "a remarkable fictional achievement for late Conrad" (132). As Lothe also perceives a decline in the quality of Conrad's fiction after

1911, *The Shadow-Line* seems to be the best of the not very good. Ian Watt begins his influential essay “Story and Idea in Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line*” with a concession: “*The Shadow-Line* is a by no means recondite piece of writing, and its main ideas are stated with such unusual explicitness that it hardly seems to call for analysis” (134). However, engaging the documents of *The Shadow-Line* alongside those of *The Professor’s House* brings the structural complexity of Conrad’s novella into sharp focus, revealing that it is far from simplistic. This comparative exploration of documents might finally do justice to Conrad’s estimation of his novella as “in its brevity a fairly complex piece of work” (“Author’s Note” v).

In contrast, *The Professor’s House* is considered one of Cather’s most experimental and challenging novels. The critical dissensus around the relationship between the first and third sections of the novel and “Tom Outland’s Story”—an unannounced first-person narration that interrupts the chronological progression of the third-person narrator’s account of the protagonist—is a reflection of its complexity. Alfred Kazin’s early criticism of the novel argued the central section was “a technical mistake” (255). More recently, however, critics are apt to read the contrived abruptness of “Tom Outland’s Story” as meaningful. In Lee’s words, it is the embodiment of “a powerful contrast” that emphasizes the very contrariness of parts one and three (242). “Tom Outland’s Story” is also described as a “mirror,” requiring us to reflect on the bracketing narrative (Millington 76). At the other extreme, Jo-Ann Middleton argues that the “parallels” between the three parts are “strangely gratuitous” (30). My focus on documents does not purport to offer a definitive reading of Cather’s ambiguous structure, but it does articulate a question that is rarely asked of the work and that, I argue, proves crucial to any critical discussion of the novel’s

central dislocation: what is “Tom Outland’s Story”? A document? Memory? Speech? Or, something else entirely? Thus the exploration of the documents of *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor’s House* that follows forms a response to the lack of attention these interpolated texts have received and reveals simultaneously the full force of Conrad’s and Cather’s works when we do engage with their citation of documents critically.

### Documenting the Shadow-Line

It is rare in Conrad’s fiction to find documents offered as conspicuously as the narrator’s diary extracts in *The Shadow-Line*. The diary entries are not simply quoted, as if casually to incorporate the text in the speech act of the narrator; rather, the extracts are clearly demarcated on the page to suggest they are independent of the larger confession.<sup>43</sup> The pronounced textual attention to the diary is curious as the excerpts do not outwardly contribute to crucial turns in plot or revelations of character, or the complex and multi-levelled narrative frames one might expect of a Conrad novel. Moreover, *The Shadow-Line* does not, like “Heart of Darkness,” work to reveal the disjunction between “reality” and what the report, letter, or newspaper article professes to describe.

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<sup>43</sup> Different editions of the novel accomplish this in different ways: for example the Dent first edition (London and Toronto, 1917) uses section breaks. The Dent Uniform edition (London and Toronto, 1923) uses section breaks and a smaller font size; the Oxford University Press edition, Ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (Oxford, 2003) retains the look of the first edition; and the Penguin edition, Ed. Jacques Berthoud (Middlesex, 1986) has a single space between the diary text and primary narrative. Note, however, as it was initially serialized in *The English Review* (1916-1917), there are no breaks, likely for lack of space. In the second serialization in the *Metropolitan Magazine* (1916), the first diary extract is abbreviated, and the second is excluded.

While no aspect of the narrator's first command has been without difficulty, the psychological implications of the ship's dire situation come to a head in Chapter 5. The first extract appears when the young captain describes his discovery that the quinine, the only medication available to treat his sickly crew, has been replaced by a nameless white powder. Immediately after notifying the men that no quinine remains on board, he includes an extract from the notes he "wrote at the time" (97). The second diary excerpt enters the confession after the redoubtable Ransome, the narrator's newly appointed steward, advises him to retire to his cabin. By way of introducing the passage, the narrator explains that he began to write a diary after being on deck fourteen days and offers a sample of his writing to the reader. Thus the extracts coincide with his narration of the act of writing them during his command. Two distinct voices emerge from the pages of this first-person narration: the narrator at the time of the action, narrator (1), and the author of the confession, narrator (2).

Lothe's *Conrad's Narrative Method* offers one of the few accounts of the diary extracts that is more than a passing reference. He regards them as "the most obvious narrative variation in *The Shadow-Line*"; and yet, crucially, this is a "modest variation" (128). The effect is twofold: in the first case, as the "distance between narration and narrated disappears in the diary, a more immediately convincing graphic picture is rendered of the ship's situation" (129). The second point, he argues, hinges on this aspect of only a modest variation in tone: "The increase of narrative intensity is not very striking. The narrator's diary is characterized by a unity of tone, pacing, and voice with the surrounding narrative which establishes a reciprocal relationship between them and enhances the plausibility and suggestiveness of both" (129). Thus Lothe argues that documents perform the role of corroboration. According to Lothe's

estimation then, *The Shadow-Line* presents a more straightforward case than *The Good Soldier*. In Ford's novel, documents are invoked as a source of evidence though not to corroborate the protagonist, but to form a counter-textual response to his wayward telling. If the events recalled in *The Shadow-Line* seem fantastic, or if readers are incredulous as to narrator (2)'s ability to accurately describe the emotions of narrator (1), the diary extracts are intended to reveal that narrator (2) has not swayed from fact in his confession. Therefore the narrator's confession might be regarded as genuine—in subject and in tone—a significant claim for a text in which readers are entirely at the mercy of its narrator who also constitutes its subject.

In light of Conrad's complex renderings of documents in his other, earlier fiction, such as "Heart of Darkness," Lothe's reading as a critical explanation for the inclusion of these documents seems somewhat simplistic, indicating, perhaps, a failure of this short novel from his point of view. A letter Conrad sent to T. Fisher Unwin, Conrad's publisher for a time, proves illuminating in this context. Conrad writes a scathing critique of Louis Becke and Walter Jeffery's *A First Fleet Family* (1896):

I do not know of course what [Becke] set himself to do. If he aimed at producing the effect of a personal narrative, of a diary with its self disclosures and the commonplace flow of ideas of such a man as the sergeant—he has absolutely succeeded. But why he should attempt such a feat passes my comprehension. It is a book full of possibilities which are never realized, in deference—as it seems to me—to the consistency of the man who is supposed to tell the story. But why he should tell the story and why Mr Becke should take that idiotic weight upon his shoulders I cannot imagine. The book tells of human characteristics. It tells of imperfect thought, of impotent effort; it speaks of error, suffering, desire, hope, failure. It speaks of life—but it has no more life in it than a catalogue. (CL 1: 302)

This passage points to two of Conrad's major grievances with *A First Fleet Family*. The first is that the novel strives relentlessly to represent a (perhaps, unworthy) character's point of view and limits itself to this view in the service of consistency. The second is that the form of the novel, its first-person narration—what Conrad describes

as having “the effect of a personal narrative” or “a diary”—is similarly employed to the end of generating this voice and authenticating it.

*A First Fleet Family* is presented as a journal belonging to Sergeant Dew that has been edited for publication. The impetus for the creation of the journal, which Dew wrote retrospectively, is to provide a record for his children of his extraordinary history and describe how he met the woman that would become their mother. The journal alludes to the diary Dew kept as a young man and quotes several other documents including lengthy newspaper articles and letters. It is difficult to determine if Dew had these documents in his possession as he wrote the journal or if he had them transcribed in his diary, which he reproduces here for his journal. The effect of this (not entirely convincing) accretion of texts is the intensification of the narrator’s voice. Conrad’s dissatisfaction with the emphasis on Dew’s consistency might also be a response to the novel’s shoring up of Dew’s story via documents. The problem is not with Becke’s desire to write a personal narrative but in its execution: the text merely reflects back on itself and thus reads as nothing more than a catalogue of characters and events. To be successful, Conrad argues in the conclusion of his letter to Unwin, Becke’s novel should represent the inevitable: “inevitableness is the only certitude; it is the very essence of life” (CL 1: 302). Conrad’s espousal of “inevitableness” here presents itself as a parallel aesthetic to Cather’s “backwardness.” *A First Fleet Family*’s fidelity to the Sergeant prevents it from eliciting the universal and the enduring—suffering, desire, hope, and failure—that Cather, too, found compelling. According to Conrad then, Becke’s novel limits itself and is limited by its form.

That Conrad saw dangers in constructing a “personal narrative” that incorporates documents to singularly posit the authenticity of the narrative voice—unlike Ford’s

more remarkable positioning of documents in *The Good Soldier*—problematizes Lothe's suggestion that Conrad does just what he detests: employs diary entries in *The Shadow-Line* to corroborate the narrator's confession. Like Sergeant Dew, Conrad's narrator writes a record. The narrator describes a difficult and exciting time in his young life and his narration is supplemented by alternate written texts. This does not preclude the possibility that Conrad's novella might be a failure according to Conrad's own standards, but it does demonstrate the need for a closer examination of how the extracts operate in relation to the larger narrative.

There are further implications for Lothe's observation of the affinity between the diary extracts and the larger narrative or narrator (1) and narrator (2). If this is a narrative that seeks to represent self-transformation as the novella's subtitle—"A Confession"—seems to suggest, the conflation of the voice of the pre- and post-journey narrator seems problematic. "*Confession*" immediately evokes a tradition of (fictional) autobiographies that describe secret or private matters. Typically introspective writing illustrates a process of development or the acquiring of knowledge. The paradigmatic confessional, Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, forms a useful counter-text to *The Shadow-Line* and reveals how Conrad specifically departs from convention through his invocation of the diary extracts.

Briefly, Augustine's *Confessions* describes his childhood and adolescence, his family, and what he retrospectively regards as his errors in public and private life at the time of writing—post conversion. The text is a painful and lyrical record of this conversion, private and particular in its admissions and yet intended as a spiritual guide for any would-be Christian. Book VIII, chapter xii holds particular relevance for Conrad's secular seaman's confession. The moment of Augustine's conversion occurs

while he sits under a fig tree, alone. As he sobs and begs God for enlightenment, he hears the voice of a child telling him to “Pick up and read, pick up and read” (152). Almost immediately, he interprets this call to action as divine. Augustine remembers the story of Antony, in which he “took it as an admonition addressed to himself when the words were read . . . By such an inspired utterance he was immediately ‘converted to you’” (153). Thus Augustine returns to the book of the apostle he had previously set down, opens the book and reads. Augustine exclaims of this moment, “I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled” (153).

This is a remarkable moment in the *Confessions*: Augustine anticipates his conversion. It is this *a priori* knowledge of reading as an act of transformation that impels him to initially pick up the book, while the moment after reading confirms his original supposition. Conrad’s protagonist, however, picks up his *own* text; he reads his own words. Yet the reading of his diary (which must occur in the act of its transcription) is not presented as critical to his development. Neither is the act of reading used to delineate the pre- and post-epiphany self. Only in the second diary transcription is the experience of reading his text even alluded to: “Here I must give another sample of it, a few detached lines, now looking very ghostly to my own eyes” (106). There is remarkably little in the text that represents the narrator’s altered state through reading, or indeed, recollection. This curious suppression of the effects of hindsight is summed up by Allan Burns:

the narrator . . . often forgoes the casually reductive lucidity of generalization that the privilege of retrospection affords for a deeper, more opaque involvement with the experiential processes whereby meanings are hypothesized, apprehended, rejected, or forged. (509)

Of course, this strategy is not unfamiliar to Conrad. The language teacher in *Under Western Eyes*, too, is obliged to feign ignorance. The teacher, as the editor of Razumov's diary, strategically withholds the fact that Razumov is a spy in the service of plot and, perhaps, to prevent any premature judgment from his reader. In the case of *The Shadow-Line*, however, there is little need to sustain suspense. Readers are immediately aware that the narrator has completed his perilous first command since he is alive to make its record: this confession.

If this is a confession that seeks to represent self-transformation like Augustine—denoted by Conrad's use of the loaded term 'confession'—the conflation of the voice of the ignorant youth and the conscious adult seems problematic. The first diary entry is simply introduced as follows: "Here is an extract from the notes I wrote at the time" (97). Following the excerpt which ends in ellipsis, the narrator merely resumes his chronological narrative. The extract is characterized by rhetorical questions, and a combination of the relation of facts such as "Ransome tells me [Burns] devours all the food that is given him" with more meditative phrases like, "There they are: stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space, great waters; the formidable Work of the Seven Days, into which mankind seems to have blundered unbidden" (97). This arrangement of action and interpretation might be said to characterize the entirety of this confession. Furthermore, the extract neither reveals nor modifies a detail of the sea journey or a particular state of mind that the narrator does not already express in the confession proper.

The first diary extract ends with the narrator's self-absorbed observation that he has been "decoyed into this awful, this death-haunted command" (98). At this point in the journey, the narrator lacks the perspective to situate his first command in the

larger, symbolic context of the passage from youth to maturity. Rather, he perceives himself to be in the hands of a cruel fate, an unwilling participant in this test of his character. However, a similar sentiment seems to be expressed earlier in this chapter when the narrator describes his feelings on looking at the wasted body of Burns: “Enviably man! So near extinction—while I had to bear within me a tumult of suffering vitality, doubt, confusion, self-reproach, and an indefinite reluctance to meet the horrid logic of the situation” (92-93). The narrator resents the fact of his own vitality as it predicates action and responsibility. This sentiment prefaces the self-pity he expresses in his diary. The continuity of emotion that seems to occur between the confession proper and the diary entries is peculiar given that the diary and the confession are composed at distinctly different times: in the earlier case, when the narrator is not sure if he will survive, and in the latter, when he has lived through and beyond his first command such that he can comfortably compose its record.

The narrator’s second diary extract recalls the first in its subject and tone. The text bordering the diary excerpt similarly offers no revision or interpretation.

However, the narrator does briefly allude to the writing process. Before reinscribing the relevant diary passage, he informs his readers:

It’s the only period of my life in which I attempted to keep a diary. No, not the only one. Years later, in conditions of moral isolation, I did put down on paper the thoughts and events of a score of days. But this was the first time. I don’t remember how it came about or how the pocket-book and the pencil came into my hands. It’s inconceivable that I should have looked for them on purpose. I suppose they saved me from the crazy trick of talking to myself. (105-06)

The narrator’s perception of his diary as a necessity anticipates Tom Outland’s experience of record-keeping in *The Professor’s House*. In the “Tom Outland’s Story” section, Tom explains that, after he and Roddy completed their contract with the Sitwell Cattle Company in Pardee, they devoted their time and resources to exploring

the nearby mesa: a beautiful mass of purple rock and jutting cliffs at the foot of the Mancos River. They find “a little city of stone” belonging to an “extinct civilization” (163-4): a discovery that will transform Tom’s life. After they settle atop the mesa dwelling, they begin excavating. Tom’s diary is a careful record of the many artefacts he unearths. Though Tom’s diary is not personal or meditative like the narrator of *The Shadow-Line*, he develops a connection to it that exceeds its function as a catalogue of mesa objects. The act of writing the record, which includes his attempts at interpreting the artefacts, brings him into imaginative commune with the extinct civilization, though he ultimately casts off the diary for fear it would cause him to “lose the whole in the parts” (207).

The narrator of *The Shadow-Line*, however, cannot part physically with his diary. The act of writing during his crisis of self-worth—no doubt perpetuated by the honorable resolve of his deteriorating crew, the steadfast Ransome, and the fact that he has remained untouched by sickness—saves the narrator from replicating the behavior of his delirious chief mate, Burns. The diary forms a silent interlocutor for him and this is, at least, one indicator of its value beyond Lothe’s citation of the extracts as performing the function of corroboration. Moreover, readers are introduced to other forms of document-making in the novella that seem especially gratuitous in relation to the diary, thereby rendering the narrator’s writing increasingly valuable.

While waiting for a meeting with Captain Ellis, the official in charge of assigning the young narrator his first command, he passionately criticizes the Harbour Office communications. The narrator reflects, “the atmosphere of officialdom would kill anything that breathes the air of human endeavour, would extinguish hope and fear

alike in the supremacy of paper and ink" (29). We are back to the opening scenes of *Chance*. These thoughts are enough to check his excitement over learning of his promotion. He "was, in common with the other seamen of the port, merely a subject for official writing, filling of forms with all the artificial superiority of a man of pen and ink to the men who grapple with realities outside the consecrated walls of official buildings" (34). The document certifying the narrator's new professional title and the office peons writing up contracts and messages for the sailors exist in stark unreality compared to the work of the men they can only pretend to circumscribe. The narrator's official contract cannot encapsulate the experience of a first command. Thus the narrator's acquisition of a pencil and paper could be seen as an act of reclaiming the self, operating in strategic opposition to the bureaucratic document that seeks to contain, label, and bind him by the officialdom it inscribes.

While the second case of document-making invites less scorn from the narrator, the writing is nonetheless viewed as a useless operation. When the narrator goes to the medical chest to prepare doses of quinine for the men, he discovers that a letter has been left for him amongst the supplies. The kindly doctor, who was meant to examine the ship's store of medicine while delayed in Bangkok, instead wrote a note addressed to the captain. Alternating between quoting and paraphrasing, the narrator reproduces the letter in his confession. The note warns the narrator in sympathetic tones that "medically speaking" there would still be trouble for the men, but fortunately the ship has "a good provision of quinine" (80). Sometime later, while attempting to administer another dose of quinine as more of the crew are taken ill, the narrator discovers that the quinine bottles have been replaced, rewrapped and resealed containing a white powder. Though the narrator blames himself for the

oversight, he remarks of the doctor, “instead of writing that warning letter, the very refinement of sympathy, why didn’t the man make a proper inspection?” (95).

Even with the narrator’s pause to address the psychological value of his diary writing—in contrast to the earlier examples of gratuitous and futile documents, always inferior to work and action—the affinity between the diary passages and the confession requires further explication. I want to suggest that the lack of differentiation, the utter seamlessness between these diary extracts and the narrative proper, in spite of being clearly delineated texts, indicates the narrator’s mastery as author. While the sea journey teleology suggests that the narrator’s transition from young to older man will coincide with the successful completion of his physical voyage, this expectation is frustrated. The narrator’s first command forms only part of his educative process where he is to acquire fortitude, purpose, and humility. As the novella ends, when the narrator describes his return to the Officers’ Sailors Home to reconnect with Captain Giles, the transition is yet to be completed. The definitive crossing of the shadow-line does not occur in the diegesis of the novella; rather, it is located in the act of transcription that constitutes the writing of the confession.

While Allan Burns’s description of the narrator’s absence of retrospective generalization is true of the bulk of the confession, its first page reveals that the narrator is conscious of the thematic implications of his telling. The introduction to his confession is uncharacteristically broad in tone and suggestion, full of phrases such as “the young,” “all mankind,” “universal experience,” and “common lot” (3). Only a page later, however, he becomes concerned strictly with the “I” of the confession: the particular details of his ship, his Eastern port, and the crew he decides to leave behind. This frame suggests that the narrator is aware of the import of his words as both a tale

of intimate experience and one that has yet far reaching connotations—like Augustine’s text. Conrad’s recapitulation of the novel in the “Author’s Note” similarly advocates its relevance beyond the experience of a young, unnamed sailor. This is not only the story of Conrad or his son Borys. Conrad’s broad tones extend the shadow-line metaphor more generally to suggest it describes an inevitable life process; one that Tom Outland also faces. Conrad explains that “the aim” of *The Shadow-Line* “was the presentation of certain facts which certainly were associated with the change from youth, care-free and fervent, to the more self-conscious and more poignant period of mature life” (“Author’s Note” x). The strategic limitation of the retrospective, post-enlightened, generalizing voice to the first few pages of the novel, the voice that would reveal the temporal and metaphysical distance between the author of the diary and the author of the confession, is indicative of the confession’s deliberate construction.

The narrator (and Conrad) characterize youth as “moments of boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction. Rash moments . . . moments when the young are inclined to commit rash actions...” (4). The narrator hastily decides to quit his berth and with the same temperament, assumes his first command. Yet it is not only these actions that attest to the narrator’s impulsive youth: his recollection of his impatient discourse with Captain Giles is irritating if not damning. The narrator derides what is not immediately apparent. Thus Captain Giles’s subtle hints and circuitous conversation are met by the narrator’s incontrovertible conclusion that Giles is “dull” (15). The insults intensify incrementally as the narrator’s patience wears thin: the narrator describes Giles as fatuous, begins “to pity him profoundly” (20), suspects him of “dreary lunacy” (21), and finally, conceives of Giles as the most “tactless idiot on

earth" (22). His physical responses to Giles's careful presentation of facts regarding the Chief Steward's curious behaviour also register impatience. In this description of their conversation, the narrator records his annoyance at what he perceives as Giles's "pointless" prodding and inane interest in a particular correspondence: "I flung away the paper I was still holding" (19, 17), "I slapped the table with my open palm" (18); "I snapped out" (21). The youthful impertinence of the narrator prevents him from thoughtfully considering Giles's words. Words that, the reader and the narrator discover simultaneously, are central to the narrator's promotion from chief mate to first command. We are also reminded, however, by the narrator's hyperbolic disinterest in the world, evocative of a Hamlet-like detachment, that this picture of youth, too, is a construction. The narrator exaggeratedly believes the world offers "nothing original, nothing new, startling, informing . . . no opportunities to find out something about oneself, no wisdom to acquire, no fun to enjoy. Everything was stupid and overrated" (172).

After the narrator has returned safely from his voyage, he meets Captain Giles. The newly loquacious narrator unfolds the details of his command to Giles with little prompting. Although the narrator admits feeling older and Captain Giles agrees that he does, in fact, "look older," the narrator has not yet completed his trek over the shadow-line of youth (131). In response to Giles's question, "Why—aren't you faint-hearted?" the narrator replies, "God only knows, Captain Giles" (132). While the narrator has abandoned his superior tone, he has not acquired complete self-possession: doubt remains. Captain Giles assures him that he "will learn how not to be faint-hearted. A man has got to learn everything—and that's what so many of those youngsters don't understand" (132). The narrator responds to Giles's remark by

asserting his newfound status: there should be no misunderstanding that he is “no longer a youngster” (132). Yet as soon as he professes his maturity, he exhibits his former impetuosity. When Giles intimates that he might take a break before resuming his duty, the narrator snaps: “What did you expect? That I would want to take a week ashore for a rest?” (132). As this brief exchange concludes the novella, the narrator has not yet definitively crossed the shadow-line of his youth. It is worth noting that Conrad amended the typescript of the novella at this point. He wrote in the adverb “perversely” to describe the narrator’s speech: “‘Live at half-speed,’ I murmured perversely. ‘Not everybody can do that’” suggesting he wanted the conclusion to bear the traces of the narrator’s earlier impatience and frustration with Giles (131).<sup>44</sup>

As artfully constructed as this picture of the narrator’s younger self might be, this only serves to emphasize the disparity between his youthful impatience and the construction of his confession. Lothe’s judgement as to the deep affinities between the diary extracts and the larger confession becomes pivotal in this context. As indicated by the narrator’s restriction of universalizing commentary to the first page, the confession acquires the tone of the diary extracts—extracts which must have been written prior to the confession. The strategic omissions, the perpetual deferral of the outcome of the sea journey, might be recognised as a symbolic act of restraint—particularly impressive as the extracts occur in Chapter 5, at the height of the narrator’s anxiety. The deliberate withholding of commentary or revised perceptions around these extracts realizes an emotional immediacy. The narrator allows his

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<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that this exchange does not appear in the MS of *The Shadow-Line* but is included in the Dent first edition. In the MS, “I murmured” becomes “I murmured scornfully” in the first serialization of *The Shadow-Line* in *The English Review*, which then becomes “I murmured perversely” in the Dent edition. See the MS at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

audience to read the details of his wretched command as powerfully as he experienced them. While the narrative emphasis on psychological intensity is not new for Conrad and a narrator's withholding of particular details in the service of plot might be said to describe the way suspense functions in any number of novels, the narrator's restraint here becomes thematized. In this confession which addresses specifically the rashness and impatience of youth, the deliberateness of the writing, including the holding back of some details in combination with the slow unfurling of others, forms the basis of narrator (2)'s response to narrator (1).

While documents like the letter from the Harbour Office inviting the narrator to take first command, or the contract that officially sets him on his journey, impel the passage of the narrator across the figurative line, documents like the diary—and this confession—suggest that one can also strategically write oneself across the line. It is through the underlying relationship between the confession and the diary extracts that the shadow-line can finally be deciphered. The symbolic restraint and careful consideration involved in the reiterations of the young narrator's diary complete the movement into the space of maturity. In a marked departure from the conventional sea journey telos, it is not landfall that encodes the protagonist's successful self-transformation, but the journey's containment and contextualization via the writing and transcribing involved in the production of this confession.

### **“A turquoise set in dull silver” or a Document within a Document**

*The Shadow-Line* admits that maturation is painful but it is a process from which no one is exempt, for good reason: the qualities associated with maturity, like poignancy and self-consciousness, are the correctives of youth's impatience and indifference. In

*The Professor's House*, however, Cather substitutes Conrad's potentially fruitful space of maturity with protracted decay. Be it the slow disintegration of familial bonds, the loss of interest in one's career, or alienation from society at large, for Cather, the end of youth is worthy of mourning. Idealism, vitality, and passion are replaced by sex, self-promotion, and unhealthy ambition. An adult's education consists of lessons in corruption and consumption. Maturity entails writing "thousands of useless letters" and making "thousands of false excuses" (216), finding just the right door fittings for expensive new houses, hosting elaborate dinners full of stilted conversation, and blackballing brother-in-laws out of jealousy. In this context, St Peter's celebration of Tom's early death seems apt: Tom "had escaped all that" (216).

*The Professor's House's* cynical perspective on the loss of youth has been attributed to Cather's own feelings of disenchantment at the time of writing. James Woodress suggests this novel reflects Cather's mood in the early 1920s when she suffered a "midlife crisis" (291). Lee argues that though Godfrey St Peter is a thoroughly imagined protagonist, Cather "embodies herself . . . in her objectified male character" (219). Cather's long-time companion, Edith Lewis, confirms these suspicions when she describes *The Professor's House* as the "most personal of Willa Cather's novels" (137). Although *The Professor's House* expresses dismal views of post-war American materialism, and Professor St Peter's near suicide is deeply unsettling (especially when related to Cather's personal decline), the "great rush of light and air" that "Tom Outland's Story" ushers into this expressly stuffy and jaded narrative cannot be dismissed (Lee 242).

Yet "Tom Outland's Story" reflects more than a change in temper, what Cather herself described in her essay "On *The Professor's House*" as the embodiment of "the

fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa” (a description to which I will return), and even more than a symbol of youth’s idealism, curiosity, and sincerity (*Stories, Poems, and Other Writings* 974). At the most basic level of plot, “Tom Outland’s Story” provides evidence of Tom’s history that has been obscured for roughly two-thirds of the novel. Perhaps this narrative deferral is intended to reflect St Peter’s initial ignorance of Tom’s past: Tom concealed exactly how and why he appeared on St Peter’s doorstep for months. Finally, Tom “at last told the story he had always kept back” to St Peter. The story “was nothing very incriminating, nothing very remarkable; a story of youthful defeat, the sort of thing a boy is sensitive about—until he grows older” (141-2). Like the narrator’s confession that comprises *The Shadow-Line*, Tom’s narrative is a retrospective account of a period of idealism and infallibility marred by self-doubt and shame. Tom’s disclosure of these intimate memories suggests a coming-to-being just as the seaman’s written confession proposes to mark his passage across the shadow-line of youth.

As a structuring device, Cather’s inclusion of the “Tom Outland’s Story” section more specifically recalls the use of diary extracts in Conrad’s novella: Tom’s story, too, accrues value as it is reiterated. Cather’s great innovation, however, is to imbue meaning in the ambiguity of its textual status. It is unclear if “Tom Outland’s Story” is a text in the familiar sense of *The Shadow-Line*’s diary extracts, Tom’s will, the Professor’s histories, or extant texts including Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and Virgil’s *Aeneid* that comprise Roddy and Tom’s reading material on the mesa. The lack of apparatus, descriptive or otherwise, around “Tom Outland’s Story” presents an interpretive problem, which also becomes, crucially, an appeal for

interpretation. What is “Tom Outland’s Story”? Is it a written text? A memory? A disembodied voice?

The material documents of *The Professor’s House* form the core of the moral and social difficulties that pervade the novel, at times problematizing the act of writing and the production of text. The narrative begins with the characters already enduring the consequences of a hastily written will, lacking foresight and specificity, benefitting some and leaving others at a serious disadvantage. After Tom arrives in Hamilton and enrolls in the University, he begins to conduct experiments and develop the formulae for what would eventually become the Outland engine: the technology that revolutionized the aviation industry. His work is carried out under the guidance and supervision of St Peter’s colleague, Dr. Crane. Without completing his experiments, Tom leaves Hamilton to join the War effort and names the Professor’s daughter Rosamond, his love interest, his sole beneficiary. Some two years after Tom’s death, Rosie marries Louie Marsellus, who acquires Tom’s papers, continues to develop Tom’s project, and turns it into a commercial success.

Though Tom does not name Crane directly in his will, Crane feels he deserves compensation. St Peter, his daughter Kitty, and the Cranes allege that anyone that knew Tom can be sure he would have wanted to share his success with those that helped him. This insistence on amending the deceased’s wishes recalls the Wilcox family in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* who, in a reversal, contest Mrs. Wilcox’s will on the basis it does not materially benefit their family. While it is evident Mrs. Wilcox’s intention is to give Howards End to Miss Schlegel, they argue that since she expressed her desire in pencil, her decision was made in haste. The form of Tom’s last wishes is not contested here; it is a legally executed document and there is little to argue on the

point of its construction. Indeed, the only reason the characters regretfully accept Tom's will is because of the authoritative form in which it is expressed. Like Casaubon's will in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (whom Cather highly esteemed), Tom's will is his material remainder, the dead hand of the past that has a firm grasp on the lives of the living. However, unlike Casaubon's carefully executed (and vindictive) will, the characters in *The Professor's House* can only mourn the guileless simplicity of Tom's document. There is overwhelming disappointment that Tom did not even produce script as informal as Mrs. Wilcox: anything that could absolve Rosamond, Louie, and St Peter from the responsibility of negotiating or making compensations. The novel does not provide a solution to this legal and moral dilemma, neither does St Peter intercede on behalf of Crane, which he promises to do: one of several examples of his withdrawal from social responsibility.

The first section of the novel, "The Family," largely depicts the less obvious but equally dramatic tensions and dilemmas arising from this document as they spill into the domestic sphere. St Peter grows increasingly annoyed with Lillian doting on Louie, admiring his influential contacts and material extravagances. St Peter, complex and subtle, is shown to battle with his inner contradictions. On the one hand, he refuses Rosie's attempts to settle an income on him from the money she has acquired via Tom's patent: "there can be no question of money between me and Tom Outland" (46) and on the other, he enjoys the extravagancies that Rosie and Louie bestow on him including opera tickets and chic hotel rooms. Mrs. Crane accuses him of benefiting indirectly from Tom's will—"It's all the same if it goes to your family" (107)—and this proves to be true in the niceties he and his wife continue to receive from the Marselluses. Even Kitty, St Peter's daughter, blames him for not preventing Louie from

collecting Tom's papers; she, too, agrees that he should intervene on behalf of Dr. Crane.

While St Peter's life's work, *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, does not play host to a wide range of difficulties like Tom's will, it does rearticulate some of the conflicts associated with this document. The success of St Peter's work, like Tom's research, has monetary consequences. As the recipient of the Oxford prize for History, "with its five thousand pounds," it "buil[ds] him the new house into which he d[oes] not want to move" and allows him to simultaneously pay rent for the other in which he comes to seek refuge (21). St Peter is conscious of how unorthodox his domestic situation might appear. He warns Augusta, the family's sewing-woman, against making his set-up public: "if it were noised about, people might begin to say that Mrs. St Peter and I had—how do they put it, parted, separated?" (10). Yet the ability to maintain two dwellings is precisely what perpetuates their burgeoning emotional distance. While the Professor's histories and Tom's formulae represent veritable contributions to knowledge—they are the products of rigorous and sincere work, wholly endorsed by the novel—the material consequences of their texts suggest they might have been better off unacknowledged. Ideas are inevitably and problematically translated into money.

Further to this uneasy transmutation of knowledge into capital, St Peter repeatedly expresses concern over the current state of education. He laments the fact that education has become a commodity to be bought and sold. He fears his institution is being farmed out "to athletics and to the agricultural and commercial schools favoured and fostered by the State Legislature" at the cost of lowering the "standard of scholarship" (43). St Peter is most staunchly opposed, however, to

transformations of Tom. He refuses to accept an income from Rosie. He explains, “my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue” (47). He considers Louie and Rosie’s decision to name their new home ‘Outland,’ another abominable translation of Tom. The Professor explains to his wife, “I admit I can’t bear it when [Louie] talks about Outland as his affair. (I mean Tom, of course, not their confounded place!)” (34). This parenthetical aside represents the critical necessity of separating Tom Outland from the Norwegian manor house ‘Outland’ as the Marselluses have successfully transformed the one into the other. He continues his diatribe: “the least they can do is to be quiet about it, and not convert his very bones into a personal asset” (34). It is commonplace to see Tom translated by the characters in the novel, and for all the monetary gains these conversions suggest, the exchange simultaneously calculates a loss. Kathleen’s solution is to split Tom, preserving an unadulterated version derived from her memory, and leaving the others to their translations. She explains to her father, “now he’s all turned out chemicals and dollars and cents, hasn’t he? But not for you and me! Our Tom is much nicer than theirs” (104).

Kathleen’s proposed solution is unviable. She is susceptible to bitter jealousies that arise over “their” Tom—the Tom of the Marselluses and the Cranes—in the form of Rosie’s superior quality furs and dresses. Furthermore, the Professor periodically enjoys Louie’s generosity, undoubtedly financed by Tom’s patent. The conversion of texts, ideas, and people into capital is an inevitable process in Cather’s novel of post-war America. The novel’s documents similarly cannot answer to the problem of translation and incommensurability: they only glorify them. Scott, Kathleen’s journalist husband, is in the unenviable position of producing text strictly for money. Feeling he

is above this menial work, Scott displays little attachment to or interest in his material. He “could sell as many good-cheer articles as he had time to write, on any subject, and he loathed doing them” (55).

Like *The Shadow-Line*, these documents exist as inevitable elements of the plot and yet they might also be used to ‘read’ the plot and each other. In Conrad’s novella, for example, the narrator’s diary extracts are contrasted with the Doctor’s letter and the Harbour Office communications to expound the theme of writing. Cather’s dislocated structure, however, amplifies the potential for these ‘meetings.’ According to the chronology of the narrative, “Tom Outland’s Story” precedes both “The Family” and “The Professor” sections and yet it is inserted between them. In other words, the construction of the novel is at odds with the chronological time of the narrative. Cather’s ingenuity lies in the implied necessity of reading her novel both linearly and from the inside-out. Following the arrangement of the novel, the documents of “The Family” anticipate “Tom Outland’s Story” followed by “The Professor.” Yet the reiteration of “Tom Outland’s Story” must also inflect the first and third sections of the novel. In this capacity, I argue, documents fulfill their second function, which is to generate interpretation. The ideas we associate with one document are recalled and refreshed by their highly evocative and, at times, uneasy association with another. This layering of documents recalls Tom’s palimpsestic mode of reading: “When I look into the *Aeneid* now, I can always see two pictures: the one on the page, and another behind that: blue and purple rocks . . .” (208).

The interpretative profundity of documents then forms a likely counterpart to the novel’s pared-down prose. Frederick M. Link’s textual analysis for the scholarly edition of *The Professor’s House* notes the many abbreviations and dropped passages

between the typescript and the Knopf first edition of the book printing. According to Link, these deletions suggest that Cather did not want to “overfurnish” her novel, borrowing Cather’s term for gratuitous detail (401). Cather’s edits include the removal of descriptive detail and reflection or moments when characters might be described as summing up.<sup>45</sup> Cather seems to be writing in line with Conrad’s declared practice, as set forth in the “Preface” to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*. If the aim of Conrad’s art is “by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see” it is explicitly not his prerogative to ‘tell,’ and neither is it Cather’s (NN x). In “The Novel Dèmeublé,” Cather explains the importance of showing without telling in fiction:

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, it seems to me, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the over-tone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself. Literalness, when applied to the presenting of mental reactions and of physical sensations seems to be no more effective than when it is applied to material things. (*On Writing* 41-2)

Taking Cather’s professed value for the understated as my cue, and considering the non-linear structure of her novel, I will examine the more subtle documentary pairings of *The Professor’s House*. This reading thus necessitates a reconsideration of the Professor’s Spanish histories that we first encounter in “The Family” via the novel’s allusions to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Tom’s mesa diary. Similarly, I suggest we import the symbolic baggage of the Professor’s histories to the documents of “Tom Outland’s Story.” Taken together, this cluster of documents articulate a dilemma that plagues the central section of the novel just as explicit conflicts over translation and incommensurability pervaded the first: namely, what

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<sup>45</sup> See Link’s “Textual Essay” in *The Professor’s House*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) 387-430.

can we claim as our own? And what do we have the right to tell? These questions represent both an epistemological impasse and the problem of appropriation.

Tom's diary records the several artefacts Tom unearthed on the mesa alongside his friend and co-explorer Roddy Blake and their companion, Henry. In the "Tom Outland's Story" section, Tom explains that after he and Roddy completed their contract with the Sitwell Cattle Company in Pardee, they devoted their time and resources to exploring the mesa: a beautiful mass of purple rock and jutting cliffs at the foot of the Mancos river. Believing themselves to be the first men to ascend the cliffs, they "discover" a city belonging to an "extinct civilization" (163-4). After they settle atop the mesa dwelling, they begin excavating. Tom explains: "we numbered each specimen, and in my day-book I wrote down just where and in what condition we had found it, and what we thought it had been used for" (173).

Though their styles would differ widely, the work of each of Tom and St Peter seems simple enough in its conception and execution: research followed by record-making. Tom's diary forms a pseudo-history of the American Southwest. Father Duchene, the missionary priest and Tom's mentor, recognizes the value of Tom's laborious work: "it may be that you will have thrown light on some important points in the history of your country" (182). He encourages Tom to take his findings to the Smithsonian and contact an archaeologist who will "revive this civilization in a scholarly work" (182). St Peter's work professes to do exactly this: his multi-volume history tells the story of the Spanish exploration and conquest of the American Southwest. Yet St Peter feels himself to be at a distinct disadvantage:

If the last four volumes of 'The Spanish Adventurers' were more simple and inevitable than those that went before, it was largely because of Outland. When St Peter first began his work, he realized that his great drawback was the lack of early association, the fact

that he had not spent his youth in the great dazzling South-west country which was the scene of his explorers' adventures. (214)

St Peter's regret suggests his distance from the Southwest renders him less connected to his subject and thus less able to chronicle the exploits of the Spanish Empire. To tell the story of the Spanish explorers necessitates an earlier claim to the "scene" of their "adventures." Yet Louie's reference to the protagonists of *Spanish Adventurers in North America* as St Peter's "Spanish-adventurer sons" suggests the degree to which St Peter's writing has become an act of possession. The stories of these Spanish explorers are his own (132).

Tom's familiarity with the land of the Southwest country might reflect his feeling of kinship with the cliff-dwelling people, but it does not make him better equipped to tell their story. The artefacts, he proudly explains to Roddy, "belonged to boys like you and me that have no other ancestors to inherit from" (200). The mesa seemed to be "preserved through the ages by a miracle, and handed on to you and me" (201). Tom regards his discovery and concomitant appropriation of the mesa as inevitable like Aeneas—the hero of Virgil's text that he carries with him to the mesa—is fated to found Rome. But Tom can only surmise how they lived and how they died, offering endearing descriptions coloured by his great affection for the beauty of his surroundings. When the artefacts he unearths present him with an interpretive problem, Henry, who has no connection to the Southwest, proves most valuable because he "had a wider knowledge of the world" (173).

Alternatively, Father Duchene speaks of the cliff-dwellers with great confidence as he "had been among the Indians nearly twenty years then" (179). He points to Tom and Roddy's oversights, their ignorance of what are "unquestionably granaries" (179), for example, but effects a similar language of certitude in his wider observations: "I am

inclined to think that your tribe were a superior people. Perhaps they were not so when they first came upon the mesa, but in an orderly and secure life they developed the considerable arts of peace” (179-80). What might raise some consternation, however, is the propensity to ground the cliff-dwellers’ superiority in their likeness to the great Western civilizations: “I have seen a collection of early pottery from the island of Crete. Many of the geometrical decoration on these jars are not only similar, but, if my memory is trustworthy, identical” (180).

While Father Duchene’s tendency to make sweeping observations after only a week on the mesa does not seem to register discomfort (indeed, Tom is appreciative of his insights) and no character expresses doubt about the western-centric perspective undergirding his superior estimation of the cliff-dwellers, the presence of *Robinson Crusoe* introduces a competing perspective. Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the few texts Roddy and Tom carry with them to the mesa for reading material. *Crusoe* forms a nice counterpart to Tom and Roddy’s experiences. Just as the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* experienced psychological isolation and found solace in the act of writing, Crusoe, too, finds a need to document in his seclusion. But *Crusoe* is also a novel fascinated by the act of discovery and consummate ownership. Crusoe finds himself shipwrecked on an island in the Caribbean he believes to be uninhabited, and thus he directly refers to it as his kingdom. Roddy and Tom take symbolic possession of the deserted mesa they “discover” through the act of naming. They immediately name the dwelling “Cliff City” (165) and refer to the uppermost living area as “Eagle’s Nest” (175). Finally, they discover the body of a woman and name her Mother Eve. The insistence on naming marks an act of ownership which is reiterated each time

they refer to the mesa as “our city” (174). They claim to speak for a people they cannot know by virtue of the fact they discovered their site.

Cather’s relationship to Defoe extends beyond her citation of his popular novel in her narrative. She also wrote an introduction to Defoe’s *The Fortunate Mistress* in 1924. In this “Introduction” she relates to Defoe as a fellow journalist and takes a moment to reflect on the success of *Crusoe*:

Defoe’s literal method never worked out so well again as in *Robinson Crusoe*—at least, not for readers of our time. Robinson, like all his other heroes, lived by his wits, but since he practised his ingenuity upon a desert island and the untamed forces of nature, the details are not so revolting as in the narratives in which the hero uses his wits upon the persons and pocket-books of his fellow mortals. (*Stories, Poems, and Other Writings* 944)

As is well-known, *Crusoe* does use his “wits upon persons”: *Crusoe* discovers a “savage” and takes him on as his natural slave, going so far as to name him. Perhaps Cather is only referring to the first half of *Crusoe*. Problematic as her omission is, her interpretation of the hero *Crusoe* suggests an important difference between his explorations and record-making and that of Tom and St Peter: *Crusoe* interacts with nature while the characters of *The Professor’s House* deal with real but deceased peoples. Crucially, however, while St Peter takes ownership of his Spanish adventurers through writing, Tom feels that only when he gives up his diary can he truly retain the mesa. Unlike the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* who must materially possess his diary in order to make his transition into maturity, Tom casts off his record. He fears his diary would cause him to “lose the whole in parts” (207).

This problem of appropriation comes to the fore, however, when Roddy sells the literal documents of the cliff-dwellers: their artefacts. After Roddy surmises that Tom has been unsuccessful in interesting the Smithsonian in the mesa, he sells the entire outfit to a German merchant. In the narrative’s now characteristic refracting and

doubling-back, this sale intentionally recalls Rosamond's shopping trip to Chicago to purchase Spanish furniture, described as an "orgy of acquisition." Rosamond "was like Napoleon looting the Italian palaces" (124). The community disapproves of Roddy's profit-making:

folks weren't bothered none about that mesa so long as you fellows were playing Robinson Crusoe out there, digging out curios. But when it leaked out that Blake had got a lot of money for your stuff, then they began to feel jealous—said the ruins didn't belong to Blake any more than to anybody else. (195)

Though Tom is uninterested in financial gain, he also condemns Roddy for selling the mesa artefacts. He faults the logic of Roddy's decision. Since the artefacts belong to the history of the country, it is impossible for a single person to own or sell them. He chastises Roddy: "I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell—nor yours!" (200). When Tom wonders if Roddy sold his diary as well, Roddy answers: "That's your private property" (202). While Roddy's response suggests he is attuned to an ethics of ownership, he has interpreted his relationship to the artefacts differently. Roddy's action is further complicated when we learn he made the sale to support Tom's education. The gains or losses involved in this example of translation seem especially difficult to calculate.

From the menial to the extraordinary, *The Professor's House* notes the degree to which the modern subject is entrenched in documents. The novel's documents are at once inevitable and problematic; plentiful and yet wanting. The intricate web of texts and concomitant exigencies, interpretations, and meanings that build across the novel form the story of one man's complex disillusionment with modern life. Yet how might this thematic shoring up of documents answer to the structural dislocation of the novel: "Tom Outland's Story"?

Cather herself has offered an explanation for the shape of the novella. In the first case, it represents her attempt to employ “a device often used by the early French and Spanish novelist; that of inserting the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman*” and in the second instance, it is “something a little more vague” (*Stories, Poems, and Other Writings* 974). The more opaque experiment she refers to is an allusion to Dutch painting in which an interior is represented but also includes “a square window, open, through which one [can see] the masts of ships or a stretch of gray sea.” She is explicit about the connection of her novel to these Dutch works:

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter’s house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland’s face and in his behaviour. (974)

Yet this description does not explain what “Tom Outland’s Story” is. Undoubtedly, just as she describes, Cather’s novel is an illustration of the *nouvelle* inserted into the *roman* that simultaneously encodes the oppositions of the Dutch interior and the open window. “Tom Outland’s Story” is the *nouvelle* that represents expansiveness, light, air and a youthful sincerity, elements altogether lacking in the *roman* or bordering narrative. However, there might be more at stake in its indefinable form, and Cather’s related lack of explication.

Before broaching the question of the materiality of Cather’s structural experiment, there is another omission to consider, this time, functioning on the level of story. St Peter plans to annotate Tom’s mesa diary and prepare it for publication. This may entail yet a further case of incommensurability; a translation of Tom that sees him inevitably converted into dollars and cents. Or, perhaps, the publication of Tom’s diary presents another instance of the epistemological difficulty inherent in

telling the story of another, and whether one might even be justified in taking up the task. Certainly, St Peter expresses anxiety about the work he has set out for himself:

The bother was that he must write an introduction. The diary covered only about six months of the boy's life, a summer he spent on the Blue Mesa, and in it there was almost nothing about Tom himself. To mean anything, it must be prefaced by a sketch of Outland, and some account of his later life and achievements. To write of his scientific work would be comparatively easy. But that was not all the story; his was a many-sided mind, though a simple and straightforward personality. (137)

While he intends to give only part of his summer to the work, we learn he has instead “pleasantly trifled away nearly two months at a task which should have taken little more than a week” (218). If this description suggests he has completed the introduction and notes to Tom's diary, we never see it. The narrative does not so much as offer a detail as to the style of the introduction or its length, what information it includes or its intended audience. This narrative omission shifts the focus to the process of writing, the time the Professor devotes to editing the mesa diary. Perhaps the reiteration of Tom's diary through St Peter affects St Peter's will to live; perhaps this summer he spends metaphorically with Tom—through the diary and his day-dreams—ultimately provides that last resistance to impending death.

If the narrative silence on the introduction and annotations to Tom's diary are intended to direct attention to the potential value of reiteration, the narrative's lack of framing around “Tom Outland's Story” might also be read as a thematic gesture; this time, occurring on the level of structure. In light of the several documents across the novel that illustrate the problem of translation and appropriation, the ambiguity of “Tom Outland's Story” forms a source of resistance. The narrator of *The Shadow-Line* takes ownership of his voice—and his story—by re-inscribing his diary by his own hand. Tom, however, is always at risk of being translated by others. Susan J. Rosowski, in one of the few discussions of “Tom Outland's Story” that makes any allusion to the

form of this inset narrative, identifies it as St Peter's "extended memory" (141). However, there is no evidence to suggest definitively that it is retold through St Peter as memory, speech act, day-dream, or in any other form. There is no discernible trace of St Peter's mediating voice. Moreover, though as readers we encounter the story as text, we cannot be certain that it is a transcription. The narrator of the novel does not present this as a possibility. In fact, the narrator is entirely absent from this first-person narration. "Tom Outland's Story" simply exists. It is the single moment in the novel when Tom seems to have avoided appropriation or translation. Undoubtedly, "Tom Outland's Story" is a reiteration, but who is doing the reiterating is left unknown. It is a document without a maker and a text that may not be a text.

### **Conrad's and Cather's Literal Reiterations**

The history of the composition of Cather's novel is itself a testament to the possibilities of reiteration. If *The Professor's House* was intended to resemble French and Spanish narratives by incorporating the *nouvelle* into the *roman*, Cather did not have to try very hard: she literally inserted the one story into the other. "Tom Outland's Story" pre-existed the concept of *The Professor's House*. As David Harrell's book length study of the genesis of *The Professor's House* reveals, the history of the book dates back to 1916. "Tom Outland's Story" was likely completed between 1916 and 1922. Cather's visit to Mancos and the Mesa Verde with Edith Lewis made a strong and lasting impression. She published an article about the Mesa in January of 1916 in the *Denver Times* titled: "Mesa Verde Wonderland is Easy to Reach/ Colorado Show Place as Authoress Sees It." This article prefigures the short story she wrote later that same year, "The Blue Mesa," which would eventually be re-titled "Tom Outland's

Story.” While the story began as a record of the Mesa Verde and the experiences of the young Wetherhills who discovered the dwelling, and who, like her protagonist Tom, kept detailed records of their findings and made an unsuccessful trip to the Smithsonian, the story would shift to a fictionalized rendition of their experience. According to Harrell, Cather conceives of inserting “Tom Outland’s Story” into a novel around 1923 when she begins writing the bordering text, which together with “Tom Outland’s Story” would comprise *The Professor’s House*, first serialized in *Collier’s* June-August 1925.<sup>46</sup> Cather’s novel presents a unique case in which the diegetic deployment of documents is both contingent upon and reflective of its method of composition.

In his “Notes” to the Oxford University Press edition of *The Shadow-Line*, Jeremy Hawthorn provocatively suggests that the narrator’s diary entries might correspond to, or be reproductions of, a diary Conrad may have kept during his first command of the *Otago*. Hawthorn cites manuscript evidence to suggest that “Conrad may have been using previously written material for the diary extracts.”<sup>47</sup> Hawthorn cites G. Jean-Aubry’s account of Conrad’s writing habits on ships. According to Aubry’s interview with the *Vidar’s* Captain Craig, in which Conrad served prior to the *Otago*, Conrad could usually be found writing in the cabin. Though it cannot be confirmed that Conrad reproduced his personal diary for *The Shadow-Line*, he was not oblivious to the potential of restating text for the purposes of fiction. The events described in

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<sup>46</sup> See Harrell, David. *From Mesa Verde to The Professor’s House* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> Hawthorn observes that: “both the diary extracts appear in the dictated part of the MS. In the first extract, the short text introducing it has been written by hand. In the second extract, the introductory text that begins ‘Here I must give another sample of it’ has been altered from ‘Here I must give sample of it’.” To Hawthorn, this evidence suggests Conrad was using a pre-existing text. See “Notes,” 113-129.

his 1890 “Congo Diary” are at their most powerful in their reiterated form in “Heart of Darkness.” *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor’s House* demonstrate Conrad’s and Cather’s great investment in the potentials of textual reiterability.

The story of *The Shadow-Line* seems straightforward enough, especially in comparison to the abrupt changes in time and place that figure so predominately in Cather’s novel. Yet the documents of *The Shadow-Line* and the confession that constitutes its whole, particularly when read alongside the more explicit structural experimentation of *The Professor’s House*, reveal that in true Conradian fashion, a document is never just a document. It is not the banal telegram, letter, or diary it merely appears to be at first glance, but constantly working with and against the frame narrative(s) in intricate and innovative ways. To dismiss the gratuitous similarities between the narrator’s reiterated diary text and the surrounding narrative as inconsequential is to mistake Conrad’s novella for a conventionally structured sea tale. Rather, the narrator’s carefully crafted confession is balanced meaningfully against the completion of his first command. While the innovativeness of *The Professor’s House* is not at issue, the potential Cather cultivated in the reiteration of text across her novel has gone virtually unnoticed as contributing to the rich ambiguity of the work and, at the same time, encoding an explanation for it in the form of “Tom Outland’s Story.”

Cather’s novel is not a rewrite or revision of *The Shadow-Line* in the conventional sense, but her deployment of documents might be described as paying tribute to Conrad. Her renegotiation of the conventional novel narrative stems from an understanding, through Conrad, that it could be done. Here, as with the previous chapter and the chapters to follow, Conrad’s invocation of documents across his

fiction—and the modernist rapprochement with his works—renders the document a recognizable form in the novel and one that carries his imaginative stamp upon it.

## Chapter 3

### Violence and the Archive: Conrad's Early Imperial Fictions and Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*

With an unusual methodicalness she tore the offending letter into tiny ragged squares that fluttered down and made a small heap in her black *crêpe de Chine* lap. The destruction completed, she gathered them up, rose, and moved to the train's end. Standing there, she dropped them over the railing and watched them scatter, on tracks, on cinders, on forlorn grass, in rills of dirty water. (47)

This scene from Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) might induce discomfort in a reader.

Even if one agrees that this "offending" letter warrants tearing, the destruction of text, especially as it occurs in a text, is disquieting. Moreover, Irene, the protagonist, fetishizes the letter's tearing. While her dispersal of the letter might be reminiscent of the scattering of ashes, suggesting a certain gravitas in her calculated tearing, the appearance of solemnity is undermined by the letter's filthy destination. The third-person narration of this episode, focalized through Irene, aestheticizes her violent act; the juxtaposition of the paper fragments with the comparably soft silk of Irene's lap is not a displeasing image. Stylistically, the use of a poetic register—the fragments "fluttered down" into her lap; their final destination is amongst "forlorn" grass and "rills" of water—forms a romanticization of the letter's regression from Irene's hands to the ground.

This evocative passage from *Passing* introduces my discussion of the works of Larsen—and Conrad—for the rather basic question it raises, which also forms the impetus for this chapter: why might the destruction of a document figure as a remarkable event? This short quotation reveals that the letter Irene receives is "offending": a detail offered as the justification for Irene's action. Yet in a chapter just over 600 words in length, that devotes one-third of its limited space to a transcription

of this letter and the remainder to a description of its destruction, Irene's elaborate response seems to gesture to more than an insulting document. In other words, the narrative space afforded to this action suggests it is not simply an element of plot. How, then, can we explain the gratuity of this description of Irene's violence?

This chapter may present something of a departure from the previous case studies. Chapters 1 and 2 established the necessity of the document first, in its role as evidence in narratives of epistemological uncertainty and second, through its reiteration across the narrative. However, my discussion of Larsen's *Passing* together with Conrad's first novel *Almayer's Folly* (1895) which was followed by *An Outcast of the Islands* a year later, focusses on the tearing, burning, and dilapidation of documents: scenes of their abandonment, abuse, and rejection. On the surface, this suggests that I consider novels that seek to cast off documents, and in some ways, this will prove to be true. But as was the case with Chapters 1 and 2, the exploration of destroyed documents is yet another manifestation of their literary necessity: the necessity of presence. The document's existence provides conditions for its destruction. As the brief excerpt from Larsen's *Passing* indicates, the presence of this letter in the narrative forms an opportunity to articulate anger at the fact of the document's material reality: an expression of dissatisfaction about what it says and what it might have said. In this case, Irene rejects the letter because its content calls into question the African American racial identity she has carefully cultivated for herself. Such moments of violence form rich sites for exploring both the document's limitations and its desirability.

As I explore Larsen's *Passing* as well as her first novel *Quicksand* (1928), I turn to Conrad's early imperial fictions. There are several compelling cases of violence

enacted on documents in *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), and also "Heart of Darkness," similarly dramatic in representation, which can provide a productive frame of reference for Larsen's invocation of documents within the American context.<sup>48</sup> The works of Conrad's early career are interested especially in documents as they are produced in or transported to the outposts of empire. Conrad was attuned to the potential of 'official' documents or state-sanctioned text to justify imperial ideology and so, as Chapter 1 argues, establishes a crucial link between documents, empire, and epistemology at the turn-of-the-century. Therefore, I suggest that the examples of textual violence across *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast*, and "Heart of Darkness" reflect Conrad's alertness to an imperial archive: the documents involved in imperial governance but also the very idea of a comprehensive field of knowledge about the colony.<sup>49</sup> In using Conrad's example as a critical frame to engage Larsen's fiction, it emerges that the destroyed documents of *Passing* and *Quicksand* similarly point to a discursive formation: what Larsen develops as an African American race archive. The crafted gratuity of destroyed documents within these novels encodes the recognition of a host of interrelated, extradiegetic texts.

Arguably, Larsen is the least likely of all the authors considered in this thesis to be addressed as Conrad's modernist collaborator. Part of the impetus for her inclusion, then, is to show that *Passing* and *Quicksand* share the textual complexities and thematic concerns of canonical modernism. More specifically, Larsen's novels reveal

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<sup>48</sup> From herein, I refer to *An Outcast of the Islands* as an abbreviated title, *An Outcast*.

<sup>49</sup> See A.M. Pursell's "'Where civilization brushes against wild mystery': 'Freya of the Seven Isles,' Empire, and the Archive" (*The Conradian* 35.1 [2010]: 1-16) for another, though different reading of Conrad's imagining of the archive. Pursell is mainly concerned with the act of memory as assemblage and collation in producing narrative (writing) and knowledge whereas my interest is in representations of material documents as gestures to a discursive formation in the Foucauldian sense.

that in the context of early twentieth-century debates over the racial equality of African Americans—debates she was invested in as a self-identified Danish-African American writer—the document might accrue a value different to Conrad’s imagined documents. This comparative reading therefore also forms an opportunity to probe how and why Larsen’s conception of and response to the archive might echo Conrad but also diverge from him in important ways.

Larsen is, of course, best known for her association with the Harlem Renaissance—the African American artistic movement or flurry of cultural activity in and around the 1920s and 30s for which Harlem was both a real and symbolic capital.<sup>50</sup> As with Cather, we know that Larsen read Conrad; however, there is little evidence available that could indicate the degree of Larsen’s interest in Conrad’s work and we can only speculate as to which books she read. According to Larsen’s biographers Thadious Davis and George Hutchinson, many aspects of her life remain shadowy.<sup>51</sup> Despite the fact that this chapter is not concerned with arguing for Conrad’s direct influence on Larsen, it does proceed from the premise that he was an important intertext for her work. A brief excursion into two interrelated aspects of Larsen’s biography can bring Conrad’s potential significance into sharp relief. The first

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<sup>50</sup> The definition I offer here is intentionally vague: it is not in the purview of this chapter to provide a definitive description of the Harlem Renaissance (itself a term that has come under intense scrutiny). See George Hutchinson’s “Introduction” to the *Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* which provides a succinct overview to the debates around the term “Harlem Renaissance” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1-10.

<sup>51</sup> Thadious M. Davis aptly titles her “Preface” to her 1994 biography of Larsen, “The Search for Nella Larsen.” She describes the difficulty in accumulating facts about Larsen’s life, particularly in the decades following the Renaissance. Larsen seemed to fade into a “figure in the shadows”(xv) and thus her book is an attempt to piece together a life out of the “limited materials and fragmentary left by Larsen herself” in addition to documents from other sources (xix). George Hutchinson’s biography, published after Davis in 2006, is titled *In Search of Nella Larsen*. He acknowledges the difficulty of constructing the life of an “invisible” woman, particularly as she published relatively little and then abruptly left literature and her eminent social circle behind.

point rests on Conrad's conceptual importance to African American artists at the turn-of-the century, including Larsen, and the second relates to Larsen's employment as a librarian.

In *Our Conrad* Peter Mallios argues that with the appearance of "Heart of Darkness" in America in 1903, there were many "racist channellings of Conrad" by white writers (190).<sup>52</sup> In taking up "Heart of Darkness" in the context of black-white race relations at the turn-of-the-century, African American authors were writing back to its racist legacy but also negotiating with Conrad's representation of Africa and Africans on their own terms—and they would do this in very different ways:

writers introduce particular subtleties of interpretation, revelation, and political agency; and overall...modern African American writers demonstrate the same expanse of diverse heterotopic response to Conrad—albeit in different terms, and through different exigencies and vocabularies of plural and polarizing elaboration—that one finds in other American economies of Conrad's contemplation. (192)

Mallios's observation of African American readings of Conrad as a source of contestation and admiration establishes the importance of Conrad to various strains of American modernism—the Harlem Renaissance being one of these. He cites Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen as two preeminent authors who exhibit disparate responses to Conrad in their works.<sup>53</sup> Larsen would certainly have been aware of the poets' citation of Conrad. She quotes a stanza from Hughes's 1926 "Cross," a poem that touches on the ambivalent status of the mulatto, for the epigraph to *Quicksand*; while the epigraph to *Passing* is an excerpt from Cullen's "Heritage," which speaks to race loyalty and responsibility. Whereas Hughes engages critically with Conrad as literary forbear in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, Cullen regarded him in terms of admiration. Cullen's 1925 collection of poems *Color* includes

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<sup>52</sup> Mallios discusses, for example, Vachel Lindsay, John Powell and Thomas Dixon.

<sup>53</sup> See Mallios 108-207.

both “Heritage” and a poem titled “For Joseph Conrad,” featured in the “Epitaphs” section. Cullen’s poem for Conrad is positioned between epitaphs for Paul Lawrence Dunbar and for Cullen himself, titled “Myself.” John Keats and the American poet Hazel Hall are the only other writers to feature in this sequence.

The significance of Conrad to writers like Hughes and Cullen reflects *the* crucial issue at the turn-of-the century: the “Negro’s” representation in art. This related to questions such as: What role had the African been assigned in art? Could a white author successfully write as an African? Larsen, too, was deeply invested in these questions and well aware of the debates. In addition to writing to Gertrude Stein to congratulate her on “Melanctha” (1909), marvelling that she, rather than “one of us should so accurately have caught the spirit of this race of mine,” Larsen defended her close friend, and white patron of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vechten’s representation of black Harlemites to the end.<sup>54</sup> While others had difficulty with the voyeuristic element of Van Vechten’s work and expressed anxiety at its title *Nigger Heaven*, Larsen did not fault him. W.E.B. Du Bois critiqued Van Vechten’s usage of “nigger” in the December 1926 issue of *Crisis*. However, he excused Conrad’s evocation of the word in *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*: “‘Nigger’ is an English word of wide use and definite connotation. As employed by Conrad, Sheldon, Allen, and even Firbanks its use was justifiable. But the phrase, ‘Nigger Heaven,’ as applied to Harlem is a misnomer.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Letter to Stein, Feb 1 1928 in Gertrude Stein Correspondence, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>55</sup> Du Bois continues: “‘Nigger Heaven’ does not mean, as Van Vechten once or twice intimates, a haven for Negroes—a city of refuge for dark and tried souls; it means in common parlance, a nasty, sordid corner into which black folk are herded, and yet a place which they in crass ignorance are fools enough to enjoy. Harlem is no such place as that, and no one knows this

Tellingly, Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* was first published in America in 1897 under the title *The Children of the Sea: A Tale of the Forecastle*. Conrad was loath to change the title but ultimately agreed, writing: "The argument was that the American public would not read a book about a 'nigger'."<sup>56</sup> There is reason to believe that Larsen read this book as her close friends Dorothy Peterson and Grace Nail Johnson, who regularly exchanged books with one another, extolled its virtues. *The Nigger* was also included in the bibliography of Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925)—the bible of the Harlem Renaissance—under the section "The Negro in Literature." "Heart of Darkness" was notably omitted from this list.

As she was working on what would become *Quicksand*, Larsen was asked to intervene in the controversy around another novel, Walter White's *Flight* (1926). Though the nature of the quarrel was not related to representations of race, Conrad's name was invoked in White's defence. Larsen attacked Frank Horne's negative review of *Flight* in *Opportunity* magazine on the basis that he was not aware of modern trends in fiction, and thus he was ignorant to what White's novel was trying to achieve. As to the specific charge that White was "awkward," Larsen replied: "these sins escaped me . . . Even the opening sentence, so particularly cited, still seems to be all right. But then, I have been recently reading . . . Conrad, Proust, and Thomas Mann. Naturally these things would not irritate me as they would an admirer of Louis Hemon and Mrs. Wharton" (qtd. in Hutchinson 207-8). It is impossible to know exactly which Conrad work Larsen refers to here, but she evokes Conrad as authoritative, as a justification for her praise of White's modern work. Significantly, Larsen wrote this

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better than Carl Van Vechten." See Du Bois, "Van Vechten's 'Nigger Heaven'" in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings*, Ed. Nathan Huggins, 1986. 1216-1218.

<sup>56</sup> Conrad inscribed this comment on a 1897 copy in the Ashley Library. The original title was used in the 1899 printing. See Smith, *Bibliographical Catalogue*, 8.

review for White in August, 1926 when she was at the midpoint of what would become *Quicksand*. She was thinking about Conrad and other notable modernists as she attempted to write her first novel.

The little we know of Larsen's reading interests together with her peers' documented responses to Conrad indicate that he was very much part of her literary sphere. As a modern, non-African writer who endeavoured to present Africa and Africans in his fiction—like Van Vechten—Conrad was relevant to Harlem Renaissance writers who were alert to representations of Africans in art by black and non-black artists alike. Whether they admired or disdained Conrad's representations of Africans, he was there to be read and grappled with. Larsen was deeply sympathetic to the issues of race injustice that mobilized the Renaissance and the subject of racial inequality consumes her fiction, as my discussion of *Passing* and *Quicksand* will demonstrate. Closely related to, and overlapping with, Larsen's artistic and social investment in Conrad is her professional knowledge of him. Larsen likely encountered Conrad's fiction during her formal training to become a librarian. Moreover, we can speculate that her recognition of documents and documenting practices as such, emerged from or were emphasized by this environment. As a librarian, Larsen's duties would have included retrieving, sorting, and collating texts.

After Larsen married, she moved to Harlem where she met prominent literary people like Grace Nail Johnson and James Weldon Johnson. It is likely that through these associations Larsen decided to join the 135<sup>th</sup> Street Branch of the New York Public Library (Hutchinson 133). Through attending various readings and events there, she befriended major authors of the Renaissance including Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, and Walter White. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is here that Larsen

eventually quit her current job as a nurse and decided to pursue a life in literature. Larsen became a library assistant in 1921 and a year later she applied to the Library School of the New York Public Library (which had not yet offered certification to African Americans) to gain accreditation as a full librarian. Records of Larsen's library education provide some indication of her literary knowledge and reading at this time. Both Thadious Davis and George Hutchinson argue that Larsen's library training influenced her next career as a novelist and, as I suggest here, provides insight into the deployment of documents across her fiction.

In making an application to the School, Larsen was asked to list ten books she read in the previous two years. Larsen included Mencken's *Prejudices 1 and 2*—in which she would have encountered Mencken's adulatory descriptions of Conrad's work—in addition to Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*; Max Beerbohm's *And Even Now*; Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria*; and W.E.B. Du Bois's *Darkwater* amongst others (Hutchinson 141). Once admitted to the program, Larsen was required to take a course in "Book Selection," which included seminars on "current fiction and poetry, as well as literature in foreign languages" (147). Larsen would have had to write an exam that covered history, literature, and translation. Her preparation for the questions on the literature section seems indicative of the particular concerns that would manifest later in her own writing. Larsen had to answer five of seven questions that included:

- Discuss the differences between the poetry of the present time and that of the Victorian period, illustrating your points by some specific titles;
- Characterize in from two hundred to three hundred words the work of one of the following authors: John Galsworthy, Henry James, George Meredith, Anthony Trollope;
- Name some measures of social reform which have been furthered by works of fiction, and the novels which have had a part in them. (Davis 146)

This last question seems especially relevant to this discussion of Conrad and Larsen. We might speculate what it meant for Larsen to evaluate literature based on its socio-political impact. Did she consider what possible intervention her fiction could make in the context of the racial oppression of African Americans? Did she write with the potential for social reform in mind? As I will demonstrate, Larsen's fiction forms an incisive response to the role of the document in American race hostilities. One also wonders, however, if Larsen was aware of the example of "Heart of Darkness." Conrad's novella brought public attention to the atrocities committed in the Congo nearly a decade before the founding of the Congo Reform Association. E. D. Morel, co-founder of the Association, called "Heart of Darkness" the "most powerful thing ever written on the subject" of the Belgian Congo (qtd. in Simmons 115). In this respect, "Heart of Darkness" can be seen as a historical document to colonial injustice, counter to the imperial archive that sought to justify and thereby prolong imperial rule.

Before addressing the concept of the archive as Conrad and Larsen imagine it, I first consider how it is that we can read the destroyed documents of the novel as more than extravagancies of plot. In other words, how does the relatively simple, but emphatic, act of tearing paper become an allusion to the imperial archive and African American race archive, respectively? The first step, I argue, is to consider the function of Conrad's and Larsen's gratuitous scenes of violence enacted on documents at the diegetic level of their narratives. In the case of *An Outcast of the Islands* and *Passing*, documents become the bodily extensions of their authors. The scene of Irene's destruction of Clare's letter, quoted in the introduction to this chapter, foreshadows Clare's death just as the tearing of Willems's letter in *An Outcast* seems to anticipate his death. In establishing this contiguity between documents and bodies, Conrad and

Larsen are able to build a degree of suspense into their narratives. Moreover, as the narrative voice of each novel yields to these scenes of destruction in the form of abrupt shifts into fragmentary sentences and ellipses, violence forms the impetus for stylistic variation. In these capacities, the dramatization of destroyed documents in *An Outcast* and *Passing* can be recognized as a narrative technique, recalling *The Professor's House* and *The Shadow-Line* as they exploited the document's potential for reiteration to a formal end. Thus thematized, violence emerges as the link between the diegetic and extra-diegetic, or archival, functions of these documents.

### **Destroyed Documents/ Dead Bodies**

*Passing* tells the story of Irene, an African American woman in 1920s New York, who finds herself a victim of the race politics of the period which, in their various permutations, threaten to throw her marriage, friendships, and carefully constructed identity into chaos. The reappearance of Irene's friend Clare, an African American woman who 'passes' as white, forms both the cause and the catalyst for Irene's internalized struggle with race. *An Outcast of the Islands*, a drama of colonial enterprise in the Malay, and the second installment of the 'Malay trilogy,' is concerned particularly with Captain Lingard's rogue protégé Willems as he becomes embroiled in several intrigues including an interracial relationship.<sup>57</sup> Willems eventually reveals Lingard's trade secret to mercantile competitors to protect himself. Despite the dramatic differences in context, Irene and Lingard find themselves in a similar predicament. They receive what should be conciliatory but are, in fact,

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<sup>57</sup> The third novel in the trilogy is the *Rescue*. Although Conrad began to write it in 1896, he did not complete it until 1920.

provocative letters from their offenders. Neither Irene nor Lingard reply in kind; that is, they do not produce further documents as responses. Clare and Willems's letters are answered by acts of violence. Insofar as each novel narrates the tearing apart of these documents, violence, too, becomes something we might read.

Irene's disturbing encounter with Clare's husband is the explicit justification for her violence. Irene discovers that Clare is married to a white man, John Bellew, who has no notion that she is black—her secret protected by the fair skin of their daughter. Irene learns that Clare permits her husband to address her as “Nig” (39). While the nickname is intended to be affectionate, it is a symptom of his bitter racism against African Americans. To Irene's direct question: “So you dislike Negroes, Mr. Bellew?” he replies: “I don't dislike them, I hate them. And so does Nig...She wouldn't have a nigger maid around her for love nor money. Not that I'd want her to. They give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils” (40). Irene is forced to pass herself and endure Bellew's insults to protect Clare's secret. The letter Irene receives from Clare the following morning seeks justification for her irresponsible invitation to Irene. As indicated by the passage that introduces this chapter, Irene is not pacified and destroys the letter. Clare sends another letter that is similarly consigned to oblivion: “tearing the letter across, she . . . flung it into the scrap-basket” (62). To Irene, these acts of violence represent both the literal end of the letters, and the termination of her relationship with Clare: “And that, she told herself, was that.” (47).

Irene proposes the destruction of Clare's letters as analogous to Clare's effacement from her life. To the degree that both Clare and Willems's documents are of an epistolary nature—that is, the “I” of the writing voice figures prominently—we might acknowledge that the notes are, to some degree, already poised as extensions

of the self. In *Passing*, the contiguity of the body and the document is enhanced further by the language Irene employs to describe Clare's letters. There is "something mysterious and slightly furtive about" Clare's letter; "furtive, but yet in some peculiar, determined way a little flaunting" (9). On her first encounter with Clare in Chicago, Irene observes: "She sat with an air of indifferent assurance, as if arranged for, desired. About her hung that dim suggestion of polite insolence" (28). Irene detects arrogance in both Clare's physical gestures and her choice of stationery. Irene adopts the same descriptive register to read Clare's body and her letters.

Deborah E. McDowell attributes the connection between Clare's letters and her body to Larsen's subversive sexual content. For McDowell, the opening to *Passing* establishes its surreptitious homosexual theme: "significantly, the novel's opening image is an envelope (a metaphoric vagina) that Irene hesitates to open, fearing its 'contents would reveal' an 'attitude toward danger'" (90). While Judith Butler's argument for the interrelationship between normative sexuality and whiteness in *Passing* does not recognize the sexual symbolism of the letters as such, the problem of reading bodies that she identifies across Larsen's narrative offers another approach to the consubstantiality of the body and document. Butler argues that "blackness is not primarily a visual mark in Larsen's story" but is rather a "matter of being able to read a marked body in relation to unmarked bodies, where unmarked bodies constitute the currency of normative whiteness" (170). Butler continues, "the sign of blackness is contracted, as it were, through proximity, where 'race' itself is figured as a contagion transmissible through proximity" (171). The novel also suggests that, like blackness, racial shame and illicit desire can be contracted through proximity. Irene's destruction of Clare's letters precludes the possibility of her identification with Clare. Whether the

letters embody Irene's illicit desire for Clare, represent the failure of the heteronormative version of race uplift, or, perhaps, indicate Irene's conflicting feelings about her responsibility to the race, so long as there is no proximate external source to corroborate these thoughts, Irene's deep rooted anxieties and fears over her sexual and racial identities can remain submerged.

Inflicting violence on Clare's documents is not sufficient, however, to remove Clare from Irene's life altogether. Death, according to Irene, is the only option. At the height of her frenetic suspicions of Clare's affair with her husband Brian, the narrator describes Irene contemplating the possibility of life without Clare: "If Clare should die! Then—Oh, it was vile! To think, yes, to wish that! She felt faint and sick. But the thought stayed with her. She could not get rid of it" (101). In this respect, we can read the destruction of Clare's letters both as anticipating her death and as an index of Irene's role in the event. *Passing* concludes with a description of Clare as she falls to her death from an apartment window. It is unclear if Clare jumps willingly once the truth of her race is disclosed, or if her confounded husband is responsible. The most provocative of these possibilities, which a lack of narrative detail renders impossible to confirm or deny, is that Irene pushes Clare. Irene expresses relief when Clare falls: "Irene wasn't sorry. She was amazed, incredulous almost" (111). She begins to panic when she thinks that Clare might not die instantaneously and will live to accuse her of attempted murder, but also Irene "felt nauseated, as much at the idea of the glorious body mutilated..." (113). Irene fears that Clare's body might resemble the letter destroyed at her hands.

In Conrad, the narrator's description of Lingard as he receives a letter from Willems recalls Irene's dramatic response to Clare's letter—but there is an important variation:

During his four days of seclusion he had received two messages from the outer world . . . One, a few words from Willems written on a torn-out page of a small notebook; the other, a communication from Abdulla caligraphed carefully on a large sheet of flimsy paper and delivered to him in a green silk wrapper. The first he could not understand. It said: "Come and see me. I am not afraid. Are you? W." He tore it up angrily, but before the small bits of dirty paper had the time to flutter down and settle on the floor, the anger was gone and replaced by a sentiment that induced him to go on his knees, pick up the fragments of the torn message, piece it together on the top of his chronometer box, and contemplate it long and thoughtfully, as if he had hoped to read the answer of the horrible riddle in the very form of the letters that went to make up that fresh insult. (203)

Like Clare, Willems is a physical nuisance and a source of mental distress. Lingard receives the young runaway, teaches him the trade, and then secures him a job with Hudig, the famous merchant of Macassar. Willems, who makes an appalling combination of vanity and greed, abuses the contacts Lingard provides. Moreover, he divulges Lingard's trade secret to the Arabs, dashing both Lingard's and his adopted son-in-law Almayer's plans for the future. After Lingard arrives in Sambir to, yet again, rescue Willems, Lingard treats Willems's incendiary note with bitterness. Like Irene, Lingard has been betrayed. Yet Lingard is "induced" to collect the fragments of the text he just destroyed. His attempt to extract some kind of meaning from the reassembled message—better still, an apology—is made in vain. Importantly, it is the uncertainty that characterizes Lingard's behaviour here that dictates the terms of his physical interaction with Willems later, suggesting that, like Clare, Willems's body may be read as contiguous with his note. Lingard's more determined mutilation of Abdulla's letter renders the link between the document and the body explicit. Lingard "rammed" Abdulla's letter "into his pocket, also with anger" (204). He "crumpled it up

slowly, smiling the while and closing his fingers firmly over the crackling paper as though he had hold there of Abdulla's throat" (210).

The tension in the days between Lingard's receipt of Willems's note and his final rapprochement with him are palpable: "the silent world seemed to be waiting breathlessly for that justice he held in his hand—in his strong hand:—ready to strike—reluctant to move" (224). Again, Lingard is described as indecisive. He is on the verge of violence, but lacks resolve. When they finally meet, Lingard waits on words of apology or justification, but only receives from Willems boasts and silence in turns. With the very same hands that tore the offending note and then pieced it together, the same hands that the narrator describes as strong but reluctant, Lingard attacks Willems. For Lingard, the battle must ensue with hands: "Naked hands, by heaven!" (259). While Lingard's singular insistence on the absence of weapons indicates that he does not intend to kill Willems, it also forges a connection between Lingard's treatment of Willems's document and his body: both come under the force of Lingard's hands. Similarly, Irene destroys Clare's letter with her bare hands, and it is the "hand" she lays on Clare's arm that may catapult Clare to her death (111).

Following an arc of acute and then dissipated emotion, Lingard's instantaneous violence again rapidly cedes to physical composure. At this point, the narrative, focalized through Lingard, devolves into ellipses. The text succumbs to the physical violence of the beating and the encounter is told piecemeal: "His throat...Ah! the thing like a snake's head that darts up and down...He squeezed hard . . . Strong white teeth. Knock them down his lying throat..." (260). We are limited to Lingard's narrow field of vision: his fury and the physical exertions of his body present obstacles to his ability to perceive the world around him. The narrative only returns to its stable third-person

narration when the beating is cut short by Willems's lover, Aïssa. In a passage that echoes the path Lingard's emotions take as he reads Willems's note, the narrator explains: "the anger of his outraged pride, the anger of his outraged heart, had gone out in the blow; and there remained nothing but the sense of some immense infamy" (265). This passage ends with Lingard's observation of Willems's insubstantiality. He thinks he sees a "floating and unsteady mist in human shape" (265). Recalling the small fragments of Willems's note that are just as liable to scatter to the winds, he wonders: "would it blow away before the first breath of the breeze and leave nothing behind?" (265). In a now characteristic state of ambivalence, Lingard uses his hands neither to kill Willems nor rescue him. Aïssa's fatal shot decides Willems's fate.

The violence of Clare's death scene exerts a similar influence on the language of *Passing*. The ambiguity around Clare's death forms a compelling example of a modernist exploration of the limits of narration. Focalized through Irene, there is only so much that the narrator can divulge. At the precise moment of Irene's contact with Clare, the narrator states: "What happened next, Irene Redfield never afterwards allowed herself to remember. Never clearly" (111). The narrator represents Irene's quickened thoughts as a sequence of clipped sentences and exclamations. Irene's incantatory "Gone!" precedes a series of contradictory descriptions of Clare, bordering on desirability and disgust. However, as Irene does not admit to pushing Clare, the narrator cannot indict her. Irene's willed ignorance precludes the possibility of readers learning decisively if she did, in fact, apply enough pressure to Clare's arm to cause her to fall. The effect of this inconclusiveness is to imbue Irene's tearing of Clare's letters with the significance of forewarning of Clare's death—at the very hands of Irene.

The consubstantiality of the body and document in *Passing* and *An Outcast* does not only form a provocative metaphor, but also an opportunity to generate suspense and explore violence as a source of stylistic variation. Moreover, this relationship underscores the very materiality of documents, which, as these novels suggest, bear heavy presences. Without minimizing the effects of Conrad's and Larsen's diegetic formulations, we can probe further the descriptive emphasis placed on destroyed documents. The most instructive and fascinating point of Conrad and Larsen's literary intersection occurs at the extradiegetic level: dramatic scenes of violence enacted on documents reveal the existence of an imperial archive and an African American race archive, respectively. In order to demonstrate the ways in which Larsen revises Conrad's imperial contexts to explore the highly problematic role of the document in both determining and contributing to the divided race consciousness of early twentieth-century America—revealing her penetrating social insight and, at the same time, enlarging upon extant formulations of the African American archive—I explore here a series of scenes of violence enacted on documents across Conrad's early works.

## The Archive

As Conrad and Larsen develop the concept of the archive in their fiction, it is not a set of documents from the past that is later deemed to be culturally relevant, stored in a public building for the purpose of consultation by researchers, and regulated carefully by the institution that manages it.<sup>58</sup> Rather, what I describe as their gesturing to an

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<sup>58</sup> The idea of a space dedicated to housing documents and retaining the memory of a colonial past is important to Jacques Derrida's reading of the archive in *Archive Fever*, though he also pays attention to what this archive means as metaphor and social imaginary (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). See also the essays collected in *Refiguring the Archive*, which take mainly a Derridean approach. Though Ann Laura Stoler adopts Foucault's theory of the archive

archive more closely and presciently resembles Foucault's theorization of the archive as epistemological practice:

The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities . . . (145-6)

In this passage, Foucault describes the archive as a set of statements emerging with and governed by the law of the archive. The law or condition of the archive can be explained as "the system of its enunciability" (146). The system of the archive's enunciability, also "the system of its functioning," defines its "mode of occurrence" and "embodies it," such that, as Foucault describes above, these statements can be grouped (146). The always already established system of the archive's enunciability defines "a field in which formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges may be deployed" (143). In sum, "the archive defines a particular level: that of a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be with and manipulated" (146). Thus in addition to a set of texts physically preserved in an institutional setting, the archive can be conceived of as a dynamic site, capable of manipulation and transformation as the rules of this "limited space of communication" might change (142).

To describe Conrad's and Larsen's treatment of the archive as Foucauldian is therefore to register the archive as process. This does not imply, however, that the colonial archive of the Dutch East Indies as a collection of public documents is

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for her reading of the Dutch national archive, she does spend time describing her methodology which includes the experience of working in an institutional space.

irrelevant to *Almayer's Folly* or *An Outcast of the Islands*. Ann Laura Stoler's study of the Dutch national archive in *Along the Archival Grain*, to which I will return, and Achille Mbembe's reading of the consequences of the archive as a physical space and structure represent significant approaches to the material ways an archive might be engaged.<sup>59</sup>

However, as Conrad's and Larsen's destroyed documents are illustrative of archives in formation rather than those institutionalized and now part of the public domain, the critical emphasis falls on the development of the archive, or the determination of its discursive practice. According to Foucault, the analysis of the archive is only possible as it is "at once close to us, and different from our present existence" which is to say, we can only recognize it when we inhabit another discursive formation. Its "otherness . . . is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us" (147). Thus, crucially, it is Conrad's and Larsen's dramatization of the attempt to destroy the trace of the document—the threat to the reproduction of its discourse—that renders the archive, or the law of what can be said, visible. The disruptive force of material violence forms the discontinuity necessary to delineate the archive as a discursive process other to, in this case, the novel.

Conrad's presentation of *Almayer's Folly* as more than the material of personal experience is imperative to gauging the discursive level(s) at which documents operate. Conrad's trips to east Borneo in 1887 as a seaman, like his later journey to the Congo, made an indelible mark on his fiction. Almayer, Lingard, Willems, and the cast of characters of the Malay novels are related to a discernible set of Conrad's

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<sup>59</sup> See Mbembe's "The Power of the Archive and its Limits" in *Refiguring the Archive*. He considers both the physical space of the institution, or the materiality of the archive, and the ways in which it resonates as "an institutionary imaginary" (19).

experiences. However, Conrad uses his “Author’s Note” to *Almayer’s Folly* to suggest that this novel should be read in the context of European colonialism. Conrad takes issue with the essay “Decivilized” by the English writer Alice Meynell, published in 1891, which, according to Conrad, argues that the literature “which preys on strange people and prowls in far-off countries . . . amongst cannibals and the more sophisticated pioneers of our glorious virtues” produces tales that are “decivilized” (“Author’s Note” vii). According to Meynell’s definition, Conrad, too, must be guilty of writing inferior literature. However, he exculpates himself from Meynell’s charge by making the crucial claim that there is a “bond between us and that humanity so far away” (viii). He frames this notion as an artistic imperative: “the picture of life, there as here, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints” (vii). In *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad’s Malay Fiction*, Robert Hampson argues that Conrad not only cites Meynell’s essay to announce his novel as a departure from the adventure fiction tradition, but also to suggest it will identify with the colonial subject (113). In this, his first formal piece of literary criticism, Conrad takes an opportunity to deliver a polemic that will feature often in his fiction: the irreconcilability of multiple and competing systems of belief.<sup>60</sup>

Conrad explains that he only began to write his second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*, when his reader Edward Garnett suggested “why not write another?” (“Author’s Note” *OI* viii). However, as Hans van Marle points out, the writing of *An Outcast of the Islands*, then titled “Two Vagabonds,” was already well under

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<sup>60</sup> Though written in 1895, the ‘Author’s Note’ was not included in the 1895 publication of *Almayer’s Folly*; it first appeared in the 1921 Doubleday, Page ‘Sun-Dial’ edition.

way.<sup>61</sup> *An Outcast* does not present just an opportunity for Conrad to develop the histories of a cast of characters he found compelling or to enlarge upon the economic rivalries of his imagined “Sambir”; it also allows him to pursue the themes of *Almayer’s Folly* further. Conrad’s interest in the unequal distribution of power between races persists alongside his invocation of documents. *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast* are noteworthy for their anticipation of the critique of the language of documents in “Heart of Darkness” as discussed in Chapter 1.

Jacques Berthoud’s account of the title character of *Almayer’s Folly* rehearses the novel’s investment in depicting a colonial situation. Almayer is a representative figure; he belongs to that “class of petty-bourgeois colonials who hold power over a native population for purely contingent reasons, and who therefore exhibit all the symptoms of unearned self-esteem” (xxx–xxxi). Of Dutch origin, Almayer resides in Sambir with his Malay wife whom he marries as a favour to Lingard. Almayer is aggrieved daily by his inferior marriage, but Lingard’s promise of riches is persuasive. He is beholden to the notion that when Lingard strikes gold, he will be recompensed appropriately. With his new wealth, Almayer can move to Europe with his mixed-race daughter where he believes she will be accepted unreservedly as a member of that superior race to which he proudly belongs. In seeming corroboration of Berthoud’s interpretation of Almayer, Conrad writes to his aunt: “What bothers me most is that my characters are so true. I know them so well that they shackle the imagination” (CL 1:171). Though there are historical precedents for Almayer, Lingard, and Willems, Conrad might also describe his characters as “true” insofar as they are expressions of colonial types. As Norman

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<sup>61</sup> See “Notes” in *An Outcast of the Islands*, Ed. J.H. Stape. See also Conrad’s letter to his aunt Marguerite Poradowska in which he describes his continuation of the Malay theme as unavoidable: “You see how Malays cling to me! I am devoted to Borneo” (CL 1:171).

Sherry's research indicates, while there are strong parallels between Conrad's characters and the men he came into contact with or heard of in the Dutch East Borneo, this is not a case of exact biography.<sup>62</sup> Conrad's claim that he knows "them so well" seems to be less a pretention to historical accuracy than an estimation of his ability to capture a particular sensibility he had observed.

As Conrad's "Author's Note" makes explicit, *Almayer's Folly* is an intervention in traditional representations of racial and cultural difference vis-à-vis European colonialism and so the documents we find in Sambir or Macassar might also be interpolated into the broader historical-political context of the novel. Insofar as Almayer and Willems are colonial traders, their documents also become colonial documents. The documents of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* are not merely represented as the personal possessions of Almayer or Willems or tied to particular events in the plot, but they can be recognized as dramatizations of and responses to an imperial archive in formation. As I will show, Larsen makes similar allusions to contemporary race discussions indicating that her works, and the documents she invokes, can be situated firmly within the debates of the period. Therefore, in addition to the diegetic formulation of the consubstantiality of the body and the document across Conrad's and Larsen's works, the potential extradiegetic, archival, functions of their interpolated texts invite consideration.

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<sup>62</sup> See Norman Sherry's *Conrad's Eastern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) for his significant historical research into the circumstances and sources of Conrad's Malay fiction.

## Almayer's Blank Ledgers: The Failed Archive

Written after the publication of *Almayer's Folly* but figured as its prequel, *An Outcast of the Islands* introduces Lingard's fantasy of gold. His pursuit of the Malay Eldorado, which is unsuccessful, produces dire consequences. In *Almayer's Folly* we learn that Lingard exhausts his financial resources in other expeditions, returns to Europe, and is never heard from again. With the growing realization of his poverty, Almayer recruits the Balinese prince Dain Maroola into his scheme for gold: Almayer's last chance to accumulate enough wealth to relocate to Europe with his mixed-race daughter. Meanwhile, an illicit relationship develops between Dain and Nina. Almayer discovers their plot to escape Sambir together and attempts to dissuade Nina from marrying Dain, who according to Almayer, is her racial inferior. However, Nina is insistent. In the very depths of despair—without his beloved daughter, no prospects for trade, and duped by his Malay wife—the narrator describes Almayer as he hesitates before the door to the office of “Lingard and Co” (198).

Before considering in detail this incredible scene of Almayer's approach to the office—and the documents it houses—it is worth turning to *An Outcast* as it represents an earlier version of Almayer's relationship to this fraught space. The approximate fifteen years between the first and second descriptions of the office represent Almayer's growing degradation and cynicism. With his marriage to Lingard's adopted daughter, Almayer receives the gift of a house and an office. The office Lingard arranges for Almayer includes a “desk, a revolving chair, bookshelves, a safe: all to humour the weakness of Almayer, who thought all those paraphernalia necessary to successful trading” (OI 299). The narrator describes the spectacle in Sambir when the office was first being furnished:

It had been the sensation of Sambir some five years ago. While the things were being landed, the whole settlement literally lived on the river bank in front of the Rajah Laut's house, to look, to wonder, to admire . . . What a big meza, with many boxes fitted all over it and under it! What did the white man do with such a table? And look, look, O Brothers!...See! There is a man carrying a pile of books from the boat! What a number of books. What were they for? . . . And an old invalided jurumudi, who had travelled over many seas and had heard holy men speak in far-off countries, explained to a small knot of unsophisticated citizens of Sambir that those books were books of magic—of magic that guides the white men's ships over the seas, that gives them their wicked wisdom and their strength . . . (299-300)

As the narrative slips into free indirect discourse in this section, it gives a dramatization of what Almayer believes the native community is thinking. When the narration returns to the third-person, we learn the *jurumudi*, or Malay helmsman, having had some experience with the trappings of European civilization, cannot be induced to join that group of seeming worshippers, who, to Almayer's mind, are capable only of responding with reverence to the unfamiliar. Hampson elaborates that even if the *jurumudi's* explanation of the books is crude, "any idea of extradiegetic collusion between narrator and reader in a sense of cultural superiority . . . is immediately undermined, since Almayer's own ideas about the furniture are shown to be no less primitive" (104). Approximately five years following this event, the foolishness of Almayer's investment in these objects is made evident: "he found out very soon that trade in Sambir meant something entirely different. He could not guide Patalolo, control the irrepressible old Sahamin, or restrain the youthful vagaries of the fierce Bahassoen with pen, ink, and paper" (300).

With the abject failure of Almayer's trade, the office of "Lingard and Co" is neglected, its door locked until we reencounter it in *Almayer's Folly*. Almayer returns from his journey to formally disinherit his daughter, and his next definitive action is to enter the office for what will be the last time in his life. In this scene, one of the most

remarkable and charged in *Almayer's Folly*, he discovers that the office's costly and carefully procured materials are in complete disarray:

Books open with torn pages bestrewed the floor; other books lay about grimy and black, looking as if they had never been opened. Account books. In those books he had intended to keep day by day a record of his rising fortunes. Long time ago. A very long time. For many years there has been no record to keep on the blue and red ruled pages! In the middle of the room the big office desk, with one of its legs broken, careened over like the hull of a stranded ship; most of the drawers had fallen out, disclosing heaps of paper yellow with age and dirt. The revolving office chair stood in its place, but he found the pivot set fast when he tried to turn it. No matter. He desisted, and his eyes wandered slowly from object to object...The desk, the paper, the torn books, and the broken shelves, all under a thick coat of dust. (199)

While it is reasonable to expect the books and papers housed in the office might pass into a state of desuetude, the level of destruction appears gratuitous. This “thick coat of dust,” like a shroud over these ruined objects, indicates that the room has been untouched for years, yet its chaotic state simultaneously suggests that it has been the site of a deliberate attack. In *An Outcast*, Willems's estranged wife disturbs the office when she transforms it into a temporary home for herself and her young child; however, there is no evidence to suggest that she is singularly responsible for the extent of its damage. Rather, we might read its exaggerated ruin as a commentary on the colony's inhospitableness to these artefacts of Western methodology and epistemology. Sambir silently enacts violence on these so-called trappings of civilization.

Almayer is induced to commit further violence, destroying the traces of “Lingard and Co” altogether. In the moments between Almayer's entrance into the office and his arson, Conrad's conception of the imperial archive comes into view. Almayer's lament for his virgin documents—“for many years there has been no record to keep on the blue and red ruled pages!”—makes manifest the link between his personal catastrophe and the unsuccessful colonial venture. Eastern Eldorados and trade

monopolies are fantasies the documents exist to corroborate; they are imported to the colonies to serve this purpose. Crucially, however, these documents indicate that these dreams of economic success are not born with the characters Lingard, Almayer, or Willems. The “Account books” pre-exist the narrative and have a predetermined function. As Foucault might argue, the account books emerge within and are governed by an already established discursive formation that aligns documents with successful colonial enterprise. In citing account books—and we might note the dramatic effect of “Account books” as a two-word sentence—Conrad alludes to an archive. He is able to make a claim for the necessity of documents to Almayer, but simultaneously to all colonials in all outposts of empire. Simply put, if documents are not produced, the colony has not been exploited sufficiently. Almayer decisively splinters the chair and drawers and collects them in a heap along with scattered papers and books. The only function Almayer can discern for these objects now is kindling. He then locks the door behind him and flings away the key. The office catches fire and destroys the house, leaving not a trace of Almayer’s compound behind.

In *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, Thomas Richards argues that the British Empire is characterized by the way in which colonization occurs through “the mediated instrumentality of information” and this is evidenced by the late nineteenth-century “obsession with gathering and ordering information” (23, 9). More to the point, there was a belief in the possibility of comprehensive knowledge of the colonies (11). In “Heart of Darkness,” for example, trade fills in the “blank space” on the map that was the Congo of Marlow’s youth with “rivers and lakes and names” (52). Ann Laura Stoler’s work on the Dutch colonial archive, particularly relevant to this discussion of *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast*, rehearses Richards’ point in her

allusion to the “kilometres” of documents contained in the archives, indicative of the remarkable “pace of its own production” (2,35). Like the British Empire, the colonial administration of the Netherlands Indies relied on documents and documenting practices to demonstrate both the effectiveness of their management and maintain authority. For this reason, Stoler regards the literal archives as “condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources . . . [the] colonial archives were both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves” (20). Even this brief description of Stoler’s reading of the archive in order to understand the archival *process* reveals the singular importance of Almayer’s blank documents. If, as Stoler contends, the archive is rich enough to be read as “a corpus of writing” (22)—that is, she detects “fixed formats” (23), “repeated incantations, formulae, and frames” (35), and suggests that there are sufficient examples of “marginalia” and “footnotes to official reports” to serve as a field of enquiry in itself (40)—what place can Almayer’s blank documents occupy in Stoler’s formulation?

Almayer, in fact, makes no direct contribution to the archive. Rather than leave the traces of his ineptitude behind, he commits his blank texts to oblivion. The violence enacted on these failed documents illustrates the threat to the archive’s reproduction. Almayer is a colonial failure insofar as he does not ensure the archive’s continuity. Following the arson, he moves directly into “Almayer’s Folly,” the grand house he built to receive the celebrated English guests that, of course, never arrive. The blank document forms an analogue to the empty rooms of Almayer’s half-finished house. He retires to a dark room in the house, develops an opium habit, and eventually dies. Thus the burning of the decayed documents forms a funeral pyre to

both himself and the colonial dream, for Almayer cannot continue to live once the dream is dead. Moreover, the presence of these imported European texts is neither enough to legitimize his presence in Sambir nor support his claim to racial superiority. In a final blow to his ego, Almayer's life in Sambir produces no record whatsoever. Unlike Willems who has a gravestone inscribed with his name to mark his albeit short residence, a parting gift from Lingard, there is no white man left to document Almayer's life in the colony—other than Conrad.

If, according to Stoler, hurried, “uncensored turns of phrase, loud asides in the imperative tense, [and] hesitant asides in sotto voce” register particular forms of confusion and uncertainty in opposition to the standard, unemotional tone of official documents—Kurtz's “Exterminate all the brutes!” addendum forms an example of this—then blankness, moreover the annihilation of the blank document, reveals the deepest doubts (23). The failure to produce documents threatens the epistemological certainty that the imperial archive instantiates through its perpetuation.

### **“...he wrote, he wrote”: the Archive in “Heart of Darkness”**

If violent iterations of blank documents represent colonial failures in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast*, then “Heart of Darkness” tells the story of a roaring success. In other words, it represents the continuity of the colonial archive, replete with the colonial anxiety that Stoler detects in the quickened pace of its production. On reaching the Company's station, the first white man Marlow speaks to is the Company's chief accountant. He is an emblem of the Company's successful ivory trade. “Perching on a high stool” at his desk in his purpose-built office, “he wrote, he wrote” (69). Unlike Almayer, the accountant does not seek work: there is too much of it. Neither

conversation nor the groans of a dying man only a few feet away can distract him entirely from writing entries in his books. His dialogue with Marlow focusses ironically on his desire for silence: to “guard against clerical errors” (69). Invalid agents and “those savages” present a continual threat to his “correct entries” (70). A life of ceaseless entries in interminable books seems just the destiny Almayer hoped would be his.

Documents are plentiful in the Congo: they are received from Europe, despatched to Europe, and circulated between the Company’s stations. They are treated with care: monitored cautiously, intercepted, sometimes examined slyly, but never absolutely destroyed. The competing vanities of various agents cause them to meddle with documents as they try to secure superior positions within the administration, but according to Marlow’s narrative, not one of them attempts to mutilate these documents. In fact, it is only Marlow who enacts violence on the page, a character that would seem to have the least motivation to involve himself with the Company’s official documents.

As Chapter 1 suggests, the documents of “Heart of Darkness” disclose a disjunction between how the imperial mission conceives itself in print and the day-to-day practice of its agents. Marlow must negotiate endlessly between the documents he encounters and what he sees for himself, which, in turn, generates deep ambiguities across the narrative. Yet despite Marlow’s mistrust of the written word, he does not abandon Kurtz’s pamphlet. When Kurtz entrusts his pamphlet to Marlow, it is understood he is imparting his legacy: “it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career” (118). But Marlow does not preserve Kurtz’s pamphlet

exactly as he received it: he tears the infamous postscript—“Exterminate all the brutes!”—from the page before offering it to the journalist.

The act of violence, the tearing, is not narrated. Since Marlow’s account is retrospective, it cannot be narrated as it occurs, but its description as a past event is nonetheless omitted. We are not privy to where it occurs—in the Congo, on his return journey to Brussels, or in Brussels. We only know it precedes the agent’s visit to Marlow in Brussels. The effect of the non-narration of the tearing is to emphasize the new state of the document rather than the physical circumstances of its mutilation. Thus Marlow’s tearing of Kurtz’s report does not share the resonances of Irene’s destruction of Clare’s letter or Lingard’s mutilation of Willems’s note. Moreover, whereas Almayer indiscriminately casts his documents to the fire, Marlow’s action seems to be carefully meditated. Marlow’s concern is the modification of content; one act of violence is intended to displace another.

Yet it could be argued that according to Marlow’s representation of documents to his listeners, the letters, newspaper articles, and reports from the Congo bearing the trite phrases, “emissary of pity and science and progress” (79), “emissary of light” (59), “lower sort of apostle” (59), and “we can exert a power for good practically unbounded” (118), are much more dangerous than Kurtz’s addendum. For it is just these hackneyed images of Western benevolence that have justified and occluded the physical violence done to the land of the Congo and its peoples. We are reminded, too, of Stoler’s observation that such “fixed formats, empty phrases, and racial clichés” are typical of documents in colonial archives (23). The insistent invocation of a particular style and “arts of persuasion” can be identified as an “archival form,” or what I also refer to as evidence of an imperial lexicon in Chapter 1 (20). In this view,

Marlow's decision to tear the postscript prevents us from reading "Heart of Darkness" as a consummate rejection of the imperial archive.

Marlow's description of the transcendent effect of Kurtz's rhetoric upon him is compelling:

"By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded," etc, etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent...It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words. (118)

The effect Kurtz's words have on Marlow's imagination should not be understated.

Marlow responds positively to documents on only two occasions across the novella.

He celebrates Towson's *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship* as an example of mimetic referentiality. Although *An Inquiry* is "dreary reading enough" (99), it represents a break from the arduous process of meaning-making in the Congo that takes its toll on Marlow. On his return to London, he explains: "it was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing" (152). In light of his response to *An Inquiry*, the tearing of Kurtz's postscript might be read as an act of self-preservation. Marlow needs to save the "idea": "something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (51). In its new, and for Marlow, improved form, Kurtz's text corresponds finally to Kurtz's beliefs. The text's mimetic potential is restored. Thus to the journalist's question, "'what was it that had induced him to go out there?'" Marlow can offer Kurtz's Report as a reply (154).

Like Marlow's decision to lie to Kurtz's Intended, his need to preserve an ideal offsets honesty. To speak the truth would have rendered Kurtz "the justice" he sought, but Marlow was not able to reveal it: "It would have been too dark—too dark altogether..." (162). In addition to Marlow's absorption of the language of documents

in his “unreadable” report that Chapter 1 considers in detail, it is arguably one of the novella’s greatest moments of ambiguity that Kurtz’s Report will be published by the Press. The language that oppressed Marlow, the “rot” his Aunt imbibed from the newspapers, is promulgated by his very hand. Moreover, insofar as the violent, exclamatory nature of the addendum registers confusion, hesitation, and anxiety about the colonial mission, in tearing it from Kurtz’s Report—otherwise exemplary in the arts of persuasion—Marlow forgoes the opportunity to undermine the alleged coherence of the imperial archive and of Kurtz’s reputation. At the same time, we must consider the degree to which Marlow’s confessional yarn aboard the *Nellie*, in revealing rather than occluding Kurtz’s violence, challenges the idealism he once fought to protect through dishonesty. It is this ambivalent treatment of the archive—in contrast to *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast*—that resounds most with Larsen’s articulation of the African American race archive in *Passing*. At the same time that Irene rallies against the race hierarchies that the archive instantiates, when given the opportunity to free herself from its conceptual boundaries, she does not take it.

### **The African American Race Archive**

As Conrad illustrates in *Almayer’s Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and “Heart of Darkness,” the citation of one document can involve the invocation of many, and the destruction or mutilation of a single document might signify a wider discursive upheaval. It is with an eye to this potential that Conrad invests in his iterations of destroyed documents that I approach Larsen’s novels. The relationship between colonial authority and the continuity of the archive that Conrad discerns has been corroborated by dedicated repositories for colonial documents in addition to the work

of archival researchers like Stoler and Richards. However, the archive that Larsen gestures to vis-à-vis her destroyed documents does not share in the acknowledged framework of the imperial archive. For this reason I suggest that reading Larsen's destroyed documents through the conventions of the imperial archive and its consequences—namely, the instantiation of race hierarchies as a national project—elucidates the greater significance of Larsen's destroyed documents. As the names suggest—for example, the National Archives of Britain, the *Nationaal Archief* of the Netherlands, and the *Archives Nationales* of France—there is a determined relationship between the imperial archive and national identity, and the same proves true of the African American race archive, as Larsen conceives it. In both *Quicksand* and *Passing*, Denmark and Brazil are invoked, respectively, as foils to America to suggest this version of the race problem as peculiarly American.

Larsen's version of the archive is notably distinct from though related to the African American archive theorized by historians John Ernest and Stephen Hall. Whereas Larsen's emphasis lies on the discursive formation that serves to systematically control and oppress African Americans in America, Ernest and Hall note the emergence of African American writing that registers and *writes back* to histories of oppression. That is, the African American archive can be figured as a response to the archive that Larsen's fiction gestures to. Hence the distinction I am making between the African American *race* archive and the African American archive.

Ernest and Hall understand the African American archive to be a conscious or direct repudiation of the racism that systematically fractured or entirely obliterated black genealogies and histories in the wake of slavery. Ernest's historiography of the African American archive reads it as incomplete: there "was no finished revolution, no

identifiable nation, no achievement of independence from the colonial oppressor, and therefore no narrative shell capable of giving shape to the fragments” (100). Ernest continues, “for African American historians, the fragments themselves were the history, and the only narrative to be constructed *from* the fragments that could represent the history indicated *by* the fragments was itself a fragmented narrative” (99-100). Lloyd Pratt’s description of the nineteenth-century African American life narrative “as linear and as characterized by progress” seems to be a response to the anxiety over incompleteness and fragmentation that Ernest describes. In *Archives of American Time*, Pratt argues that the “fugitive slave narrative, spiritual autobiographies, and fictionalized biographies” of the period were engaged in a double bind (157). On the one hand, these narratives testified to the dehumanization of Africans and African Americans, and, on the other, they were invested in portraying the stolidity and fortitude of a race with a past and a certain future.

African American literature has long taken as one of its primary concerns a condemnation of the efforts by slave-owners and other institutionally sanctioned racists to sever African American family ties, to obscure the birth dates of African Americans, and to reset the clock of daily African American life. (161)

These fictions sought to fill out or fill in the absences of the archive in order to facilitate a future that could “redress injustice in the present” (178).<sup>63</sup>

Despite the perceived fragmentation of the African American archive, whether due to histories of silence and erasure or to a methodological shortcoming as Greg Carr suggests may be the case, the African American archive, like the imperial archive,

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<sup>63</sup> Pratt’s interest is in the archive’s relationship to expressions of time. He contends that this overt expression of linear time is, in fact, much more nuanced. Different experiences of time are layered to produce what he describes as “coextensive times” (178). Though perceptible, these varieties of time are downplayed in the narrative because they “undermine one’s claims to a coherent identity” (168).

has been institutionalized.<sup>64</sup> Hall cites the formation of the American Negro Academy in 1897 as crucial to the establishment of an African American archive: “the Academy sought to promote scholarship, educate youth, establish an archive to document the work of black authors, and foster increased intellectual production by black scholars” (168). In tandem with the work of the Academy and similar initiatives, universities in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially Howard and Tuskegee, actively procured documents and created dedicated spaces for their study, leading to the “professionalization of African American history” (215).

Ernest also argues, however, that the idea of the archive in America extends back farther than Reconstruction. To mark the American Revolution as a crystallizing moment in America’s history, the government supported the establishment of an archive to document America’s new nationhood in the form of Peter Force’s *American Archives*, a compendious nine-volume collection of documents assembled between 1837 and 1853.<sup>65</sup> Hall cites the *Civil War* as another pivotal historical juncture. Both whites and blacks sought to reinvent the nation through a reimagining of their roles in its formation:

“New nation” here refers to the fact that African Americans as well as white Americans constructed themselves as new people in a nation baptized by the fire of the Civil War and the destruction of slavery’s scourge on the land. The rise of new social arrangements throughout the nation, but especially in the South, forced a realignment of American society. (154)

The African American archive might be described as one response to the “new nation” while the African American race archive, forms another. Largely a product of

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<sup>64</sup> In “Translation, Recovery, and ‘Ethnic’ Archives of Africana: Inscribing Meaning beyond Otherness,” Carr argues that it falls to Africana studies scholars broadly to expand “ideas of what constitutes the range of inscription systems that contain the genealogies and trace elements of African intellectual work over both long-term and communicative human history” to fully realize the archive (361). See the *PMLA* 127.2 on Practices of the Ethnic Archive.

<sup>65</sup> Ernest calls Force’s *American Archives* “perhaps the most notable official effort to collect the materials of the past that was supported by the government” (96).

white America, though, crucially, not exclusively so, Larsen's archive reinvents the nation as white, relegating blacks to the periphery in light of their emancipation. This archive, like the imperial archive, produces documents to instantiate race hierarchies as part of its re-envisioning of an America excised of black history and the possibility of equitable black social participation. As Larsen's fiction demonstrates, the race archive is oppressive, exclusionary, and, through its perpetuation, prevents the already disenfranchised from becoming full participants in the nation it exists to reconceive. At its most pernicious, the values of the archive are imbibed by the marginalized, convincing them their disenfranchisement is as natural as it is desirable. As I will show, particularly in the case of *Passing*, the internalization of the archive produces devastating effects.

The destroyed documents of *Quicksand* and *Passing* refer to extradiegetic texts largely complicit with white-black binaries, where whites often appear as biologically superior, or in their more extreme manifestations, advocate systematic racial oppression. The documents in circulation during the Reconstruction era are particularly significant as they become the site of debate on how to maintain the subjugation of blacks, to varying degrees and purposes, despite the illegalization of slavery.<sup>66</sup> George Frederickson's important history *The Black Image in the White Mind* notes the overwhelming number of documents in circulation—pamphlets, conference papers, books, scientific papers, tracts, articles, novels—as part of its survey of the race climate leading up to and after Emancipation that had bearing on white perceptions of blacks. Frederickson's study indicates that documents are produced mainly to police the the fate of African Americans in America. They reveal anxiety over

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<sup>66</sup> The period of Reconstruction is marked by the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment forever outlawing slavery in 1865.

how to accommodate blacks after Reconstruction. The opinion expressed, for example, by the Baltimore physician and novelist Edward W. Gilliam that blacks should return to Africa because “white antipathy arising from a legitimate fear of miscegenation” would bar them from equality was representative for the end of the nineteenth century (229). However, other documents stand out for inciting new race perceptions with particular consequences. Frederick L. Hoffman’s *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (1896) was “the most influential discussion of the race question to appear in the late nineteenth century” (249). Charles A. Carroll’s *The Negro: A Beast* (1900) and R.W. Shufeldt *The Negro: A Menace to White Civilization* (1907) disclose, in their titles alone, the effect of Hoffman’s book on later attempts to treat the race question. According to Frederickson, *Race Traits and Tendencies* became:

a prized source of information and conclusions for anti-Negro writers for many years to come and also had the practical effect of helping to convince most white insurance companies that they should deny coverage to all Negroes on the grounds that membership in the race by itself constituted an unacceptable actuarial risk. (249)

*Quicksand* seems to register precisely the social effects of books like Hoffman’s with the inclusion of the detail that Helga is employed by a newly-established black insurance company in Harlem. The frenzy of writing produced in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century reveals the degree to which the systematic oppression of African Americans was both incited and given authority by documents, particularly as the scientific style gained currency across this period. The black-degeneracy hypothesis, for example, developed as a response to the alleged unviability of African American education (Frederickson 270). In their study of the language of scientific racism, Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman describe “scientific language [as] one of the most authoritative languages with which meaning

was encoded, and as language it had political and social, as well as intellectual, consequences” (73). As “the short, depersonalized, empirical paper that is still the hallmark of science today” became standardized in the late nineteenth century, this style infiltrated and replaced other modes of writing on race (79). At the turn-of-the-century and into the early part of the twentieth century:

science became both more specialized and authoritative as a cultural resource and language of interpretation . . . it began to replace theological and moral discourse as the appropriate discourse with which to discuss nature. Science also encroached heavily on political discourse, as many political issues were transposed into the realm of neutral “nature,” the scientists’ province. (80)

Stegan and Gilman make the further observation that “the concepts within racial science were so congruent with social and political life (with power relations, that is) as to be virtually uncontested from inside the mainstream of science” (74). Stoler’s evaluation of imperial archives as “technologies of rule in themselves” thus emerges as equally applicable to the African American race archive (*Refiguring the Archive* 83).

This is not to suggest, however, that African Americans were divorced entirely from the production of the African American race archive. For W.E.B. Du Bois, Larsen, and a host of other black artists and thinkers, Booker T. Washington’s theory of “uplift” represented another version of sanctioned oppression. Washington’s views suggested he was complicit with “romantic racialism”: the white view of “the black future in terms of a permanent and allegedly benevolent domestic colonialism” (Frederickson 311). Thus the fictional Naxos of *Quicksand*, modelled on Washington’s Tuskegee, comes under fierce criticism by the protagonist Helga. She bitterly remembers a recent visit to the school by a white preacher. He “had dared any Northerner to come south and after looking upon this great institution to say that the Southerner mistreated the Negro,” and he continues, if only all “Negroes” would

“conduct themselves in the manner of the Naxos products there would be no race problem, because Naxos Negroes knew what was expected of them” (37). Still more shocking for Helga, the speech is met with “considerable applause” (38). Reflecting further on the ideological failure of Naxos before breaking her ties with it completely, Helga muses: “this great community was no longer a school. It had grown into a machine. It was now a showplace in the black belt, exemplification of the white man’s magnanimity, refutation of the black man’s inefficiency” (39).

However, Larsen’s fiction is less concerned with those who determine the archive, from Hoffman to popular journalists, than the profoundly personal consequences of the archive on those it seeks to contain and systematically oppress. While her destroyed documents and allusions to racist discourses demonstrate the existence of the archive, she is attuned particularly to its exorbitant “psychic cost,” to borrow a phrase from Hutchinson, on her heroines (186).

### ***Quicksand* and the “Race Problem”**

A closer look at the context of Larsen’s literary production reveals the inescapability of the archive as a discursive reality, both for her and her protagonists. In 1928, the year Larsen published *Quicksand*, her first of only two novels, over ninety non-fiction books about the “Negro” were in circulation in America. This figure excludes pamphlets, papers, and other published documents.<sup>67</sup> These books, as *The United States Catalog: Books in Print January 1, 1928* indicates, covered a variety of topics including “Religion,” “Education,” and “Colonization” amongst numerous others.

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<sup>67</sup> Across the first few decades of the 1900s, the book entries under “Negro” in American National Bibliographies range between fifty and ninety-five. In part, this range can be explained by different editorial practices which may or may not cross-index under related entries like “United States—Race Problem.”

“Miscegenation,” as one example, does not appear as a subcategory of “Negro” literature in 1928, though it is present from 1912 to 1921. The disappearance or reappearance of certain subcategories indicates the degree to which certain topics remain relevant for authors and readers while others become obsolete. It is telling for *Quicksand* that American national bibliographies include the subcategory “Race Problem” across the first three decades of the twentieth century. Sample titles from 1928 include Smith’s *Christianity and the Race Problem*; Reuter’s *American Race Problem*; Payne’s *Afro-Americans and the Race Problem*; Mecklin’s *Democracy and Race Friction*; and Ferguson and Bigham’s *Select Discussions of Race Problems*.

The regular appearance of literature devoted to the “race problem” in precisely these terms points to a well-established discursive base, which, in its perpetuation, instantiates the race problem as a problem of the African American in America. In her capacity as a librarian and as the subject of these debates, we can assume that Larsen was familiar with such publications. It is no coincidence that *Quicksand*, a contemporary chronicle of racism in America, refers to the “race problem” over five times. Helga complains repeatedly of her Harlem acquaintances: “why . . . didn’t they find something else to talk of? Why must the race problem always creep in?” (83). In this respect, it is specifically the black community of *Quicksand*—those who advocate uplift in addition to Harlemites who willfully segregate themselves from whites and castigate those who do not—that is scrutinized for bolstering the view that the races are inherently different. Just as Helga rebels against what she acknowledges as the dangerous hypocrisy of the Naxos mentality in the South, black Harlem’s views of race come under increasing pressure. Anne, Helga’s friend and embodiment of the Harlem elitism she disdains, “frequented all the meetings of protest, subscribed to all the

complaining magazines, and read all the lurid newspapers spewed out by the Negro yellow press” (79). Although she subscribes to this hatred of whites, like so many other Harlemites, “she aped their clothes, their manners, and their gracious ways of living” (80).

Helga’s frustration with her peers recalls Marlow’s response to hackneyed phrases like “emissary of pity” or “emissary of light,” which, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, belong to an imperial lexicon that exerts a formative influence on Marlow’s “unreadable” report. Like the tensions that emerge through Conrad’s negotiation of this language in his revision of the imperial adventure story, Larsen’s protagonist exhibits anxiety as she contends with the restrictiveness imposed by the “race problem.” How can the mixed-race Helga—and Larsen—move beyond the oppressiveness of this discursive formation as they try to forge a future that is not already circumscribed by these documents? How does this discursive reality impinge on Helga’s self-identity and sense of national belonging?

Helga’s answer to this problem is to reject the archive. Helga’s reaction to her Naxos papers suggests the moment the archive comes into view is also its consummate dismissal. Again, the destruction of text represents the threat to the archive’s continuity. Moments after resolving to quit her post, Helga collects her “schoolteacher paraphernalia of drab books and papers,” texts she has identified as emblematic of a particular form of racism inflicted by African Americans on themselves, and flings them “violently, scornfully toward the wastebasket” (38). She is “soothed by the impetuous discharge of violence” (39). It is this action, placed in the first few pages of the novel, which initiates a personal battle with the race divisions the archive instantiates.

After a succession of inspired moments that turn to grave failures, it becomes evident that Helga will not escape race borders. From Naxos to New York, Copenhagen to a tiny Alabama town, Helga's many false starts in misperceived "homes" make a mockery of the *bildungsroman*. Larsen reveals the progressive teleology of the coming-of-age narrative to be an empty promise for a mixed-race protagonist. We might note here the difference Larsen's novel presents to the life narratives isolated by Pratt, and also, looking ahead to Chapter 4, how the trajectory of Helga's life echoes Rachel's stalled development in the colonial context of Woolf's *The Voyage Out*. Helga's geographical relocations, do not, as she assumes naively, entail the simultaneous transgression of her racial difference. She does not secure the happiness she desperately seeks. Like the original act of violence on text that precipitated her physical and psychological journey, the novel ends with violence enacted on her mixed-race body, itself bearing the divisions of the archive. Helga is still suffering the consequences of her most recent pregnancy when her loathed husband impregnates her. The novella ends bleakly: "And hardly had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain . . . when she began to have her fifth child" (162).

However, the narrative does provide glimpses of a life free of the existential pressures of the archive. Along her sea journey to Copenhagen, Helga experiences momentarily "that blessed sense of belonging to herself alone and not to a race" (94). The narrative promptly deflates this promise of racial freedom when Helga discovers that her difference will be fetishized in Denmark. Harlem, too, provides such fleeting moments of inspiration. Helga is mesmerized by the beautiful Audrey Denney who unapologetically socializes with black and white men. Helga wants to defend Audrey from the scrutiny of Anne and their friends but "she felt that it would be useless to tell

them that what she felt for the beautiful, calm, cool girl who had the assurance, the courage, so placidly to ignore racial barriers and give her attention to people was not contempt but envious admiration" (92). She is too well aware of the fruitlessness of her position. Perhaps most poignantly, and at her most incisive, Helga asks for a rethinking of approaches to race through the production of a new text that will throw the carefully constructed race divisions of the African American race archive into flux: "Why, she wondered, didn't someone write *A Plea for Colour?*" (51). Helga envisions a text that will neither relegate blacks to a position of subservience nor demonize whites. "Colour," here, is neither black nor white.

### ***Passing: Resisting and Reinforcing the Archive***

Like Helga's violent response to her Naxos papers, Irene's repeated destruction of Clare's letters in *Passing* signals the African American race archive's tentacular grip on its subjects, though with a crucial difference. Helga tries to escape its grasp by making a series of changes in her life including moving to different cities and starting new jobs, but she never outmanoeuvres its reach and she succumbs to the foreclosures that the archive entails. In a powerful reversal of Helga's sustained resistance to the archive, Irene, perhaps paradoxically, seems to desire the structure and predictability it entails. Although she is also acutely sensitive to race prejudice as a black woman in New York, she takes solace in knowing her place and status in society.

The violence that characterizes Irene's treatment of documents, as described in the introduction to this chapter, emerges as different to Helga's irreverence for her Naxos papers. Irene's behaviour recalls more closely the ambivalence of Marlow's reaction to Kurtz's report in "Heart of Darkness." Despite the fact that Marlow is

critical of the imperial lexicon's concealment of physical, economic, and epistemic violence, he is seduced by Kurtz's language. Irene believes emphatically in the equality of the races, but she is also comforted by the easy demarcations of difference that the African American race archive instantiates. It is not the case that *Passing* or, indeed, Larsen, supports Irene's response to the archive. Rather, in this, Larsen's second novel, she enters into more nuanced dimensions of the archive's influence on the mental life of its subjects. Larsen considers how the archive's reification of race might be a crutch for those who have formed an unyielding definition of their racial identity under the pressures of prejudice. Violent iterations of documents in *Passing* not only form an allusion to the archive, they also realize a trenchant representation of the archive's psychological effect on those that have imbibed its discourse. This is partly achieved, as I will show, through the subtle modulations to the structure of the novel that the letters present, recalling the examples of *The Shadow-line* and *The Professor's House*. In this respect, while Conrad's destroyed texts across *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast*, and "Heart of Darkness" help to illuminate Larsen's articulation of the archive, the documents of *Passing* perhaps exceed Conrad's interpolated documents in their multi-levelled discursive functions.

Before approaching Clare's letters specifically, it is worth considering the narrative's representation of the newspaper as both emblematic of the archive, but also as anticipatory of Irene's violence. Like "Heart of Darkness," the newspaper in *Passing* is targeted for rehearsing well-established racial prejudices. As shorthand for the difficulties she faced growing up with her white aunts, Clare describes her guardians as belonging "to the generation that had written and read long articles headed: 'Will the Blacks Work?'" (26). Even after Clare flees the household to marry

John Bellew, she suffers silently the recriminations of the press. For Bellew, the newspaper is a reliable source of information about African Americans, especially as he considers it beneath himself to make their acquaintance directly. To Irene's question if he has known any "Negroes," he replies: "I know people who've known them, better than they know their black selves. And I read in the papers about them. Always robbing and killing people" (41). In an effort to curb his offensive tirade, and to prevent the conversation from intimating her secret, Clare responds that her guests likely "read the papers too" (41). Larsen includes the newspaper here to argue for its role in propagating certain racist views of blacks and also for encouraging complacent white readers, recalling Marlow's aunt.

Though it is unfeasible for Irene to condemn openly the content of the papers in the presence of Clare and Bellew, she voices her displeasure at home. Her husband speaks "bitterly of a lynching that he had been reading about in the evening paper" inviting the naïve questioning of their son Ted: "Dad, why is it that they only lynch coloured people?" (102). Brian answers: "Because they hate 'em, son" (102). His attempt to elaborate is quickly thwarted by Irene's demand that he avoid discussing "the race problem" (103). However, Brian's immediate response to Ted's question is not entirely unjustified.<sup>68</sup> Lynching was a profoundly black problem in America. While there was criticism of lynching by this time, it was still considered in some areas to be the only effective way of dealing with "Negroes" perceived to have "uncontrollable sexual passions and criminal natures stamped by heredity," echoing precisely the point of view supported by the papers Bellew reads (Frederickson 276).

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<sup>68</sup> The pinnacle of lynching in America was 1892 although it continued into the early twentieth century. See *The Negro Handbook*. Ed. Florence Murray (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

That Irene should prevent her husband from discussing the race problem with their children, despite the fact that Junior has already been called a “dirty nigger,” as her husband points out, is symptomatic of her need for control (103). Irene is uncompromising in her views of right and wrong. She interprets Brian’s notion of moving to Brazil as a threat to the “sense of security, the feeling of permanence . . . she had so admirably arranged for them all” (57). Although Brian argues that African Americans are treated better in Brazil than America, Irene “desired so ardently to have” life “remain as it was” (57). The narrator, focalized through Irene, maintains a critical distance from her on this point: “It was only that she wanted [Brian] to be happy, resenting, however, his inability to be so with things as they were, and never acknowledging that though she did want him to be happy, it was only in her own way and by some plan of hers for him that she truly desired him to be so” (61). From her initial reading of Clare’s behaviour at tea: “she was sure that she would have classed it . . . as being just a shade too provocative for a waiter” (15), to her even more banal displeasure with the mild Christmas temperatures: “The weather, like people, ought to enter into the spirit of the season” (85), Irene is apt to judge harshly anyone or anything that does not comply with her strict sense of order and propriety.

The novel’s structure also seems to be focalized through Irene. In other words, if we were to imagine Irene devising the structure of her story, it would resemble this novel. Parts One, Two, and Three—“Encounter”; “Re-Encounter”; “Finale”—are divided into exactly four chapters each amounting to roughly the same length. Its tight triptych form is suited perfectly to her neurosis. In this respect, the structure of *Passing*, like *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor’s House*, has thematic resonance. It is no accident that the carefully balanced form of the novel is punctured by Clare’s

letters, which also penetrate Irene's safely guarded domestic sphere. Not only do the letters introduce narrative variety into the text vis-à-vis their reproduction on its pages, they also interrupt its chronological unfolding in the form of digression. Like Proust's madeleine, the letter Irene receives from Clare becomes an occasion to narrate painful scenes two years prior, which begins: "This is what Irene Redfield remembered" (12).

The narrative's development of Irene's tendency to absolutism in addition to its contrived structure become measures of Irene's resistance to the uncertainty, risk, and unabashed desire that Clare's letters represent. Expressing a longing for black society after living as a white woman, Clare requests Irene's help in making these transgressive visits a reality. As outlined earlier in this chapter, Irene is insulted and repulsed by Clare's appeals. Her intricate destruction of Clare's letters substitute as responses. Judith Butler elucidates the possible covert reasons for Irene's repeated disavowals of Clare, including her refusal to answer her letters:

Is it that Irene cannot bear the identification with Clare, or is it that she cannot bear her desire for Clare; is it that she identifies with Clare's passing but needs to disavow it not only because she seeks to uphold the "race" that Clare betrays but because her desire for Clare will betray the family that works as the bulwark for that uplifted race? (177).

Like her involvement in Clare's death, the range of potential explanations for Irene's dual fascination with and contempt for Clare is left unresolved by the narrative. Limited by the very restrictions Irene places on herself, the narrator cannot liberate the thoughts that Irene submerges. What is clear, however, is that the expressions of border-crossing the letters contain—"this terrible, this wild desire" to be with African Americans or "wanting to see" Irene again amongst her own people—function in direct opposition to the African American race archive (11, 46). Clare, repeating and reversing her trek across the black-white border in every visit to Bellew and Harlem,

threatens the identity that Irene has so carefully cultivated for herself along the lines of the archive. The life she “had so admirably arranged for them all, and desired so ardently to have remain as it was” is thrown into chaos by Clare (57). In other words, to be black, as Irene understands it, entails that she cannot be white whereas Clare possesses the unique ability to be both. In this view, Clare’s letters articulate resistance to the African American race archive, and their destruction by Irene, ensures the archive’s preservation.

Deborah McDowell incisively observes of *Passing*:

In ending the novel with Clare’s death, Larsen repeats the narrative choice that *Quicksand* makes: to punish the very values the novel implicitly affirms, to honour the very value system the text implicitly satirizes. The ending, when hidden racial identities are disclosed, functions on the ideological as well as the narrative level. Larsen performs an act of narrative “dis”-closure, undoing or reversing the promises of the narrative. (94)

Larsen, who according to Hutchinson, “never stopped thinking of herself as a Negro (and a mulatto, and a Danish American),” seemed to share Clare’s view that racial identity might be fluid and performative, multifarious and complex (186). Those letters of Clare’s, “a little flaunting. Purple ink. Foreign paper of extraordinary size” might describe Larsen’s very stationery. Her correspondence with Carl Van Vechten and Dorothy Peterson collected at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library from 1927 onwards reveals she might have been referring to her own letters.<sup>69</sup> And yet, as McDowell notes, both *Quicksand* and *Passing* offer rather bleak conclusions to their heroines’ attempts to defy the archive’s black-white hierarchical binary. In the impossibility of their success, Larsen reveals the pervasive power of the archive.

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<sup>69</sup> See the Carl Van Vechten Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale). In the collections of correspondence including 1928-29, 1930, 1930-31, and 1933-41, there are several examples of letters Larsen wrote to Van Vechten on thick paper in purple, light blue, and especially green ink. A few of these letters are co-written with her husband Elmer Imes. In these instances, Larsen’s colours emerge as particularly stark. While she writes in bright ink, Imes’s sections on the same page are written in black ink. It seems she insisted on colour.

Despite their best attempts, it is a losing game for Helga and Clare. And yet, the historically oppressed who embody and abide by the divisions of the archive suffer consequences just as terrible. Despite the fact that Larsen may not be able to illustrate the archive's dismantling or characters that successfully transcend its foreclosures, *Quicksand* and *Passing* are used to recognize its formation.

Conrad's and Larsen's recognition of the imperial archive and the African American race archive respectively is remarkable because they wrote during their fervent production—and their works are also products of them. Without the benefit of distance or time, they were able to discern, in the Foucauldian sense, the archives' discursive formations. Recurring statements including "emissary of light" and the "race problem" are treated in these novels as expressions of epistemological practice: they refer to a host of interrelated statements that propose to know their subject fully. However, Conrad's and Larsen's strategic deployment of documents in these novels also indicates they understood the implications of an archive: that the "kilometres" of documents that Stoler describes, for example, could have cultural meaning. Through their cultivation of the image of the destroyed document, the powerful material reality of the archive comes to the fore. As documents arrive in the Malay of *Almayer's Folly* or enter the home of Irene Redfield in *Passing*, they serve as reminders of the documents that pre-empted them and also anticipate those that will come after.

## Chapter 4

### **A Case for Connection?: The Newspaper in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Woolf's *The Voyage Out***

The documents—reports, telegrams, diaries, contracts, account books, and letters—that feature in the works of Joseph Conrad and his modernist collaborators are the creations of a distinct moment. Kurtz's Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, Tom Outland's mesa diary, Almayer's blank account books, and Clare's foreign-looking letters, to name a few of the interpolated texts discussed across the thesis, emerge out of the particular social worlds their narratives cultivate, which are themselves informed and shaped by the documents that exist outside them. This consideration of the document writ large in the fiction of the early twentieth century therefore encounters the document as a gesture to a thriving and at times anxious world of print production and circulation outside its pages. However, of the many documents that might be found in the modernist novel, it is arguably the newspaper that is invoked with the greatest awareness of its real-life counterpart, and it is also for this reason that its citation proves to be the most pressing and complex. This chapter considers Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) alongside Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), both of which utilize the newspaper to develop multi-layered concepts of community and connection in their fictions.

The newspaper is the modernist document *par excellence*. It is the document that virtually every proponent of high modernism in Britain, at one point or another, decried or extolled in print. Patrick Collier describes the newspaper as “the most controversial medium of the age of modernism”:

Newspapers were impoverishing public discourse, emphasizing the inflammatory and sensational rather than shaping public opinion with judicious restraint; their brief but flashy prose and visual layouts were making readers distracted and intellectually lazy; their content was skewing values, creating a taste for passing sensations, celebrity gossip and tawdry details of crimes; their infectious vocabulary of shorthand phrases threatened the very language itself. (1)

Such arguments for the disastrous consequences of the newspaper's popularity, in addition to its lack of integrity, were made by many authors. In *The Critical Attitude* (1911), Ford Madox Ford complains that "nowadays, even in remote country districts, the Englishman is overwhelmed every morning with a white spray of facts—facts more or less new, more or less important, more or less veracious" (124). Shifting his attention to undiscerning readers of the popular press, he compares the consumption of facts and opinions from the newspaper with eating prepared foods: "Just as the large public gets its ideas from the syndicated presses, so it gets its bodily nourishment from what are called 'canned goods'" (127). With respect to literary journalism, authors were also critical. In "Salutation the Third" (1914), Ezra Pound castigates the smugness of *The Times*: objector to "newness" and "foe to free speech and good letters" (45). In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), T.S. Eliot complains that criticism too often tries to include the author when it should be "depersonalized." He argues that "if we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows" we will hear more about the poets than the poetry they create (40). In other words, the journalists get it wrong, and the masses readily follow.

However, these expressions of antagonism distort what is a complex and, in some cases, synergetic relationship between modernist authors, modernist writing, and the newspaper. Many authors relied on publishing in periodicals as a source of income and several participated in literary journalism, most notably here Virginia

Woolf, but also writers like T.S. Eliot. Woolf's first non-review pieces were published in the *Guardian* and *Cornhill Magazine*, though her most substantial relationship was to the *TLS* as a literary reviewer. Woolf held "complicated and often contradictory feelings" about her job as a literary critic (Lee *Grub Street* 113). Though she frequently expressed a desire to quit journalism, she wrote reviews for years after she was no longer dependent on the money. The overlap and connection between her non-fiction and fiction arguably contributed to both forms of writing (*Grub Street* 114).<sup>70</sup> Of course, only a few years after publishing "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot started the periodical the *Criterion* (which Woolf also contributed to). Others found in the newspaper an opportunity to rethink literary language: James Joyce's "Aeolus" chapter in *Ulysses* offers, perhaps, one of the most compelling examples of the deployment of newspaper cant in the early twentieth-century novel. While the newspaper was, importantly, a source of concern and even loathing, it also meant more to modernism than the standard of writing against which it defined itself.

I have reserved my final chapter for a discussion of this most ubiquitous and notorious of all modernist documents for two interrelated reasons. In the first case, this chapter's focus on the newspaper as a category of document bookends my consideration of the evidential role of documents that began this thesis, which included some discussion of the newspaper amongst other inset texts in "Heart of Darkness" and "An Outpost of Progress." It is likely due to the robustness of Conrad's anti-press sentiments in these works that critics tend to read them as emblematic of Conrad's position on the newspaper. To the end of nuancing this interpretation of

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<sup>70</sup> See also Jeanne Dubino's chapter "Virginia Woolf: From Book Reviewer to Literary Critic, 1904-1918" in *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*. Eds. Jeanne Dubino and Beth Rosenberg (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997). 25-40.

Conrad, this chapter reads his most press-obsessed novel, *The Secret Agent* (1907), against the grain. That is, rather than engage exclusively with the newspaper as an ideologically flawed object, I also read Conrad's citation of the paper as a narrative device that performs manifold roles in line with the numerous other documents that feature across his fiction. This converse though complementary return to the newspaper in Conrad is facilitated by the example of Virginia Woolf. Woolf's apprenticeship novel *The Voyage Out* (1915), with the help of her extended essay *Three Guineas* (1938), clarifies Conrad's treatment of documents in *The Secret Agent*. My second objective in concluding with the newspaper is to draw attention to those valences of the document that have gone hitherto unconsidered by this study yet remain crucial to our sense of the cultural embeddedness of documents as they are represented in the early twentieth-century novel. More precisely, the strategic pairing of *The Secret Agent* and *The Voyage Out* reveals the work of "community" and "connection" that the newspaper can accomplish as a textual object.

This chapter also represents a methodological shift. Rather than locating in Conrad a preliminary framework for engaging with representations of documents in later, modernist fictions, here Woolf underscores my reappraisal of Conrad's novel. This approach may seem counterintuitive. As is well-known, Woolf was an attentive reader of Conrad, and like Ford and Cather, it is "Heart of Darkness" that she references most explicitly in her fiction, especially in *The Voyage Out*.<sup>71</sup> However, as

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<sup>71</sup> See Woolf's reviews of Conrad for the *Times Literary Supplement*: "Mr Conrad's Crisis" (14 March 1918) and the obituary "Joseph Conrad" (14 August 1924), later collected in *The Common Reader I*. As many critics have noted, the engagement scene in *The Voyage Out* is suffused with the images and language of "Heart of Darkness." See especially Mark Wollaeger's *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Marianne DeKoven's *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Esty's *Unseasonable Youth*.

was the case with Ford, Cather, and Larsen, I am less interested in arguing for a case of direct influence and more fascinated by the ways in which Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf, despite subscribing to different aesthetic or political commitments, might find similar ways of registering the physical presence of the document in modernity. More specifically, Woolf's ambivalent depiction of the newspaper—ambivalence characterized by her perception of the paper as ideologically objectionable but a fictional occasion—offers us new possibilities for interpreting the role of the newspaper in Conrad's novel.

Considering that nearly every fiction in this study and many others unnamed here cite the newspaper as an interleaved text, the choice to read *The Secret Agent* alongside Woolf's first novel might appear incongruous. There are, in fact, several other Conrad fictions that feature journalist characters and newspaper articles that might be discussed. Decoud of Conrad's *Nostramo* becomes the "Journalist of Sulaco" in recognition of the potentials of print for shaping public opinion—in this case, preventing support for the rebellion. Although Decoud is full of importance with the task that he has been entrusted with, he equates his propagandistic writing with "intellectual death" (180). *Under Western Eyes* and *Chance* similarly suggest journalism's lack of integrity. In both novels, the paper is reduced to a source of gossip, always falling short of a complex and nuanced articulation of the desperation and guilt that plague their characters, which, in contrast, the novelistic narrative has the capacity to achieve. *The Planter of Malata* provides an insider's view to how gossip is produced. The Editor—identified by his profession rather than a name—reveals that it is in his power to elevate or destroy a man's reputation. Just as things might be kept

“out of the paper” to oblige friends, others are taken to task when it might be profitable (15).

*The Secret Agent* is one of Conrad’s most “textual” novels, in this respect perhaps only comparable to *Under Western Eyes*. Marlow’s yarning or any other scenario recalling a dynamic exchange between storyteller and listener is absent. The narrator of *The Secret Agent*, unlike the other unnamed narrators in Conrad’s fiction, does not feature as one of the novel’s characters. The possibility of entering the novel as a confidante or one of a group of listeners—a typical scenario in Conrad—is therefore dismissed. Moreover, *The Secret Agent* has very little dialogue. In this novel of secret meetings, plans, and alliances, characters are reticent either from habit or necessity. *The Secret Agent* is encountered primarily as a text: a text that reveals itself to be reliant on its inset documents, including the newspaper, in the cultivation of its textuality.<sup>72</sup> Unlike the aforementioned fictions that feature newspapers and journalists, *The Secret Agent* uses the imagined materiality of its papers—things to be produced, picked up, purchased, and discarded—as a fictional opportunity to realize forms of connection. In this respect, *The Secret Agent* provides a compelling case for the necessity of the newspaper to the possibility of its story.

In addition to presenting an opportunity to reread *The Secret Agent*, which is typically engaged with as a full-blown attack on journalism, this focus on the popular press forms an occasion to consider this comparatively underexplored aspect of Woolf’s writing. As Karin E. Westman argues in her article on the political significance of Woolf’s citation of *The Times* newspaper in *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s response to the newspaper as a new mode of communication has received negligible attention in

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<sup>72</sup> I discuss Conrad’s strategies for evading the writtenness of his writing as outlined by Michael Greaney, Edward Said, and Tony Tanner in the Introduction.

Woolf studies. This chapter, however, does not read her treatment of the newspaper in *The Voyage Out* as a response to a novel technology, which is certainly not the case at the time Woolf is writing. Like all the genres of documents considered in this thesis, the newspaper is not new. Rather, I approach the newspaper on the level of narrative as a recurring inset text. Despite the fact that other novels, including *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *The Years* (1937), and *Between the Acts* (1941), also feature numerous allusions to the press, the newspaper in Woolf criticism has remained largely in the background. *The Voyage Out*, in this respect, emerges as noteworthy for establishing what will be a career-long recognition of the role of the press in daily life. Moreover, her apprenticeship novel anticipates her more experimental treatment of objects in these later works. This chapter, therefore, also presents an opportunity to place the newspaper at the centre of Woolf's practice.

### **The Newspaper, Communities, Collectives, and Connections**

I use "community" in this section with some reluctance. This word arrives steeped in implied meanings. It is suggestive of certain expectations or exigencies depending on the particular theoretical pressures applied to it as a concept and/or social activity.

The conditions that permit the formation of communities and the roles and effects of established communities have long been debated in moral and political philosophy as well as in the literature of Marxism, feminism, and deconstruction. Drawing on these broad areas of inquiry, studies in international justice, recent debates on cosmopolitanism, and nationalism, to name a few, have also taken up the idea of community. I use "community" here, however, not as a goal or horizon to aspire to, which according to these various approaches to community is often the case. My

consideration of the community “work” that occurs in *The Secret Agent* and *The Voyage Out* is not related to community as a social value and therefore to be celebrated or revered. If community is an event that might provide the possibility for surmounting the violence, hatred, and injustice that can occur as a result of differences in race, sex, and religion, or constitute a form of fellowship that could undermine cultural and economic imperialism, this does not seem to be what Woolf and Conrad have in mind as they imagine the newspaper’s role in generating community.

Despite these caveats, I use the term community because of the important association Benedict Anderson makes between newspaper readers and the formation of communities in his still fruitful work *Imagined Communities*. Anderson’s work, as I outline in the next section, provides a productive point of entry into *Three Guineas*, raising a host of questions that I extend to Woolf’s and Conrad’s fictions. However, as a means of countering and therefore supplementing what *Three Guineas* reveals to be Anderson’s rather utopic vision of the newspaper, I also employ Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of “serial collectivity” as outlined in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Sartre provides another way of understanding the “work” performed by the newspaper in *The Voyage Out* and *The Secret Agent*. Finally, “connection” in this chapter refers to personal identification with another, which as I will elaborate in the following section is different to the social relationships that Anderson and Sartre describe. “Community,” “collective,” and “connection” are, therefore, not concepts that I collapse into each other, but I do consider their moments of overlap to offer insights that are productive for my reading of Conrad in relation to Woolf, and vice versa.

In all instances, the degree to which Woolf and Conrad develop communities, collectives, and connections through their use of the newspaper is, I argue, a question of narrative strategy. The newspaper, as a material object that is handled, is like a stage prop around which discrepant character “types” coalesce. Under normal circumstances, Hirst, Miss Allan, and Mrs. Thornbury of *The Voyage Out* would never find themselves in the same drawing-room in London, but they do congregate around the English paper in the colonies. The effect of the communities and collectives drawn through the newspaper is an expansion of the novel’s fictional world, conditioning the possibility of the stories it tells. Newspapers might also develop personal connections between characters, such as that between Ossipon and Winnie in *The Secret Agent*. Ossipon’s imagined connection to Winnie occurs in the context of reading the report of her suicide in the papers. The connective capacity of the newspaper is also realized formally: these interleaved texts act as hinges between disparate speech acts. Transitions are seamlessly negotiated by newspaper phrases that seem to hang on the page.

Insofar as the newspaper’s role in forging community has been considered in modernism, it tends to be in the context of debates on high versus low culture. According to Conrad, Woolf, and other modernists, as indicated earlier, the newspaper instantiates and perhaps even encourages two kinds of readers. The first category, to which these authors belong, is characterized by scepticism. These readers can discern the limitations of the newspaper medium, including what Pound described as the paper’s objection to “newness,” whereas the others cannot. Especially for writers, this critical position on the press and its impressionable readers formed an important part of bolstering the value of literature, which, in contrast, was superior

writing that could be new and free. The second group, according to the first, is credulous and lazy. They are susceptible to the paper's sensationalism, gossip, and corruption of language. The two communities that emerge vis-à-vis the popularity of the press, and the preferred reading materials of each, can broadly be mapped onto a highbrow-lowbrow axis.

The different and oppositional communities of readers engendered by the Press—and duly noted by these literary elites—have been the subject of scrutiny by critics for decades. Fredric Jameson's "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (1979) posited the influential argument that we should "read high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under late capitalism" (133-34). Following Jameson's formulation, several full-length studies, including Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), Jennifer Wicke's *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading* (1988), and Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1999) consider the implications of the mutual exclusivity of high culture and mass culture for the production and reception of art. More recently, critics contend that the newspaper medium, specifically, was essential to the modernist movement, exposing modernism's imperviousness to the press as mere myth.<sup>73</sup> However, rather than frame modernism's relationship to the newspaper as a question of its investment in the products of popular culture as has already been done, this chapter, in line with my earlier readings, addresses Conrad's and Woolf's representation of the newspaper

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<sup>73</sup> See Collier's *Modernism on Fleet Street* cited in the introduction of this chapter. See also Rubery's *The Novelty of the News* and *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower*, eds. Bridget Bennett and Jeremy Treglown. Finally, the essays in *Journalism, Literature, and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism* edited by Kate Campbell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

in their fiction as a document deployed to cultivate the community and connection that is integral to their stories.

It is worth considering Conrad's and Woolf's views of the press in their non-fiction in order to see how the newspaper operates differently in their fictions. In other words, what does the newspaper accomplish in the novel that it cannot do in life? If we take Conrad at his word, then like Woolf, there seems little room for the possibility that his use of the newspaper could engender community. Across *Notes on Life & Letters*, Conrad finds opportunities, even if only obliquely, to disparage the press in a language that resonates with Collier's list of indictments that opened this chapter.

The essay "Protection of Ocean Liners," first published in 1914, mourns the loss of the ship the *Empress of Ireland*. Conrad augments his disappointment by comparing the quality craftsmanship of the *Empress* with the recently sunk *Titanic*. Unlike that shamelessly advertised ship:

the company who owned [the *Empress*] had no agents, authorised or unauthorised, giving boastful interviews about her unsinkability to newspaper reporters ready to swallow any sort of trade statement if only sensational enough for their readers—readers as ignorant as themselves of the nature of all things outside the commonest experience of the man in the street. (249)

If Conrad chastises the press here for indiscriminate publishing, printing anything and everything in the service of profit, in "The Crime of Partition" he condemns the press conversely for what he regards as their strategic silence. According to Conrad, Western newspapers withheld reporting on partitioned Poland's surging nationalist movement for fear that the revolutionary impulse would infect the West. The silence is morally reprehensible; it is a "danger" (122); "Truth" is subservient to "European diplomacy" (122). Similarly, in Woolf's *Three Guineas*, which I consider in the following

section, she notes the press's disinclination to print stories regarding the efforts of those working towards gender equality: "a conspiracy of silence seems to be the rule" (240). She is thinking here specifically of Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act, unheeded by the press, and Phillipa Strachey's letter printed finally in the *Spectator* to its credit. Titled "A Conspiracy of Silence," Strachey chastises the Press for its concealment of protests against a provision in the Contributory Pensions Bill that would institute unequal pay for men and women performing the same jobs.

These brief but cutting criticisms—the newspaper's imprecision, lack of integrity, and a readership too dull to detect the difference—are explored with further complexity in "Autocracy and War," an essay occasioned by the Russo-Japanese War (1905). Conrad's recognition that his knowledge of the battles in Manchuria derives from text rather than firsthand experience causes him to reflect on the ineffectuality of print. The "cold, silent, colourless print of books and newspapers" relays the War "in a grey reflection . . . through the veil of inadequate words" (84). The papers' accounts have "all the futility of precision without force" (84). He elaborates:

there must be something subtly noxious to the human brain in the composition of newspaper ink; or else it is that the large page, the columns of words, the leaded headings, exalt the mind into a state of feverish credulity. The printed page of the Press makes a sort of still uproar, taking from men both the power to reflect and the faculty of genuine feeling . . . (90)

In the process of criticizing the newspaper medium, Conrad implicates the newspaper reader. On the one hand, the formal limits of its form and its particular aesthetic render the newspaper ill-suited to relay events comprehensively. On the other, the newspaper reader's eager assimilation of print is a result of an inability to discern these limitations, a critique Conrad makes with little compassion as he proves himself

perceptive enough to recognize these deficiencies. However, Conrad also acknowledges the failure of the Press to incite genuine emotion as a distinct challenge of the time. “In this age of knowledge,” by which he seems to be alluding to an environment saturated by readily available and easily purchased facts, “our sympathetic imagination, to which alone we can look for the ultimate triumph of concord and justice, remains strangely impervious to information” (84). According to Conrad, it is only “direct vision of the fact, or the stimulus of a great art” that can awaken real feeling (84).

Jonathan Arac argues persuasively that the terms of Conrad’s criticism of the press anticipate Walter Benjamin’s distinction between “information” and “storytelling.” Briefly, “information” refers to mass knowledge disseminated through institutions like the Press while storytelling is personal and bears the marks of the speaker. Whereas storytelling “does not expend itself . . . It preserves and concentrates its strength,” information “does not survive the moment in which it was new” (qtd. in Arac 81). The unreceptive newspaper reader thus reflects, in part, the failure of the newspaper, or information, to create an enduring impression.

However, Arac’s Benjaminian reading of “Autocracy and War” leads him to the erroneous conclusion, I believe, that Conrad’s fictional writing therefore “tries to negate itself as writing” (77). Here we might recall Greaney’s, Said’s, and Tanner’s descriptions of Conrad’s attempt to circumvent textuality. The renunciation of writing that Arac imagines is not the inevitable outcome of Conrad’s position on the newspaper in “Autocracy and War,” especially as this essay, in addition to “Protection of Ocean Liners” and “The Crime of Partition,” cannot be taken as representative of Conrad’s relationship to the Press. Like Woolf, Conrad proves to be rather more

ambivalent. Moreover, Arac extends the idea of Conrad's denunciation of text to *The Secret Agent*, the most consciously "textual" of Conrad's fictions. As I will demonstrate in my discussion of the newspaper in *The Secret Agent*, and as I have attempted to show across this thesis, Conrad invokes documents as a narrative strategy in much more complex ways than to stage their consummate rejection.

It is, after all, true that Conrad's knowledge of the Russo-Japanese War is sourced from the newspaper. His concession in this same essay that "in stigmatising the printed word as cold, silent, and colourless, I have no intention of putting a slight upon the fidelity and talents of men who have provided us with words to read about the battles in Manchuria" is excluded from Arac's discussion (83). Conrad suggests that the problem of representation is inherent to journalism, which, "however correctly and even picturesquely conveyed," remains a reproduction, and hence lacks the type of force or immediacy that might wake us from our "slumbering" (84). Yet, however imperfect, Conrad, like Woolf, relies on the newspaper's reports. Stephen Donovan points out in *Joseph Conrad and Popular Culture* that Conrad's son John "recalled his father being engrossed by newspapers until 10:30 each morning" (9).

In addition to reading papers as a sailor—a scene that he revisits across the shipping ports featured in his fictions—Conrad also followed the news carefully in his new profession as an author. He monitored the reviews of his fiction across a number of periodicals, collecting them himself or requesting cuttings from friends and associates. In a letter to his agent J.B. Pinker, Conrad expresses his ambivalent position on the utility of the Press:

The *Set of Six* is out and looks tolerably well as to the get up. I have no cutting; but two people wrote to me saying they have seen some good reviews, especially in the Dly News. Could you send me that one? It isn't for the glory of the thing, you understand; and anyhow criticism as done in the daily press is of not much use to one; but all the same it

is sometimes possible to get a hint of what pleases the general public and I am adaptable enough to profit by it. (CL 4:102)

Somewhere between Conrad's recognition of the inadequacy of the newspaper as a mode of communication and his more acerbic attack on the Press as the propaganda machine of Empire described in Chapter 1, he accepted and relied on journalism as an essential feature of an increasingly networked world. In his capacity as an author, he depended on publishing in periodicals for income. Moreover, as this letter makes clear, Conrad shrewdly recognized the paper as an index of popular opinion that could provide him with a recipe for future successes. Like Woolf, it is impossible to quote a single statement in Conrad's letters or essays as representative of his views.

Before turning to Woolf's citation of the newspaper in *The Voyage Out*, I consider her extended letter-cum-essay *Three Guineas*, which, unlike Conrad's asides and tangents in his essays, provides sustained engagement with the newspaper. Her most fully-fledged commentary on the newspaper and its relationship to community, *Three Guineas* can shed light on how the imagined space of fiction can counter what she observed as the limitations of its real-life counterpart, which Conrad, too, perceived.

### ***Three Guineas and Benedict Anderson's Imagined Community***

Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* as a response to a question posed to her in a letter: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war" (255). The letter, written by the honorary treasurer of the society for the protection of "culture and intellectual liberty," seeks an answer to his question in addition to Woolf's signature on the society's manifesto and a donation (277). The appeals for her endorsement and money are, by this stage, commonplace; it is the question that Woolf finds remarkable. She writes, "since when

before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented?" (153).

That Woolf perceives this question to be gendered—that is, she is not being asked simply how to prevent war (a burdensome question at that) but how a woman thinks it possible to prevent war—is crucial to the unfolding of her argument. She begins by acknowledging that although she is of “the educated class,” she is acutely unqualified to answer this question (154). Unlike her male interlocutor, Woolf has not received any formal education—a condition enforced rather than chosen freely. She has, rather, the “unpaid-for” type of education at her disposal, and she must therefore consult other, informal resources to answer this question (158). This discrepancy becomes a launching point for Woolf to tackle a history of patriarchal authority in Britain—enforced by the newspaper—that has prevented women from becoming fully integrated members of the public sphere. At its most incendiary moments, the essay develops an interrelationship between this tradition of inequality and fascism on the continent.

Before considering Woolf’s discussion of the newspaper in detail, it may be helpful at this stage to turn to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* as it details a framework for the relationship between the newspaper and community that can elucidate Woolf’s particular argument here, and also inform *The Voyage Out* as it attends to the social implications of a daily press. Although Woolf’s and Conrad’s examples might be read as confirming Anderson’s argument for the pertinence of print capitalism to the conception of modern communities and, by extension, the nation, they do so with many caveats. In this respect, Sartre’s theory of serial collectivity forms a nice compliment to Anderson’s thesis insofar as it provides

another, less idealistic way of approaching the social connection that forms between the readers of this document. Woolf especially anticipates the terms under which Anderson's thesis would be critically interrogated by later theorists.

For Anderson, it is reading the newspaper, like reading the novel, which produces the experience of simultaneity. While we read alone, we can conceive others reading like us. This community is distinctly imagined rather than empirically verifiable: it occurs in silence, often in solitude, and it is impossible to know the many others engaged in this same activity. He elaborates on the implications of this experience of reading the paper:

each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. (35-36)

Finally for Anderson, it is the newspaper's capacity to create a "remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (36). While Woolf and Conrad might agree with Anderson's description of the daily reading of the newspaper as a mass, secular ceremony, one which, undoubtedly, they participated in like their characters in *The Secret Agent* and *The Voyage Out*, they would almost certainly contest Anderson's optimistic interpretation of its social consequences. In his description of the reading experience of the first provincial American papers, Anderson suggests that "various bits of news, unrelated on the page . . . created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom" what were once disparate "ships, brides, bishops and prices" now "belonged" (62). Not only does the experience of reading the paper induce one to consider masses of

anonymous readers engaging in the same activity simultaneously, but what were once simply facts—a ship’s arrival, a marriage announcement, the newly appointed religious leader, or the price of grain—become, through print, our facts or our news.

Partha Chatterjee, one of the notable critics of Anderson’s thesis, argues in his article “Anderson’s Utopia” specifically against his notion of “empty homogenous time,” a prerequisite for the simultaneity of reading that Anderson recognizes as necessary to the development of community. The terms of Chatterjee’s disagreement can help to elucidate Woolf’s ambivalent construction of community vis-à-vis the Press. Discussing the implications of Anderson’s argument for the postcolonial world, Chatterjee contends that it is the:

simultaneity experienced in empty homogenous time that allows us to speak of the reality of such categories of political economy as prices, wages, markets, and so on. Empty homogenous time is the time of capital. Within its domain, capital allows for no resistances to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time—something out of precapital, something that belongs to the premodern. Such resistances to capital (or to modernity) are always thought of as coming out of humanity’s past, something people should have left behind but somehow haven’t. But by imagining capital (or modernity) as an attribute of time itself, this view succeeds not only in branding the resistances to it as archaic and backward, but also in securing for capital and modernity their ultimate triumph, regardless of what some people believe or hope, because after all, as everyone knows, time does not stand still. (131)

Chatterjee asserts that Anderson’s view of modernity is in this sense “mistaken because it is one-sided. It looks at only one dimension of the time-space of modern life. People can only imagine themselves in empty homogenous time; they do not live in it” (131). Drawing on examples from the postcolonial world, Chatterjee describes the time of modernity rather as heterotopic, or “unevenly dense” (131). Empty homogenous time is utopic: “It linearly connects past, present, and future, creating the possibility for all of those historicist imaginings of identity, nation, progress, and so on” (131). This revision of Anderson’s capital as time formulation is crucial for Chatterjee as it has the effect of displacing the West as a model of modernity that the

rest of the world seeks to emulate. Moreover, in drawing attention to formerly colonized countries, Chatterjee indicates that Anderson's attention to the West is misplaced; that is, he might examine how time is experienced in "most of the populated world" (132).

Although Chatterjee is specifically interested in the implications of Anderson's reading of time with respect to the emergence of nationalism in the postcolonial world, his criticism can be described broadly as an attempt to foreground Anderson's exclusions. Framed as questions, Chatterjee asks: Whose experience of time? Whose imagined community? It is in this attempt to narrowly define the agents of community and the conditions necessary for its development that Woolf's treatment of the newspaper in *Three Guineas* resonates with Chatterjee's response. For Chatterjee, the omission largely constitutes the postcolonial experience, which Anderson reads as derivative, while for Woolf, the newspaper's promise of community in Anderson's utopic terms is undermined by the exclusion of women from the public sphere. *Three Guineas* calls into question the degree to which the newspaper can facilitate the experience of simultaneity or identification with anonymous others. It also reveals Anderson's description of the process by which one takes ownership of facts through their reification in print as dependent entirely on the subject-position of the reader.

Critics often argue that the formal qualities of Woolf's essay indicate her anti-fascist, anti-patriarchal position. In keeping with her fictions that feature fluid, oscillating shifts in perspective or "disruptive sentences" instead of a stable authorial voice (Caughie 116), Woolf's embracing of ellipses in *Three Guineas*, her preference for "we" over "I," and the open-endedness of the conclusion have been read as her rejection of totalitarianism. Teresa Winterhalter claims that the essay exceeds a

rejection of fascism; it actually models “the narrative practices she argues must be envisioned to prevent war” (237). However, comparatively little attention has been paid to her frequent citation of the newspaper as either contributing to or detracting from her design. What are the implications of her embedding text from an institution that she regards to be ideologically flawed in an essay written precisely to contest it?

Woolf’s reading notebooks reveal that she had been collecting newspaper articles about women in public space, or lack thereof, and later about war and masculine “spectacle,” for some seven years in preparation for this essay. Merry Pawlowski estimates that she read “no less than 4-6 newspapers a day” including “conservative papers . . . leftist, labor-leaning papers . . . and more glitzy tabloids” (35). The elaborate footnotes to *Three Guineas* are a testament to the breadth and detail of her reading. Her numerous allusions to articles in combination with her studied collection of press cuttings have led some critics to read Woolf as a cultural historian. In fact, Pawlowski interprets the reading notebooks as evidence of the work of a counter-culture historian. Woolf is attentive to articles that might be glossed over by the average reader, including letters to the editor, back page stories, and special interest pieces. This privileging of minor articles demonstrates Woolf’s resistance to “standard versions of contemporary history” (Pawlowski 35). Moreover, Woolf was careful in her arrangement of these pieces in her notebooks. Rather than paste or transcribe them immediately, Woolf postponed affixing them to the page until she could achieve her desired effect. She was especially interested in using juxtaposition to elucidate the ironies governing male perspectives on women.

While her reading notebooks can be recognized retrospectively as cultural artefacts, in the space of *Three Guineas* it is clear that she cites documents primarily to

lend credibility to her core arguments. Ostensibly concerned about the public's perception of her aptitude in the political sphere, she cites the newspaper as an authoritative voice, and her extensive footnotes appeal to the reader as good scholarly practice. Hermione Lee notes that she "braced herself for hostile responses from her circle" before sending it out for publication—and she got them (*Virginia Woolf* 691). Despite her research and years of preparation, her nephew Quentin Bell "thought the essay's argument 'wholly inadequate'." Queenie Leavis of *Scrutiny* called it "silly and ill-informed." Lee writes that Woolf was most offended by Vita Sackville-West's criticism that it was "full of 'misleading arguments'" (qtd. in Lee 692).

Woolf was correct to attempt to pre-empt accusations of ineptitude raised against her: "But, you will interpose, what are these facts? these historical but deplorable facts? Therefore let us place them before you" (*Three Guineas* 189). She likely felt she had to substantiate her opinions with "facts," and it is facts that she accumulates from the papers. For Woolf, "the daily papers bear daily witness to those indisputable facts" of patriarchy, and so "a single quotation from it may save time and limit our inquiry" (260). Across her essay, she engages in a process of telling followed by showing: "But it is obvious, from today's newspaper" (161); "*The Times* newspaper supplies us with figures" (194); "We will consult the newspaper" (226); "here is a newspaper account" (247); "there is the evidence of the daily paper" (250). In short, the newspaper is invoked both as authoritative discourse and as shorthand for an index of male perceptions of women.

However, Woolf also repeatedly acknowledges that the medium she cites to bolster her argument is flawed. How does Woolf's assiduous quotation of the newspaper in this essay criticising patriarchy align with her remark that "the control of

the Press—the decision what to print, what not to print—is entirely in the hands” of men? (167). It is this ambivalence in her recognition of the paper as a flawed but necessary intertext for her work that, anticipating Chatterjee, undermines Anderson’s idealistic description of the experience of community facilitated by print capitalism. Woolf’s question, like Chatterjee’s, might well be: whose community? Or, more specifically, whose England?

Woolf explains that the facts she cites for her essay derive from “such records as are available to an outsider” (189). While the newspaper as a textual object is easily attainable—that is, she can purchase and consume it in common with millions of other readers across England, recalling Anderson’s description—it is also in this act of reading that Woolf is given a view of her marginalization. Through the newspaper’s content, she is made aware of her exclusion from the executive processes of the Press and the public world it both attends to and shapes. While women can “write articles or send letters to the Press,” she writes, “the control of the Press—the decision what to print, what not to print—is entirely in the hands” of men (167). Despite the unpalatability of the medium, however, she has little choice but to cite the newspaper in her attempt to take the pulse of the nation.

There are contiguities between Woolf and Winnie Verloc’s experience of the newspaper in *The Secret Agent*, which I will return to in greater detail, but for now it might be said that where Winnie succumbs to the alienation of the Press, Woolf instead writes *Three Guineas* and imagines an alternative community. Lee notes that in 1934, Woolf was asking herself what “taking part” against the threat of the war would involve: “What could she be doing except just ‘reading the newspapers’?” (*Virginia Woolf* 655). Pawlowski’s rich textual research of Woolf’s reading notebooks

reveals that the newspaper “clippings grow in importance and number against Woolf’s own handwritten notes” across the three volumes that informed *Three Guineas*.

“From 25 in the 67 pages of Volume 1, to 48 in the 59 pages of Volume 2, to 54 in 65 pages of Volume 3,” the newspaper cuttings dominate her pages (34). The visceral effect of the newspaper text—the mounting evidence of the exclusion of women from public life which Woolf connected to militarism—seemed to swallow her words on the page. If she could not contest the imagined community of the newspaper in this space, she would do it elsewhere. As Woolf herself said: “What can I do but write?” (qtd. in Lee 673 ).

As she reflects in her essay on a history of patriarchy, Woolf develops the Outsiders’ Society as an alternative to the community that the Press depicts and inscribes. To reject the community that the English Press imagines is to reject England. As she demonstrates across her essay, to be English is, in this sense, to be complicit with patriarchy. “Our country,” a hypothetical Outsider would say, “throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share of its possessions” (313). In one of the more polemical statements of *Three Guineas*, Woolf writes: “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (313).

Woolf’s disavowal of the nation in *Three Guineas* is impracticable given that this essay also depends on the citation of the newspaper for legitimation. That is, the tensions between the ambitions of *Three Guineas* and its formal features are never fully reconciled. Woolf’s professional relationship to the Press further complicates her appeals to the newspaper. Woolf acknowledges that writing for periodicals is, in fact, one of the few professions available to women because it does not require expensive

materials (284). Woolf herself benefited immensely from literary journalism. Until 1928, she earned more money from her reviews than her fiction. Lee writes that according to Leonard Woolf, Virginia earned £205 from her books from 1909 to 1921 (117). Only after *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Common Reader* “did her earnings from her books go over the magic figure of ‘£500 a year’; only then was she earning more than her husband; only then could she start turning down some of the books she was offered for review” (Lee 117-8). Thus even with the caustic descriptions of the Press in *Three Guineas*, it is difficult to specify Woolf’s relationship to the newspaper with certainty. What *The Voyage Out* makes clear, however, is that the newspaper in her fiction is treated differently. Whereas in *Three Guineas* the question of the newspaper’s content is central to the construction of her essay and forms the thrust of her argument against the possibility of community, in her novel, the newspaper, invested in as a text-object in the manner of *The Good Soldier*, can facilitate community. In other words, the community and connection that cannot occur in life or the paper finds an opportunity in fiction.

### **Waiting for the Newspaper in *The Voyage Out***

The question of Woolf’s development of narrative strategies to create or reveal communities in her fiction is, of course, not new. Apart from the idealized communities of Conrad’s ships, what Raymond Williams describes as a “‘knowable community of a transparent kind’ . . . whose values and traditions are preserved in the anecdotal wisdom of generations of sailors,” “community” is perhaps applied disproportionately to Woolf (qtd. in Greaney 2). Community and connection are frequently read as the desired outcomes of Woolf’s fiction. In addition to her

representations of communal activity like the pageant in *Between the Acts* or the party that concludes *Mrs Dalloway*, her less contrived community scenarios and non-bodily meetings are also the focus of critical attention. In her later fiction especially, critics tend to associate her interest in developing oscillating subjectivities and deauthorized narrations through a fluid and often unsignalled shift in voice with her sense of the connectedness of people. Jessica Berman argues that “out of this mode” of writing “arises a radically modern version of community, one which governs relation within, between, and among subjectivities while seeking to circumvent the tyranny of bodies” (121). For Berman, Woolf’s writing evokes unpredictable, unspoken, and cerebral connections and thus stands at a distance from “conventional modes of construing community in which the group exists as a monolithic, consistent, whole” (122). Where Woolf seems to imbue specific objects with the power to induce connection and community, such as the waves of *The Waves* or the toffee advertisement in *Mrs Dalloway*, these are often approached in a similar vein. Michael Whitworth, for example, reads Woolf’s use of telecommunications technologies such as the telephone and concomitant telephone metaphors as indicative of her attempt to reimagine community vis-à-vis altered perceptions of space and time.<sup>74</sup> That is, the telephone, like the waves and the advertisement, is invoked as a means to produce a new version of community and connection.

This attention to Woolf’s invocation of objects to produce narrative effects or experiences that seem to exceed their express use-value might be traced back to Eric Auerbach’s influential reading of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, and hence is worth

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<sup>74</sup> See Whitworth’s “Woolf’s Web: Telecommunications and Community.” *Virginia Woolf and Communities: Selected Papers from the Eighth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Jeanette McVicker and Laura Davis (New York: Pace University Press, 1999):161-167.

outlining at this point. In his landmark study *Mimesis*, Auerbach considers a scene involving Mrs. Ramsay and a brown stocking. According to Auerbach, the “entirely insignificant occurrence” of Mrs. Ramsay measuring the brown stockings she made for the Lighthouse keeper’s son serves as a vehicle for the expression of a host of Mrs. Ramsay’s and other characters’ unarticulated beliefs and feelings. Importantly, these thoughts—the shabbiness of Mrs. Ramsay’s furniture, the Swiss maid Marie and her ill father, the unattributed phrase “Never did anybody look so sad,” and Mr. Bankes’s desire for Mrs. Ramsay—are not thoughts directly related to the brown stocking, nor each other. The “continuity” of these disparate comments and observations “is established through an exterior occurrence,” which is the measuring of the stocking (529). That the stocking is represented as an opportunity to explore inner thoughts indicates the loss of the “hegemony” of exterior events. According to Auerbach, objects like the brown stocking “serve to release and interpret inner events, whereas before [Woolf’s] time . . . inner movements preponderantly function to prepare and motivate significant exterior happenings. This too is apparent in the randomness and contingency of the exterior occasion” (538). Auerbach interprets Woolf’s narrative strategy as revealing her “attitude toward the reality of the world” she represents, which lacks “objective assurance” (535).

Taken to their logical ends, Auerbach’s, like Whitworth’s and Berman’s, approach to Woolf suggest that she is not much interested in the thingness of the objects she invokes.<sup>75</sup> That is, the materiality of objects is subservient to the immaterial effects they produce. One object might be substituted for another so long as the desired

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<sup>75</sup> For an alternative perspective, see Douglas Mao’s *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). He is interested in taking up the thingness of objects in Woolf’s fiction and Sartre’s fiction; see, for example, his discussion of trees.

effects, themes, or events are produced. And yet there is something objectively assured about the newspaper in *The Voyage Out*, like the “Protest” or telegrams of *The Good Solider*. Its invocation is not merely a resource for exploring community; rather, it is fundamental to Woolf’s expression of community in this novel. Woolf invokes the newspaper to reflect on it as a document—as a textual object—and the uses to which she can put it in the space of the novel rather than a tool to express new versions of community. Unlike *Three Guineas*, the newspaper in *The Voyage Out* derives its efficacy from its physicality rather than its content.

The particular status of the newspaper comes to the fore in the context of Woolf’s dramatization of the many other inset texts of *The Voyage Out*. Though it is not unusual for Woolf’s characters to quote from or be seen reading any number of novels, poems, histories, letters, or newspapers over the course of a novel, in this, her debut work, Woolf seems to be especially concerned with acts of reading that also encompass teaching, translating, and writing. Susan Stanford Friedman describes the novel as “a parable about reading” (“Pedagogical Scenes of Reading” 105). *The Voyage Out*, which references both a literal and figurative journey, is for Friedman a *bildungsroman* concerned with the young protagonist Rachel Vinrace’s sexual and social initiation into adult life. Treated as a *tabula rasa* throughout, Rachel must learn to read life and literature. The novel “examines the place of reading in a narrative of development” (Friedman 105). It is worth noting, however, that Rachel does not make it to adulthood; the novel concludes with her death and therefore might be described more accurately as a failed *bildungsroman*. Jed Esty reads *The Voyage Out* as an

example of the colonial narrative of stalled development, or the frozen-youth trope.<sup>76</sup> Esty argues that Rachel succumbs to imperial authority in the form of patriarchy, and thus is not allowed to transition successfully into adulthood. As I will show, the newspaper takes on particular urgency in light of the colonial setting of the novel, which Esty reads as contributing to its anti-teleological form.

Woolf's foregrounding of reading importantly extends beyond the question of Rachel's progress. That is, Woolf makes no distinction between embedding texts that Rachel reads or hears, and text that she would not have access to such as Susan's diary. Just as a quotation from *Comus* is reproduced in the novel—"There is a gentle nymph not far from hence" (380)—Susan's diary entry, in all of its telegraphic banality, available only to Susan and Woolf's readers, is afforded space in the narrative: "A.M. – Talked to Mrs. H. Eliot about country neighbours. She knows the Manns; also the Selby-Carroways . . ." (115). On some occasions we seem to encounter text as if peering over a character's shoulder, and at other times, we are part of a larger audience. In both cases, Woolf's readers view acts of reading that include and exceed Rachel's experience. More than a "trope for education," reading seems to be *the* activity of the novel (Friedman 109).

A range of genres of writing are represented in the process. Correspondence includes Clarissa's letter to Hester about the "oddest ship you can imagine" and the letters newlyweds Susan and Arthur read together (49). There are several discussions about recommended reading such as *Cowper's Letters* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. From Terence's proposed novel: "Silence, or the Things People don't Say" (255) to

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<sup>76</sup> See Esty's *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, specifically his chapter "Tropics of Youth in Woolf and Joyce."

Willoughby's "documents" that chart the success of his overseas rubber trade (30); Clarissa's reading of Austen's *Persuasion* that puts her husband to sleep, to Hewet's reading of Milton's *Comus* that sets Rachel's illness in motion, and the numerous other real and imagined texts that might be added to this list—including those works such as "Heart of Darkness" that go unnamed—*The Voyage Out* is literally a text consumed by other texts.

Insofar as characters, including Rachel but importantly also several others, lend these texts to one another and engage in discussions about what they have read, Woolf suggests that reading can prompt connections between people who otherwise have little in common. Though characters might (and often do) differ in their responses to Austen, Cowper, or Gibbon, their shared experience of reading these authors, which results in both consensus and debate over their value, realizes a community of readers. Thus Clarissa and the sailor Mr. Grice connect on the basis of Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*, while Rachel and Hirst overcome their initial awkwardness when he sends her a volume of Gibbon, which also forms a point of connection for Mrs. Flushing, Hewet, Ridley, and Helen. Without devaluing the importance of this activity, this type of community formation is presented as forced, if not superficial. Shared reading experiences are often the result of a coordinated effort such as Susan's engagement party, Hewet's expedition, and the journey upriver to observe a native village. In other words, these attempts at forging connections are initiated consciously by characters. The newspaper, however, presents a different case. Its capacity for connection is neither the result of the meditated actions of any one character nor a special dispensation of the narrator; rather, it occurs on the basis of its status as a ubiquitous textual object. This special potential of the newspaper in

the novel represents Woolf's marked "departure" from *Three Guineas*, though this is the later text.

Despite, as I have suggested, the many instances of characters reading across the novel, it is crucial to note that our access to this reading material is selective. This detail proves significant to the novel's investment in the newspaper as a textual object, along the lines of documents in *The Good Soldier*, *Passing*, or *An Outcast of the Islands* discussed in earlier chapters. Though we might be aware of titles of works or the types of texts that characters write and read in *The Voyage Out*, such as letters, notes, or fictions, we are not provided with the corresponding sentences as a matter of course. In one of the more explicit examples of these exclusions, Woolf's third-person omniscient narrator censors Mrs. Ambrose's "very long letter" in a moment of Victorian intervention (103). After some paraphrasing and direct quotation, Mrs. Ambrose comes to the subject of her niece's ignorance of the relations between men and women. The ellipses in this section ostensibly represent Mrs. Ambrose's reference to Rachel's ignorance of the male and female anatomies, though we cannot be absolutely sure. The narrator's parenthetical statement "(here Mrs Ambrose's letter may not be quoted)" reminds us that there are either whole documents or parts of them obscured to us (105).

Given the fact that Woolf's narrator is able to, for example, dart in and out of the minds of characters to recount their dreams, we might consider why she largely withholds the text of the newspaper from view. That is, despite her omniscience, some and not all of what she "knows" is made available. The effect of this narrative non-attention to the text of the newspaper is, I suggest, to heighten our awareness of it as a physical presence. The emphasized materiality of the newspaper recalls Hewet

and Rachel's sense that words might be touched or felt. One could "almost handle" Milton's words (380). Rachel encounters words as "though they were made of wood, separately of great importance, and possessed of shapes like tables and chairs" (138). The newspaper, however, is one of the rare texts in the novel that is taken up as an object while eschewing any serious engagement with its content. In other words, its thingness is privileged over its textuality. As I will demonstrate, the newspaper's facilitation of community is a feature precisely of its materiality—the very exterior occurrence that approaches like that of Auerbach, Berman, and Whitworth deemphasize.

The newspaper makes a noteworthy appearance in the introduction to the second section of the novel, located in the fictional South American coastal town of Santa Marina. It is worth considering how this scene unfolds in detail as two conceptions of community emerge from Woolf's deployment of the paper. Sometime between the "extinction of Hewet's candle" in the evening and breakfast in the morning, newspapers are laid out in the Villa San Gervasio where several British travellers take rooms. This section begins: "Directly breakfast was over, the ladies as usual circled vaguely, picking up papers and putting them down again, about the hall" (122). As characters are drawn towards the papers—stealing glances at the latest headlines, waiting for another to finish with their copy, or merely glancing in their direction—bodies collide. Mrs. Elliot drifts "up against" Miss Warrington and this becomes the impetus for a few sentences to be exchanged between them. Mrs. Elliot, whose "eyes moved from thing to thing as they never found anything sufficiently pleasant to rest upon," catches a newspaper headline. She exclaims: "The poor little Queen of Holland!" (123). This exclamation becomes an opportunity for Woolf to

introduce Miss Allan: “‘Were you talking of the Queen of Holland?’ said the pleasant voice of Miss Allan, who was searching for the thick pages of *The Times* among a litter of thin foreign sheets.” A short conversation ensues and then Miss Allan, “perceiving *The Times* at some distance...moved off to secure it” (123).

Though Mrs. Elliot and Miss Warrington, the pair that began the scene, part ways, we do not follow them out of the hall; rather, we remain with the papers. Next to enter are “a very respectable elderly pair,” who “having inspected the long table of newspapers, did not think it worth their while to read more than the headlines” (124). Rather than read the foreign papers, the Thornburys, observing that Miss Allan has *The Times*, sit down to wait their turn. In the interim, they strike up a conversation with Mr. Hewet. Finally, Miss Allan, perceiving that her newspaper is in demand, offers it to the Thornburys. At this stage, the participants in the conversation increase to four people. A discussion ensues about each character’s particular style of reading the paper. Casual remarks such as, “I begin with the debates first” (125), or “I confine myself to cricket and crime” (126), indicate the habitualness of paper-reading, echoing Anderson’s description of the consumption of the daily paper as like a secular ceremony. By this time, Mr. Thornbury, frustrated with the news of the debate he has been reading, drops the paper on the table: “the sheets fell in the middle of the group and were eyed by them all” (126). The paper, on the floor and at the centre of the foursome, initiates a comic pastiche of quotations and interjections as Hewet, Mrs. Thornbury, and Hirst interrupt each other with partial references to different news stories.

Even as the group peters out and preparations for lunch are underway, the narrator reminds us of the location of the newspaper. As the men exit the hall for their

walk, the ladies are left alone, “surrounding *The Times* which lay upon the floor” (127). In what appears to be a tiresome dialogue with Mrs. Elliot, Mrs. Thornbury picks “up *The Times*” to encourage Mrs. Elliot’s exit (129). The scene finally ends with a description of the resting place of the newspaper: it is “directly beneath the clock.” Uncannily anticipating Anderson’s thesis, the narrator interprets the positioning of the newspaper and the clock as, “together seeming to represent stability in a changing world” (129). We return to a similar scene at the conclusion of the novel. The morning after Rachel’s abrupt death, we are reminded that the newspaper, like time, never stops. Although no conversation about the paper ensues, the routine continues. The newspaper is an assured presence and reassuring. It is worth noting that the home to Greenwich Mean Time is the target of a bombing attempt in *The Secret Agent*. The Observatory is, however, unscathed. In Conrad’s novel, too, time and the newspaper persist.

The first expression of community that might be extracted from this section largely runs along the lines of Anderson’s argument. The newspaper develops connections amongst the hotel residents insofar as it enables them to conceive themselves as English. To be sure, this is not the newspaper in the colony of “An Outpost of Progress” or “Heart of Darkness” in that Woolf does not specifically address the newspaper as a vehicle for imperialist jargon. Unlike Conrad’s papers in the outposts of empire, which are appealed to by colonialists as corroborating and justifying their “work,” it is the weighty materiality of the paper in Woolf’s novel that is privileged. However, the anticipation of touching this object and being near to it emerges through circumstances similar to those depicted in Conrad’s colonial stories. Englishness, and the English paper, acquires new relevance in the outposts of empire.

That is, the importance of one's Englishness comes into view as soon as England is out of view. As Clarissa Dalloway remarks onboard the *Euphrosyne*, "Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid—what it really means to be English" (51). Nowhere is the question of Englishness more pressing than in the voyage scene of the novel, replete with echoes of "Heart of Darkness." Though these characters have names, and by this stage we are well acquainted with them, the narrator refers to the members of the expedition upriver as "the English" (309). With the prospect of meeting natives, the anxiety over their racial difference manifests in the narrator's repeated gestures to nationality. Their self-importance, echoed by the smug approval of the "thick" pages of *The Times*, is finally undermined when the natives do not seem to appreciate the difference they represent. Hewet admits of this anti-climax: "it makes us seem insignificant, doesn't it?" (332).

Under these constraints, the English characters' casual and consistent dismissal of any paper excepting *The Times* is revealing. From the outset, the foreign papers seem to be at a disadvantage. They are described as thin and flimsy in contrast to the *The Times*, suggesting a direct link between physical and intellectual substance. The narrator notes the characters' disinclination for foreign papers as eminently English: "Whether the flimsiness of foreign sheets and the coarseness of their type is any proof of frivolity and ignorance, there is no doubt that English people scarce consider news read there as news" (123-4). The narrator discloses that Mr. Elliot "has a profound knowledge of Coptic, which he concealed as far as possible," in addition to French. Tellingly, he does not put his facility in other languages to use in the Villa San Gervasio. He explains to the other guests, "You might read your news in French, which is equivalent to reading no news at all" (126-7).

Although the characters do not seem to do much reading, or engage with the news stories seriously, they are in agreement that the English paper represents “their news.” It is worth noting that *The Times* represented a conservative, pro-Empire line. It was a paper “written for the country’s higher classes and controlling minority” (Westman 5). To be near the paper, or to touch it, is enough to corroborate their identity as English. The singularity of the English paper in Santa Marina emerges with greater force during a parallel discussion about how each character practices this daily rite at home: where they read the paper, which section they read first, and the articles they avoid. Characters anxiously attempt to reproduce the conditions of their reading in England in Santa Marina. The English paper abroad becomes a material link to a life in England, dependent entirely on the recognized ubiquity of this document at home. Englishness, as devised by the newspaper, becomes the basis for the sense of community these characters experience. Their engagement with the newspaper at home, however, is not likely to invite the same pride in its thick pages or the same sense of belonging that attends its possession in the Villa San Gervasio. Even if we set aside Woolf’s argument in *Three Guineas* that the newspaper exposes the social divides that fracture the nation and is, in part, responsible for preventing its cohesion, it appears that the community established vis-à-vis the newspaper in Santa Marina could not exist as it stands in England. While a few characters do discover that they share an acquaintance at home, these links prove “cynically fragile, and sometimes painfully acute, lacking as they did the supporting background of organized English life” (255)—and this, perhaps, is where the English paper plays its defining role abroad. Even so, it is not simply a matter of transplanting an extant community from England to Santa Marina. There is no reason to expect to find Susan, Helen, Hewet,

and Evelyn in addition to the many other characters in the same drawing-room in London. This detail proves central to the second sense of community that the newspaper establishes, which I suggest contributes to the possibility of the novel.

Jean Paul Sartre's description of passive unification can clarify this particular effect of Woolf's citation of the newspaper. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre defines different experiences of social collectivity. Although his complex exploration of the relations between people and things is part of a broader interest in social class, his concept of seriality is particularly relevant to Woolf and, as I demonstrate in the following section, Conrad. Sartre uses the example of people waiting for a bus—a “practico-inert object”: practical in terms of human action but inert in its materiality—to elucidate the social collective he calls seriality.

The unity of the collection of commuters lies in the bus they are waiting for; in fact it is the bus, as a simple possibility of transport (not for transporting all of us, for we do not act together, but for transporting each of us)...their acts of waiting are not communal fact, but are lived separately as identical instances of the same act. (262)

The idea of seriality emerges in the implied structure of waiting for the bus together:

Everyone realizes [the serial structure] for himself and confirms it for Others through his own individual *praxis* and his own ends. This does not mean that he helps to create an active group by freely determining, with other individuals, the end, the means, and the division of tasks; it means that he *actualises* his being-outside-himself as a reality shared by several people and *which already exists, and awaits him*, by means of an inert practice, denoted by instrumentality, whose meaning is that it integrates him into an ordered multiplicity by assigning him a place in a prefabricated seriality. (265)

Sartre here suggests that the bus already implies a structure of behaviour that each commuter acknowledges and attends to insofar as the commuter is able to recognize himself or herself as both an individual and an Other in a material environment. As the commuter knows he or she is waiting for the bus, he or she can also recognize the same action taken by Others. The commuter acknowledges that “he constitutes himself in a gathering as an objective element of a series” on the basis of a shared

orientation to the bus. While there is a latent potential for the gathering to become a group—that is, they could articulate a common aspiration—as it stands, the collective is passive. The commuters here retain their own motivations while being attached to the same object.

Like the bus of Sartre's example, the newspaper in *The Voyage Out* implies a seriality that the characters acknowledge and reproduce. Woolf's decision to include only one copy of *The Times* is crucial in this respect. As one character is in possession of this copy, the others must wait. It is in the space of waiting that bodies collide and conversations ensue. Though each character, as an individual, awaits their chance with this copy, they are aware of the existence of Others waiting, and this, in Sartre's language, produces unity. Though their aims and beliefs are not articulated and agreed on as a "group"—a term Sartre would therefore not attribute to this type of social collective—they do form a gathering, at the centre of which stands the object: the newspaper. Through Sartre, this gathering—what I have been calling a community—emerges as a fact rather than a privileged social outcome. While Berman sees Woolf's non-monolithic communities as the creations of specifically cerebral or non-bodily connection, this example of the newspaper presents an alternative: physical unity occurs while alterity is preserved.

As Woolf represents the serial structure of the newspaper, it is a fictional opportunity. Through the physical circulation of the newspaper that I traced earlier and the bodies and conversations that follow as a result, Woolf is able to draw a distinct cast of character types together in a manner, for example, far less contrived than Hewet's picnic. Hirst understands the Villa to be distinctly divided into several communities, served by "types": "You could draw circles round the whole lot of them,

and they'd never stray outside" (118). According to Hirst, "Mr Hughling Elliot, Mrs Hughling Elliot, Miss Allan, Mr and Mrs Thornbury" comprise one circle; "Miss Warrington, Mr Arthur Venning, Mr Perrott, Evelyn M. another circle; then there are a whole lot of natives; finally ourselves" (118). While Woolf can contain these characters in her fictional hotel in the fictional South American port town of Santa Marina, how will she make them interact? What can be the impetus for character types to connect with other types: to move beyond their circles?

Through the newspaper, Woolf is able to expand the scope of her fiction in a manner that speaks specifically to the material reality of her characters. They are drawn toward this document as a matter of course. As they experience the need to possess it and be proximate to it under the particular constraints of their distance from home, characters are allowed to emerge alongside one another in passive unities that have the capacity to—and do—lead to the formation of groups during the expedition, tea, and Susan's engagement party, to give a few examples. As much as this novel is a consideration of one young woman's social initiation, it is also a study in failed interactions, awkward conversation, and those singular moments when characters seem to make connections despite the education, life experiences, and social classes that otherwise set them apart. It is in this respect that the newspaper is a privileged text. While it lacks the credentials of the celebrated Austen or Gibbon, and though it is rarely engaged with as serious reading, it is able to perform work in the narrative that *Persuasion* and *Decline and Fall* cannot claim to do.

## ***The Secret Agent* and Collectivity**

Woolf's examples of community formation vis-à-vis the newspaper present an opportunity to rethink the multiple appearances of this document in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. That is, the dominance of the newspaper might be accounted for by reasons other than the characters'—and Conrad's—persistent critical scepticism.

Michael Greaney, in his incisive and persuasive excavation of the multiple and competing registers to be found in *The Secret Agent*, argues nonetheless for just this point. In *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*, Greaney suggests that the novel is exemplary of Conrad's distaste for the newspaper:

The mass-circulation newspaper is for Conrad the symptom par excellence of modern linguistic degeneration; and its readership, that ill-defined entity known as 'the public', is a pale shadow of the vibrant linguistic communities to be found elsewhere in his fiction. There could scarcely be a more graphic counterpoint to the powerful longevity of oral tradition than the newspapers that litter the landscape of *The Secret Agent*. (142)

This aversion to the newspaper, however, is complicated by the fact that *The Secret Agent* is indebted to it. Greaney continues: "one suspects . . . that the disgust lavished on newsprint by *The Secret Agent* is a form of deflected self-loathing: the novel heaps odium on a narrative mode that it all too clearly resembles (143). Greaney's interpretation, like Arac's cited earlier, is quoted here as representative. Despite the novel's linguistic familiarity with the newspaper, it is read as a transient medium: its proper place is in the gutters of Conrad's London. Journalism is inferior to other forms of writing and undoubtedly discursively inferior to the celebrated oral communities of Conrad's other fictions. Such interpretations are symptomatic of the critical mainstay that Conrad develops strategies to efface the writtenness of his work. However, as I have attempted to show across this thesis, once the document—including the newspaper—is reoriented to the centre of his practice, a very different story

materializes. Especially with Woolf's example at hand, it emerges that the newspaper is fundamental to Conrad's formation of community in *The Secret Agent*, which, as I will illustrate, is the very crux of this novel. The newspaper is not invoked as that which *The Secret Agent* anxiously measures itself against, as Arac and Greaney would argue, but instead forms its conditions of possibility.

The newspaper is everywhere and nowhere in *The Secret Agent*. That is, though it may be seen on desks, in the streets, and folded into coat pockets, its text is rarely reproduced in the narrative—with the exception of those few remarkable lines describing Winnie's suicide, which I return to in the conclusion. Moreover, the newspapers of *The Secret Agent* are seldom read. While at one time or another Verloc, Vladimir, the Assistant Commissioner, Chief Inspector Heat, Winnie, the Professor, and even Toodles reference the paper or might be seen with a copy in hand, they are not described in the act of reading it. So while Verloc responds to Vladimir's accusation of ignorance by "intimating hoarsely that he was in the habit of reading the daily papers" (26); the Assistant Commissioner circumvents Toodles' elaboration of the attacks on Sir Ethelred's proposed Bill with his response: "I read the papers" (145); and in answer to Heat's question of Winnie's familiarity with a certain "affair," Winnie, we are told, had "glanced at the morning paper as usual" that day (204), Stevie and Ossipon are the only visible newspaper readers in the novel. Their particular ways of reading have been taken up by Peter Nohrnberg who suggests that the novel uses these characters to satirize an Edwardian reading public in the vein of Conrad's criticism of mass readers in "Autocracy and War."<sup>77</sup> For Patricia Pye, that the news is not read but largely heard suggests Conrad's characters inhabit a "transitional age": they are shown

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<sup>77</sup> See Peter Nohrnberg, "I wish He'd Never Been to School': Stevie, Newspapers and the Reader in *The Secret Agent*." *Conradiana* 35 (2003): 49-61.

“negotiating the progression from an ‘oral-cum-written’ society” (54). Nohrnberg’s and Pye’s astute readings cannot, however, explain the ubiquity of newspapers. Why do these documents appear across London and at regular intervals across the novel if they are hardly ever read?

*The Voyage Out*, as it clarifies Sartre’s concept of seriality, is a productive approach to Conrad’s deployment of the newspaper. In Woolf’s novel, the paper is invoked as part of an unshakeable routine. Even Rachel’s illness cannot prevent Hirst from picking up *The Times*, and her death has no bearing on its punctual appearance at the Villa San Gervasio the following morning. The newspaper in *The Secret Agent* is also a certain presence, although the significance of its certainty derives from a different set of constraints. Like Woolf’s strategic non-engagement with the text of the newspaper in *The Voyage Out*, the lack of narrative space afforded to the reproduction of newspaper text in Conrad’s novel serves to emphasize it as a physical feature of London rather than a text given to mimetic reproduction, which is, perhaps, more typical of the way we encounter documents in his fictions. As the narrator of *The Secret Agent* recounts this “tale” of impotent anarchism, including a botched attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory culminating in the domestic drama of a wife’s revenge on her husband for the loss of her brother, the newspaper is invoked consistently. What is remarkable about the frequency of the newspaper appearances in *The Secret Agent*, more so than in the Woolf, is the spectrum of locations in which we encounter it. From the drawing rooms of the elite, to the clandestine meeting places of anarchists, from police headquarters to the seemingly impenetrable inner precincts of the Foreign Embassy, the newspaper is a pervasive and unemphatic, and hence noteworthy, presence like wallpaper.

Conrad seems to have been well aware that in telling Winnie's story, the professed *raison d'être* of his novel, he would be required to enter into these disparate segments of London society. In the process, he would draw from established character types. Several critics have noted Conrad's indebtedness to genres including detective fiction and spy thrillers but also the very newspaper accounts of the Greenwich Bomb Outrage of 1894, which Conrad almost certainly read.<sup>78</sup> In his "Author's Note" to the novel, Conrad describes the Embassy's Mr. Vladimir as "fair game for a caricatural presentation" (xiii). Conrad is congratulated on this creation; it is either his familiarity with that "sphere"; that is, high ranking foreign government officials, or "his excellent intuition of things" that produce his accurate portrayal of the profession. If Vladimir is a type, the same is true of Conrad's anarchists. Conrad expresses satisfaction in the further compliment he receives that "the book was written by somebody who knew a lot about *them*" (emphasis added xiv). The Assistant Commissioner and Chief Inspector Heat are the constructs of another professional world, Sir Ethelred and the great lady patroness of Michaelis another, and Winnie, her mother, and Stevie constitute yet another social group. According to Conrad, these "personages" are brought "out in front of the London background" by the case of Winnie Verloc (xiii). "*This book,*" the "story of Winnie Verloc" is "suggested and centred round the absurd cruelty of the Greenwich Park explosion" (xii).

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<sup>78</sup> See Greaney on the novel's relation to popular genres. Norman Sherry's investigative work reveals the many similarities between the explosion in *The Secret Agent* and the reports published by *The Times* and the *Morning Leader* about an attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in 1894. The culprit, Martial Bourdin, blew himself up instead. Bourdin's brother-in-law, Mr. Samuels, was a leading anarchist in London. See Sherry, *Conrad's Western World*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). See also the more recent work of Cedric Watts, "Contexts for *The Secret Agent*, with a Letter from R. B. Cunninghame Graham to H. B. Samuels." *The Conradian* 36.1 (2011): 81-88.

Push Conrad's analysis of the architecture of his tale only a little further, however, and there appears another decisive factor in the containment of these disparate "figures" between the covers of *The Secret Agent*: the newspaper ("Author's Note" xii). The newspaper produces the community through which Winnie's story takes shape. That is, the Greenwich bombing and its manifold material consequences derive from each character's investment in the newspaper. Just as proximity to the newspaper could unify what Hirst described as the assorted "types" housed in the Villa San Gervasio of *The Voyage Out*, the newspaper develops the cast of characters of *The Secret Agent* into a community. Not only is it invoked as a physical prop which, in its circulation, serves to draw a map of London that includes the disjunctive locations represented by the novel as I have already suggested, but it also implies a more fundamental connection between characters that, as with Woolf, might be elucidated by Sartre's concept of seriality.

Like the commuters of Sartre's bus example, the characters of Conrad's novel also wait for the dispensation of an object—the newspaper—in unison. Once again, Sartre's emphasis on the possibility of attaining social collectivity through objects without surmounting the differences between individuals is fundamental to Conrad's deployment of the newspaper. For Sartre, each commuter's investment in the bus's arrival is a shared experience, insofar as each person, through the recognition of Others waiting, discerns himself or herself to also be a commuter. However, the differences between each commuter are not effaced by their shared dependency on the bus; that is, the commuters are not acting "together" (262).<sup>79</sup> My emphasis on

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<sup>79</sup> There is a distinction to make here between "the newspaper" in *The Secret Agent* and *The Times* in *A Voyage Out* with respect to Sartre's concept of seriality. Whereas there is a specific issue or copy in demand in Woolf's novel, in *The Secret Agent*, it is the newspaper at large.

“community” in this respect, and my invocation of Sartre in particular, is, as with Woolf, to divest community of social value or utopic elements. Rather, this focus on the newspaper and the community work it accomplishes is an attempt to elucidate the document as a narrative strategy: to reorient the newspaper to the question of Conrad’s practice.

It is the characters’ collective dependency on the newspaper that produces the bombing as a necessary event. As Vladimir makes evident, the idea for the bombing emerges specifically from its potential to acquire meaning as it is written up and disseminated through the popular press. Vladimir rails against Verloc for his failure to stir the popular imagination with his anarchist activities to date: “every newspaper has readymade phrases to explain such manifestations away” (32). Alternatively, what is needed is an event that goes “beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive” (32). The idea that follows—an attempt to blow up science—is calculated on the basis of the response it will produce in the press, which should, in turn, incite the police to pursue resident anarchists actively. Vladimir exclaims in self-congratulatory tones: “I defy the ingenuity of journalists to persuade their public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy. Starvation itself could hardly be dragged in there—eh?” (34-35). If the newspaper cannot offer up possible justifications for this act of violence, it will be viewed as “gratuitous blasphemy,” which is precisely the outcome Vladimir requires for the police to be pressured into action (33).

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Sartre’s bus example describes the experience of waiting for the bus at a particular bus stop (and not all bus stops). However, since I treat the newspaper as a singular, undefined object in Conrad’s novel, it seems to me that Sartre’s definition of seriality obtains.

This brief but significant exchange with Verloc largely explains the terms for each group's investment in the material effects of the newspaper. Vladimir acknowledges that he relies on the press to further his ends but also to direct his actions as his most recent idea, predicated on the press's assumed response, indicates. However, his relationship to the newspaper—which might therefore be characterized as reciprocal—is only effectual insofar as the police and the anarchists are just as invested in this document. Vladimir is aware, for example, that the direction of the police's activities is based on popular opinion, as promulgated by the press. Hence, once the newspapers cite the bombing as pure destruction, the police will assume a directed course of action. In terms of Sartre's seriality, though Vladimir is not, so to speak, reliant on the newspaper "together" with the police and anarchists; that is, they have not formed a group on the basis of a shared set of aspirations and do not hope for the same results, he registers himself as one in a series of figures reliant on the press. Without this recognition, not only would the collective not exist, but the object—the newspaper—would lose its efficacy for all parties.

The Assistant Commissioner and Chief Inspector Heat, in addition to the anarchists, necessarily corroborate Vladimir's articulation of the community that emerges through the newspaper. Again, if they did not—if, for example, the characters of the novel were all modelled on the Professor who consciously extricates himself from the press—the Greenwich bombing would be meaningless and Winnie's outrage, as it is developed through this event, would be unfounded. As Vladimir predicts, the police are put under pressure once the bombing, despite missing its target, is reported. Heat is prepared to offer up a name to the press should the public "think fit to roar with any special indignation in this case" (114). The name he intends

to submit is Michaelis, though the Assistant Commissioner is keen to prevent any such suggestion. The rift that ensues between the Commissioner and his subordinate has little to do with the relative innocence or guilt of Michaelis, but relates to the newspaper. On his release from prison, Michaelis had the good fortune of receiving the press's sympathy "by some emotional journalists in want of special copy" (122). Conrad's inclusion of Michaelis's backstory speaks directly to the serial structure of the newspaper. It is through the demonstrated results or effects of the newspaper object that its collective structure is known. Heat can therefore speculate that "the journalists who had written [Michaelis] up with emotional gush would be ready to write him down with emotional indignation" (122). Based on what came before, Heat knows the terms of his relation to the newspaper at present. The Assistant Commissioner, only too aware of this possible outcome, attempts to redirect Heat's investigation so that he will not lose favour with the "great lady" patroness of Michaelis, who took up Michaelis's cause at the time the press made it fashionable to do so.

Even Heat is not immune to the personal threat the newspaper poses. Verloc's intention to make the plot public "meant the disclosure of many things—the laying waste of fields of knowledge" (210). Heat's "system of supervision," his anarchist informant, and the innocence of Michaelis, whose guilt he boasted of to his superior, would be revealed to the public. It "appeared to him by a sudden illumination" that the papers were "as invariably written by fools for the reading of imbeciles" (211). This observation is less a consummate rejection of the newspaper than Heat's realization that the medium which furthered his career could also be influenced by another party to undermine his reputation.

The anarchists, too, appeal anxiously to the newspaper to direct their actions but also seek within it an opportunity to advance their ambitions. Ossipon learns of the bombing through the newspaper and worries over the perception of his guilt. He confides to the Professor: "No doubt they are aware well enough that we had nothing to do with this...What they will say is another thing" (77). Ossipon immediately considers how he might use the press to protect himself. He will solicit Michaelis "to speak from his heart" at an anarchist gathering. Michealis proves a good candidate because "his name is known." Ossipon continues, "And I am in touch with a few reporters on the big dailies" (77-8). Like Vladimir, the Assistant Commissioner, and Heat, Ossipon can anticipate the outcome of the event he proposes due to the already established serial structure of the newspaper. He knows the papers will be keen to report on Michaelis and more importantly, he expects that the ensuing article will influence the police investigation. The police may avoid pursuing Michaelis or his associates if it means operating against public sentiment.

In this way, through their appeals to the newspaper and investment in its material effects, the various segments of Conrad's London are brought together and revealed to be part of a complexly knit community that rely on each other's interest in the press as part of defining their own relationship to it and each other. It is worth noting that part of what characterizes their orientation to the newspaper is its unpredictability; thus the newspaper presents a much more nuanced case of a practico-inert object than Sartre's bus example. Unlike the paper as it is envisioned in *A Voyage Out*, no character in this novel can calculate with accuracy what the newspaper will print and exactly how the public will respond. Heat may plan, for example, to offer up Michaelis as a suspect, but "it was impossible to say yet whether

it would roar or not. That in the last instance depended, of course, on the newspaper press" (114).

Drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulation," Peter Mallios argues persuasively that *The Secret Agent* entertains "a written relationship to events . . . that is so powerful that the elements of representation and of a differentiated, autonomous reality drop out entirely, the world instead being scripted, constituted, supplanted by the media and models that are brought to bear upon it" (Reading *The Secret Agent* 170). That is, the newspaper might *produce* rather than report the facts. The report of the bombing may or may not willingly corroborate what Verloc knows to have occurred, and is, in this sense, unpredictable. However, as Conrad represents the newspaper in this novel, the degree to which the newspaper is faithful to facts is irrelevant because it supplants them: the paper's version of events becomes their reality. Though Mallios does not make this observation, it seems worth pointing out that for all the allusions to the Press, there is no journalist character like Kurtz, Decoud, or the Editor of "The Planter of Malata." No individual personality emerges from the press, and there is no one of its writers to appeal to in the process of producing a story. Hence, the newspaper appears to be an authorless document; it is the document-writ-large.

There is, however, one character intent on being outside the community that the all-powerful newspaper instantiates, and his relative failure, according to the perspective of the narrative, can help bring the urgency of the collectivity that forms around the newspaper into view. The Professor rejects the paper for reasons very different to Michaelis. While the ticket-of-leave apostle refrains from reading newspapers because they "make him too sad" (302)—despite owing his celebrity

status and book contract to the press—the Professor refuses to subject himself to the paper’s potentially caustic unpredictability by neither producing news for it, nor allowing it to direct his work. That is, he chooses not to submit himself to its validation or denunciation. “The condemned social order has not been built up by paper and ink,” he explains to Ossion, “and I don’t fancy a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it” (70).

To be sure, the “paper and ink” of *The Secret Agent* is not the same “paper and ink” criticized by the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* where documents issued by the Harbour Office fail to represent the reality of life at sea (176). Rather, the “paper and ink” of *The Secret Agent*, as Mallios suggests, is precisely the reality that characters must contend with—irrespective of its relation to truth or facts—if they are to have any hope of furthering their ambitions. As a young man the Professor believed success could be obtained without “arts, graces, tact, wealth,” but through “merit alone” (80). “To see” his skill go unrewarded “opened his eyes to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous” (81). Therefore, in rejecting “paper and ink” and its supporting institutions—expressions of the world that failed him—the Professor learns to endow himself with the affirmation he seeks: “by exercising his agency with ruthless defiance he procured for himself the appearances of power and personal prestige” (81). However, as suggested by the community work the newspaper performs, the narrative proves the Professor’s assessment of the power of documents to be naïve. Moreover, the consequence of choosing to exist outside the world they circumscribe is to not exist at all. The Professor is reduced to “a force”: a walking bomb (311). The teeming streets of London form his nightmare vision of serial collectivity.

## A Case for Connection?

Finally, the conclusion of *The Secret Agent* suggests two compelling scenarios of connection. In the first instance, the paper's description of Winnie's suicide facilitates a personal connection. In contrast to the broad, though perceptible, social networks initiated by serial collectivity that I have described thus far, connection here entails identification with another person. Ossipon's imagined connection to Winnie is based on his incessant and unsatisfactory rereading of her death in the paper. Ossipon keeps the article titled "Suicide of Lady Passenger from a cross-Channel Boat," safely folded into his pocket. He "knew every word by heart" and "he was menaced by this thing in the very sources of his existence" (307). The last line of the article reads: "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair" (307). It is worth noting that this represents one of the few moments in the novel in which newspaper text is reproduced. Fragments of the phrase are repeated several times over the final pages of *The Secret Agent*. The narrator tells us that Ossipon "saw his own brain pulsating to the rhythm of an impenetrable mystery" (310). A page later, the narrator revises this description and offers it as a judgement: Ossipon is an example of "the mystery of a human brain pulsating wrongfully to the rhythm of journalistic phrases" (311). It is clear that the report of Winnie's death has made an impression on him.

One interpretation of this scene suggests that Ossipon is dangerously uncritical of the Press in the manner of Winnie before her suicide. Matthew Rubery, for example, argues in *The Novelty of the News* that, like Winnie, Ossipon's return to the newspaper phrase is merely "repetition without insight" (146). In this respect, Ossipon's

continuous revisiting of the article is prefigured by Winnie's obsessive return to the newspaper phrase "The drop given was fourteen feet" (268). After murdering her husband, Winnie begins to imagine the scene of her hanging. She appeals to her recollection of newspaper reports, which "never gave any details except one." This detail—"The drop given was fourteen feet"—"came with a cruel burning pain into her head, as if the words . . . had been scratched on her brain with a hot needle" (268). The newspaper's words penetrate her subjectivity with crippling effect: Winnie's projection and then internalization of the newspaper's sentence on murderers anticipates her suicide. Woolf's demonstration of the necessity of critical distance from newspaper discourse in *Three Guineas* never appeared so urgent. It is one of the novel's great ironies that in her desperate attempt to avoid becoming the subject of an article, she produces news anyway. Winnie, for whom we are repeatedly told "life doesn't stand much looking into," never quite grasps the extent to which the personages that surround her, including Ossipon, are committed to the newspaper that both anticipates and reifies her end. Insofar as Winnie expresses an opinion of the Press, she complains that the incendiary papers displayed in the shop prove ghastly reading material for the impressionable Stevie. Recalling the Professor, Winnie naively asks: "what's the use of printing things like that?" (60). She cannot know that by the end the very same question might be posed of the words that communicate her tragedy.

However, there is an important difference between Ossipon and Winnie. While both might be easily influenced, Ossipon evinces a weak but critical stance to the newspaper. His recognition of the inability of the newspaper to give adequate representation to Winnie's death is the impetus for his imaginative connection with

her. A brief reading of James Joyce's "A Painful Case" in *Dubliners* (1914) can help to illustrate this subtle and, I think, often overlooked aspect of Ossipon's response to the newspaper. Like *The Secret Agent*, death in "A Painful Case," brings the connective capacity of the newspaper into view. The protagonist, James Duffy's response to the newspaper provides a gloss on Ossipon's new, agitated condition.

James Duffy, who had "neither companions nor friends, church nor creed," slowly develops a close connection to the married Mrs. Sinico, which "exalted him" (268, 270). On one of Duffy's many visits to her, Mrs. Sinico displays a gesture of affection suggesting her interest in him exceeds friendship. Duffy decides to end their acquaintance out of propriety, and Mrs. Sinico is visibly shaken. Four years pass, and Duffy has returned to his daily routine with no visible change. As he is apt to do, Duffy reads "the evening paper for dessert" (271). Joyce suggests the news is a commodity to be consumed at the same time that he emphasizes the ascetic character of Duffy. On one of these evenings, Duffy comes across an article detailing Mrs. Sinico's death. The article is reproduced as an inset document, like the diary entries of *The Shadow-Line* and the letters in *Passing*. Lacking, perhaps, "the beauties of [the] journalistic style" of Winnie's article (SA 307), the article reports the details of the death of Mrs. Sinico by train. While the article intimates that her misjudgment at the train crossing could be the result of a very recently acquired drinking habit, the incident is described as an accident. Duffy is infuriated by the article: "the whole narrative of her death revolted him . . . The threadbare phrases, the inane expressions of sympathy, the cautious words of a reporter won over to conceal the details of a commonplace vulgar death attacked his stomach" (274). Duffy's criticism of journalism's lack of integrity here could have been lifted directly from the pages of Conrad's "Autocracy and War."

In “Dead Men's News: Joyce's ‘A Painful Case’ and the Modern Press,” Stephen Donovan makes the astute observation that “the reader of ‘A Painful Case’ knows at once that the newspaper report is wrong, because Joyce has put her in a position of epistemological privilege. Without telling her family why, Mrs. Sinico has been trying to deaden her sorrow in drink before ultimately deciding, although not necessarily while drunk, to end it all” (42). Readers understand Duffy’s frustration because they share in his knowledge. Similarly, in *The Secret Agent*, readers, like Ossipon, know that Winnie’s death is not an “impenetrable mystery” since we are aware of the circumstances that lead to her suicide. While the stewardess and chief steward of the boat believed their speechless and tragic passenger was ill “by what they could see of her face,” Ossipon knows that she was not (308). Ossipon “knew” that unlike the reported facts, Winnie was not dying. Rather, the narrator tells us, “Ossipon knew that behind that white mask of despair there was struggling against terror and despair a vigour of vitality, a love of life that could resist the furious anguish which drives to murder and the fear, the blind, mad fear of the gallows. He knew” (308). Like Duffy, though he was not at the scene, he knows the article is insufficient and he is therefore in a position to imagine what it does not say. I contend that Ossipon’s ability to identify with Winnie’s fear before her jump constitutes his connection to her. Comrade Ossipon, who always found a way to survive, seems to connect with Winnie through his recognition of her will to live.

Like Ossipon, Duffy carries this article in his pocket and reads the “paragraph over and over again” (272). As he reads and rereads, we witness his sentiments over Mrs. Sinico’s death change. His initial anger that he associated with a woman who was immoral enough to develop a drinking habit subtly shifts to a sense of responsibility

for her death. He asks himself a series of questions that mark the transition from his role as only marginally culpable to directly accountable: “what else could he have done” (275); “Why had he withheld life from her? Why had he sentenced her to death?” (276). He eventually draws the conclusion that “he was alone” (277). While Donovan reads Duffy’s desperation as a reflection of “the world of mass cultural ephemera that Duffy has been striving to avoid finally lay[ing] its dead hand upon him,” I argue that Duffy’s recognition of his loneliness is a moment of insight (43). In the same way that Donovan argues that we are privy to information that allows us to interpret the article about Mrs. Sinico as unsatisfactory, Duffy, in this moment, corroborates what readers already know but he has never been able to admit. The narrator intimates throughout the story that Duffy’s highly regimented life is an attempt to circumvent a despised solitude, and through the newspaper, he finally confirms it for himself.

Ossipon’s recognition of Winnie’s fear is, perhaps, more noteworthy of our attention because unlike Duffy, he has never revealed himself as able to care for another or to think about another in any capacity beyond a verdict on their physiognomy or their potential contribution to his wealth and comfort. Although he does not ask himself Duffy’s introspective questions, his behaviour indicates he has been changed by the experience of reading. Ossipon reproduces Winnie’s solitude when he abandoned her. Like Duffy, he knew “he was alone” (310). Ossipon will no longer meet women. He actively avoids the appointments that once sustained his “self-love,” material needs, and, indeed, his revolutionary career (307). With the privileged position the newspaper occupies in this novel, it is apt that this experience of connection is mediated by its text. The newspaper makes an enduring impression

on Ossipon and on the narrative through its incessant repetition across its final pages: an outcome that, according to Conrad in “Autocracy and War,” its real-life counterpart could never produce.

The second scenario of connection in the final pages of Conrad’s novel occurs on the level of narrative. By way of concluding, I want to consider briefly how the quotation of the newspaper invites formal innovativeness into *The Secret Agent*—and *The Voyage Out*. One of the themes of this thesis is experimentalism. In each case study I have attempted to show the ways in which the document is cited in the modernist novel as a subject of inquiry but also as a formal concern. *The Secret Agent* and *The Voyage Out* are no exceptions. When the newspaper is quoted in these novels, which, as I have noted, is a rare occurrence, it becomes an opportunity for Conrad and Woolf to “connect” different temporalities or speech acts together without the mediation of their narrators, and this, I argue, produces novel results. The same newspaper phrase that produces a perceptible change in Ossipon also facilitates a narrative connection. “An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act or madness of despair” occurs fourteen times over the last few pages of the novel. Whereas this repetition is read often as the result of Ossipon’s incipient madness, Michael Greaney attributes this repetition to the novel’s neurosis:

Like a scratched gramophone record, the text seems infuriatingly stuck on a single snatch of language. Although the repetition of this facile postscript to the report of Winnie’s suicide seems intended as a symptom of Ossipon’s creeping insanity, in the end, Ossipon’s breakdown is something of a red herring: it is the novel that is obsessed with the phrase, with journalism in general, to the point of hysteria. (144)

For Greaney, the novel is indebted to the language of the popular press: it “has closer generic affinities with the mass-circulation newspaper than with the kind of oral narrative that Conrad’s fiction so frequently masquerades as” (143). He therefore

reads the incessant repetition of the article as evidence of the novel's "self-loathing" (142). It is anxious about its resemblance to a narrative mode that it disdains.

I would suggest, however, that the repetition of the phrase cannot be attributed to either Ossipon or the novel with any certainty. Curiously, like "Tom Outland's Story" in Cather's *The Professor's House*, who or what is doing the reiterating is unclear. An example of the repetition of the newspaper phrase can help to illustrate the difficulty of locating its source. The first repetition, which is arguably the most difficult to attribute, is represented as follows:

Comrade Ossipon was familiar with the beauties of its journalistic style. "*An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever. . . .*" He knew every word by heart. "*An impenetrable mystery. . . .*" And the robust anarchist, hanging his head on his breast, fell into a long reverie. (307)

Notice the difference between this paragraph and what is clearly the narrator speaking at the bottom of the same page: "'An impenetrable mystery' was sure 'to hang for ever' as far as all mankind was concerned. But what of that if he alone of all men could never get rid of the cursed knowledge?" (307). While in this second example it is evident that the narrator has quoted the article, that is, fragments of the phrase are inserted into his claim about mankind (itself an interesting moment of the novel's "self-quotation" that develops rather than occludes its textuality), the first case is unclear. Several other repetitions tend to follow the pattern of this first example. The fragments appear as independent sentences and lack contextualization. Since there are no traces of mediation, we cannot attribute the presence of these phrases to the novel, the narrator, or Ossipon with certainty. What is clear, however, is that both Ossipon and the third-person omniscient narrator momentarily step out of view to let the document "speak." Once again, like "Tom Outland's Story," the inability to locate the source of these fragments positions them rather uniquely to perform

work that neither the narrator nor Ossipon could do, since it appears that they are both occupied. From the moment that we are told Ossipon “hanging his head on his breast, fell into a long reverie” on page 307, to the moment he “raised his bowed head” on page 309, the narrator ceases to describe Ossipon as he sits in the Silenus. Rather, the narrator takes this time to provide a description of the moments leading up to Winnie’s suicide. This is to say that there are two actions occurring at once. Time does not stop when the narrator leaves Ossipon. While the narrator discusses Winnie, Ossipon is engaged in thinking. These two different narrative actions, occurring at the same time, are facilitated by the unplaced newspaper text. In response to the newspaper phrase “mystery destined to hang for ever...” the narrator describes the eyewitness accounts of Winnie, and notes how her condition was misinterpreted. For readers, at least, no aspect of her death is a mystery. At the same time, Ossipon responds to these phrases with a long reverie. His thoughts are induced by, and presumably consist of, the newspaper article. This kind of textual experimentalism is evidence of Conrad’s interest, if not investment, in the potentials of textuality rather than, as Greaney argues, the “rebarbative textuality” that Conrad settled on in defeat (6).

*The Voyage Out* presents an interesting case because it is a first novel and unlike Conrad, Woolf is not yet writing at the height of her powers. *The Voyage Out* does not adopt the fluid, anti-authorial narrative point of view associated with a work like *The Waves* or develop its story through abrupt, unannounced shifts in space and time like *Jacob’s Room*. Nonetheless, Woolf’s first novel, especially as it is read here alongside *The Secret Agent*, also seems to be thinking through its textuality, though in decidedly subtler ways. In addition to the novel’s numerous allusions to literature and, of course,

the inclusion of a writer-character working on his first book, her citation of the paper invites us to think about how textuality might perform thematically, in the same way that the formal qualities of *Three Guineas* contributes to its argument. *The Voyage Out* probes as its subject the conditions under which connections and communities form, but it also begins to examine this question, too, as a formal constraint. Again, it is the newspaper that seems to facilitate this experimentation.

As I suggested earlier, the paper, as it is imagined in the Villa San Gervasio, is like a prop around which the different characters gather. They are drawn towards this pre-eminently English object despite all the social differences that would keep them apart in England. However, in this scene, the newspaper also becomes a narrative hinge: it connects disparate speech acts together. Following a discussion about how each character reads their papers at “home,” Mr. Thornbury throws down the single copy of *The Times* in his hands:

The sheets fell in the middle of the group and were eyed by them all.  
 ‘A lady was walking yesterday in the streets of Westminster when she perceived a cat in the window of a deserted house. The famished animal—’  
 ‘I shall be out of it anyway,’ Mr Thornbury interrupted peevishly.  
 ‘Cats are often forgotten,’ Miss Allan remarked.  
 ‘Remember, William, the Prime Minister has reserved his answer,’ said Mrs Thornbury  
 ‘At the age of eighty, Mr Joshua Harris of Eeles Park, Brondesbury, has had a son,’ said Hirst.  
 ‘...The famished animal, which had been noticed by workmen for some days, was rescued, but—by Jove! it bit a man’s hands to pieces!’ (126)

In this scene, the third-person omniscient narrator seems momentarily to drop out of view. We are not even informed that Miss Allan or Hirst are reading. Without the prior knowledge that the newspaper is physically at the base of their discussion, literally spread on the floor around which they sit or stand while they read and discuss, this dialogue would be unintelligible. Woolf’s reliance on the paper here to do the work of the narrator seems to me to sketch the beginnings of her movement away from the

type of narrator that readily explains and sets up scenes to the more selective, even slightly reticent narrator of *Jacob's Room*, as one example. There might be other ways of mediating speech, time, and setting than through the explicit directives of a narrator. Moreover, the stark and unmediated juxtapositions in subject creates the effect of a newspaper. Speech seems to mirror the physical layout of the paper. An article about a starving cat might share a page with the story of an unexpected birth. The pattern of speech has absorbed the physical layout of print. As a physical object, the newspaper draws these bodies together and invites conversation that then allows Woolf to reflect back on the medium and reproduce it. While Woolf confines her linguistic borrowing from the newspaper to a page in her novel, Greaney argues that *The Secret Agent* is indebted to the language of the press. It would be no exaggeration to add to Greaney's assessment that, like *The Voyage Out*, the story of *The Secret Agent* is made possible—and probable—with that most inescapable, polemical, and commonplace of all modernist documents: the newspaper.

## Conclusion

### The Document Today and the Sense of an Ending

The document in the modernist novel signifies more than the personal diary that records events and feelings, the letter written by one person to communicate information to another, or the newspaper that summarizes current affairs. Clare's letters to Irene in *Passing* importantly express her desire to circumvent the colour line but they also gesture to an African American race archive. As well as informing the characters in South America of the results of a debate over naval efficiency at Westminster, the newspaper in *The Voyage Out* provides the necessary conditions for the social collectivity through which the protagonist's story emerges. The narrator's diary in *The Shadow-Line* "saved [him] from the crazy trick of talking to [himself]" (106), but also, through its reiteration in his confession, serves to reshape the conventional sea journey telos. In one sense, this short overview description of a few of the documents considered in this study recalls the letters, newspapers, and notes in the works of my selected authors' literary predecessors, Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, Daniel Defoe, and Samuel Richardson, as outlined in the Introduction. Like these earlier documents, Clare's letters, *The Times* newspaper, and the narrator's diary contribute to plot, and introduce verisimilitude and competing voices into the narrative. However, this summary also demonstrates that the document in modernism claims to do much more—possibly because it must. Modernity, as I have tried to show meant that the document would take on new urgency. In an increasingly globalized and networked world, a period which saw unmatched economic and political expansion into other continents, and mechanized forms of social mediation, the

document accrued a social and cultural significance as a fixed point of reference that became particularly important to the authors focussed on in this study.

Ford Madox Ford, Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, Virginia Woolf and especially Joseph Conrad, were attuned to the new documentary reality, and their fictions explore the implications of the production and dissemination of documents for the modern subject—and the modern novel—in different but interrelated ways. In a nutshell, in *The Good Soldier*, the document supplies epistemological evidence in a world in flux whereas in *Passing*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and *Almayer's Folly* the document is used to gesture to the African American race archive and the imperial archive, respectively. *The Voyage Out* and *The Secret Agent* exercise the potential of the document to form communities and collectives. The citation of the document also presents an opportunity to experiment with conventional forms, which, as a question of craft, concerns each of these authors. In *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor's House*, the reiteration of documents negotiates the conventional structure of the linear novel narrative. "Heart of Darkness," a foundational text for this thesis, not only asserts a crucial link between the production of documents and the justification of the imperial project, but it also forms a powerful exploration of the language of documents as they impinge on the novel. In sum, greater demands are placed on the document in modernism than had taken place before. As envisaged first by Conrad, and then by Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf in his wake, the document, as both a concept and material object, met these demands in innovative and precise ways.

Running parallel to this study's attempt to chart selected modernist responses to and imaginings of documents is also an argument for the centrality of documents to Conrad's fiction. Conrad's turn to the document does not seem to suggest the

“rebarbative” textuality that Michael Greaney describes (6). Although Conrad’s storytelling communities remain crucial to his fiction, they do not detract or distract from his deployment of documents. When we orient the documents in Conrad’s novels differently, that is, when we allow them the possibility of doing more than reinforcing speech and storytelling, the carefully cultivated textuality of his documents comes into view and, as I have sought to show, his fiction is all the richer for it. If Conrad was attuned to the limitations of documents as they exist in the world, then he seemed to discern and exercise a potential for them in the space of literature that was different to how his contemporaries H. Rider Haggard, Louis Becke and Walter Jeffery approached them, and, as we have seen above, is also anticipatory of the uses and functions of documents in Ford, Cather, Larsen, and Woolf.

While I consider here the modernist citation of documents, and enlist Conrad for the purpose of exploring various documentary strategies across the period, it is true that the invocation of the document does not originate with modernism. The numerous nineteenth- and eighteenth-century examples of inset letters, diary excerpts, and newspapers suggest that the citation of documents has an intimate relationship with the novel form and is, in this respect, a perennial literary concern. But we can take this opportunity to look ahead, too, and consider the longer twentieth-century life of the document in writings after modernism, by way of concluding this study. My paradigmatic case—Julian Barnes’s *The Sense of an Ending* (2011)—asks about the continuing relevance of the document in writing in this new century and, as such, asks also about what it does differently in this new era? Barnes’s Booker Prize-winning novel is a synoptic illustration of the document in modernism; it largely recognizes the terms of the citation of documents as has been carried out in

this thesis, yet also goes beyond such citation in its attention to contemporary document technologies and the unique epistemological dilemmas they introduce. A short reading of this novel, and in particular of the role played by documents within the text, will therefore provide an appropriate way of rounding off this thesis.

At roughly the midpoint of *The Sense of an Ending*, the narrator pauses to describe what seems to be a trivial letter:

It was one of those long white envelopes with my name and address shown in a window. I don't know about you, but I'm never in a hurry to open them. Once, such letters meant another painful stage in my divorce—maybe that's why I'm wary of them. Nowadays, they might contain some tax voucher for the few, pitifully low-yielding shares I bought when I retired, or an extra request from that charity I already support by standing order. So I forgot about it until later in the day, when I was gathering up all the discarded paper in the flat—even down to the last envelope—for recycling (62-3).

We know this letter will be significant because the narrator has taken the time to describe the appearance of its ordinariness. If it was the voucher or donation request he suspected, then it is unlikely he would feel the need to include it in his story.

Documents are so commonplace that their presence does not require formal acknowledgement. We are never told, for example, what comprises the remaining papers he gathers for “recycling.” While documents in works by Conrad, Ford, Cather, Larsen, Woolf—and Barnes—are not cited in an attempt to reproduce their ubiquity in the world, their pervasiveness in the world is also the condition of their meaning in the novel.

Anthony Webster, or Tony, the narrator and central character of *The Sense of an Ending*, confirms the expectation that this particular piece of mail is the exception to the rule. He reveals that the letter is from a lawyer, informing him of the late Mrs. Sarah Ford's bequest. In addition to five hundred pounds, Mrs. Ford leaves him “two ‘documents’” (63). The first of these “documents” is a letter from Mrs. Ford addressed

to Tony, and the second, which soon becomes his obsession, is the diary of his friend Adrian Finn. Tony is justifiably perplexed by this gift since he only knew Mrs. Ford as the mother of his college girlfriend Veronica. After Veronica and Tony decided to split up, Adrian began a relationship with Veronica. Sometime later, Adrian committed suicide. The conclusion of the novel reveals that Mrs. Ford and Adrian had a child together, who, likely due to the complications of a pregnancy at Mrs. Ford's age, has a developmental disorder. Tony finally understands why Adrian took his life, and the reason Mrs. Ford left his former friend's diary to him.

It is a finely constructed plot, and the suspense that is generated through passages like the one cited above contribute to the momentum of Part Two of the novel, where one revelation leads quickly to the next. However, it is the question that motivates the narrative which proves to be more compelling than Adrian's untimely death or the sight of Adrian and Mrs. Ford's child (now a man of forty named Adrian who requires full-time care): namely, what role does Tony play in Adrian's story? An excerpt from Adrian's diary, in combination with the other documents of the novel, are presented as proof that Tony was more involved in the trajectory of Adrian's life than he cared to remember—or could even know.

*The Sense of an Ending* poses the question directly that this thesis returns to implicitly in each of its case studies: is the citation of the document avoidable? Can we tell our stories, or the stories of others, without reference to those documents that are inevitably at hand and have in some way or other impinged on and even changed the course of events? Barnes's novel—an introspective account of the failures of memory, self-preservation, and, perhaps, most provocatively, the process by which the commonplace and even the banal might become monumental (documents

included)—relies on documents: they are integral to Tony’s story and provide the conditions possible for its telling. In so doing, Barnes claims the document for the twenty-first century novel, just as the writers discussed in this thesis claimed it for the purposes of epistemological evidence at the beginning of the long twentieth century.

Frank Kermode’s work of literary criticism *The Sense of an Ending*, published nearly fifty years before Barnes’s novel, provides one way of conceptualizing the relevance of documents to the demands of the modern novel. Kermode’s study of the structures of “the End” in literature suggests that, at base, we have a “deep need for intelligible Ends”; hence “we project ourselves—a small, humble elect, perhaps—past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle” (8). Although Kermode is addressing fictions of the ends of the world, specifically the Apocalypse, all fiction conforms to this model in the sense that there is always an end (even an end to a thesis), though it may not be the end we anticipate. In fact, “we do not ask that they progress towards that end precisely as we have been given to believe . . . only the most trivial work” will adhere to pre-existent types (24).

Barnes’s *The Sense of an Ending* begins at the end, and it relies on documents in an effort to go back and uncover the whole: to reveal how the end could have happened and may in fact have happened. At the time of narration, Tony is ostensibly in his sixties. Forty years have passed since Adrian’s death and the birth of his son. Tony has already received the lawyer’s letter, the fragment of Adrian’s diary, and the facsimile of a letter he sent to Adrian. It is the receipt of these documents that marks the end—the revelation of Adrian and Mrs. Ford’s child—and at the same time initiates Tony’s discursive journey into his past that begins on the first page. As we saw with Kurtz’s death in “Heart of Darkness,” Florence’s betrayal of her husband in *The*

*Good Soldier*, and the narrator's successful completion of his first command in *The Shadow-Line*, these are the startling outcomes that propel the stories forward to restage and reconsider everything that came before. In the context of these narratives' representation of the difficulty of constructing an intelligible story through memories and impressions alone, the document becomes a necessary intertext. In "Heart of Darkness," *The Good Soldier*, and *The Sense of an Ending*—as well as the other works that feature in this study—there is a recurring gesture to the document, not only because documents provide, as suggested, a necessary corollary to modernist subjectivity, but also because they simply are there to be consulted.

Although Victoria claims to have burned Adrian's diary, she provides Tony with a fragment: a facsimile of a single page which, though elegantly written by Adrian, is cryptic because of its lack of contextualization and an incomplete sentence that hangs at the foot of the page. Victoria also gives Tony a photocopy of his response to Adrian's initial letter seeking permission to ask Victoria out. It is a letter that Tony never anticipated seeing again. However, technologies of reproduction ensure that forty-year-old letters, or those original documents cast to the fire, do not need to be lost forever—marking a discernible departure from the destroyed documents of *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Quicksand*, and *Passing*. The photocopier provides the possibility of producing endless iterations of the original. Barnes's novel therefore treads into new territory, and yet at the same time recalls the iterated documents of *The Shadow-Line* and *The Professor's House*, especially with its citation of the email. Email, relatively recent as it still is, is another form of insistent and reiterable documentation that can be returned to and reconsidered. After an email is sent, it does not disappear, but a "copy" is retained in the "sent box." Tony consults

his sent box frequently as a corrective to the shortcomings of memory, just as the narrator in *The Shadow-Line* returns to his diary and Professor St Peter rereads Tom's mesa diary in *The Professor's House*.

The novel's reproduction of the letter Tony sent to Adrian reveals the full extent of the defects of memory. His recollection of the letter he wrote to Adrian—"I told him pretty much what I thought of their joint moral scruples. I also advised him to be prudent, because in my opinion Veronica had suffered damage a long way back"—serves as an inadequate representation of the text we read (42). Tony wishes Adrian and Veronica permanent "damage" (95). Part of him hopes that they "have a child because I'm a great believer in time's revenge," but then it "would be unjust to inflict on some innocent foetus the prospect of discovering that it was the fruit of your loins" (95-6). The most remarkable portion of the letter sees him encourage Adrian's affair with Mrs. Ford: "If I were you, I'd check things out with Mum—ask her about damage a long way back. Of course, you'll have to do this behind Veronica's back . . ." (96).

However, it is Adrian's diary, his own words, which can indicate the extent of the letter's influence as a measure of Tony's culpability. Tony recognizes the significance of the diary: it "was evidence; it was—it might be—corroboration. It might disrupt the banal reiterations of memory. It might jumpstart something—though I had no idea what" (77). We are back again with Dowell who must revisit his diary to produce the record that is *The Good Soldier*, or Professor St Peter's annotation of Tom's diary, which seems to give him the strength to live. Of course, the diary does jumpstart something: it is the force behind Tony's reevaluation of his life. It confirms for Tony that he did, in fact, contribute to Adrian's end. But Tony's description of the diary is also an astute commentary on the form of the novel. The primary narrative is a

reiteration of memory that is punctuated by embedded document text, which, as I have suggested, is imperative to a novel that explores the vicissitudes of subjectivity, recalling especially *The Shadow-Line*. The last line of the fragment, the enigmatic: “So, for instance, if Tony” is described by Tony as a “cliffhanger” (86). Again, Tony’s description also serves as a commentary on the novel. The incomplete sentence (in both the grammatical and punitive senses) represents a moment of suspense for him, but also for his readers.

Although the theory of accumulation that Adrian presents in his diary is directed to “human relationships,” it seems to encapsulate the function of documents in this novel, as well as the many newspapers, letters, diaries, wills, and telegrams considered in this study (85). There is an accreted value to documents: documents are produced feverishly in the outposts of empire, are collected as evidence, compiled as the archive, reiterated across the narrative, or piled up in the gutters of London’s streets. Adrian initially expresses his idea of accumulation as a formula: “ $b, a^1, a^2, s, v$ ” (85). We learn that  $b$  represents baby, the first  $a$  is Adrian while the second is Anthony,  $s$  refers to Mrs. Sarah Ford, and  $v$  is Veronica. He elaborates in prose: “. . . if a link breaks, wherein lies the responsibility for such breaking? On the links immediately on either side, or on the whole chain? How far do the limits of responsibility extend?” (86). This is a powerful moment in the novel that condenses Tony’s dilemma. He measures his responsibility to Adrian through the accumulation of memories as against the accumulation of documents. Ultimately, it is the document that produces the reality he must contend with and it is the document, therefore, which forms the impetus for this novel.

*The Sense of an Ending* reveals that the deployment of the document is still a viable narrative strategy today yet also recalls us to the revelatory force of the document in the high modernist text. Barnes's novel retrieves many of the functions of the document in the novels cited in this study but also adds to them through its citation of new document technologies. Since Barnes's novel takes the long view of the document, it invites us to think of the place of these technologies relative to the twentieth-century novel. Tony's narrative ushers us through the transitions in the production and reception of documents. He remembers his friends writing letters to one another in college "as people—even the young—did in those days" (19). At the present point of narration, however, email is the preferred mode of communication. Email invites new complexities and opportunities. The paratext of emails, including the time they are sent, suddenly allows one to assess the reliability of content: is Veronica's brother really in Singapore when he writes to Tony? It also allows assessment of the reliability of memory: did Tony ever ask Veronica to meet, or was it her idea? The "sent box" is consulted further when there is confusion about a particular response. Tony only understands Veronica's curt reply, "Blood money?," when he rereads his initial email (81). Perhaps the major change email represents is the experience of time. Tony asks: "How did people in the old days bear it when letters took so long to arrive? I suppose three weeks waiting for the postman then must equate to three days waiting for an email," which by Tony's account, is a very long time as he assiduously checks his inbox for Veronica's reply (121).

Barnes's novel indicates that the types and pace of the production of documents has changed since, for example, the exchange of telegrams between India and England in *The Good Soldier*, which at that point, was regarded as extremely efficient.

Telegrams were sent when Tony was in college, but he notes they have since been replaced by the text message. We might think about these technologies, too, relative to the fictions considered in this study. If, as I suggest, the violence committed to Irene's letters in *Passing* and Almayer's account books in *Almayer's Folly* serve as a gesture to the archive, how might these scenes of destruction be reproduced in the twenty-first century novel given these new technologies? Is the "delete" button equivalent to tearing a letter? *The Sense of an Ending* indicates that these documents are never truly lost; there is always a copy that has been "archived" and therefore can be recalled. And again, how could the thematic significance of Clare's flaunting letters written on foreign-looking sheets and in coloured ink be represented via email? As reading and writing practices increasingly move online, the experience of the materiality of text that has been so important to the conceptualization of documents in modernism is likely to change. However, even as some documents disappear and new ones are introduced, the generic differences they represent remain a pressing subject for fictional exploration and, as Barnes's novel exemplifies, their citation invites and reinvents formal innovativeness.

From *Robinson Crusoe*, as discussed in the Introduction, to *The Sense of an Ending* addressed here in this Conclusion, and the numerous examples between, there is a compelling case to be made for the continuing value of documents to the novel. This is to say that there is a discernible tradition of citing documents that takes different forms at different times across the history of the Anglo-American novel, and in relation to the emergence of new technologies. What Barnes's novel clarifies for us here at my thesis' end is the degree to which early twentieth-century citations of documents remain pertinent today. His novel asks the same core questions about

subjectivity, memory, the archive, collectivity, and knowledge that motivated his literary predecessors. Then, as now, Conrad appears to be central to the invocation of the document.

The question of the continued relevance of Conrad seems to me an important point on which to draw this thesis to a close but also to open out to further lines of enquiry. More recently, engagement with Conrad's *oeuvre* appears to be the domain of authors who write under the banner of anti-colonialism or postcolonialism, or whose fiction is concerned with the experience of marginalization or disenfranchisement. The tone of this turn to Conrad varies considerably. On the one hand, Conrad's fiction is invoked as part of a revisionary project. The term "writing back," for example, characterizes the adaptations of Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o as they seek to dismantle the authoritative status of Conrad's depiction of Africa in the colonial context. On the other hand, many of Conrad's fictions are rewritten by authors perceptibly less invested in challenging Conrad's formulation of the colonial encounter, writing from locations that are not referenced by his fiction. What the example of *The Sense of an Ending* points to therefore may be a third category: an even more subtle turn to Conrad that is brought to bear through a cluster of texts. Perhaps what is required therefore is an approach to Conrad's fiction that would recognize the importance of his narrative strategies—such as the citation of the document—and his carefully cultivated textuality, as well as his treatment of the colonial theme, which has been so generative for writers of decolonization. It is clear that Conrad continues to yield fruitful returns for contemporary writers; his work does not cease to "make us see," especially insofar as his own narrative techniques and structures encourage us each time to look at his fiction differently and anew.

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