

WRITING BEYOND DIVORCE: CONVENTIONS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN  
THE EDWARDIAN NOVEL

By

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To Michael LeFlem

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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The “(un)knowable *Weib an sich*” is a familiar device for readers of Edwardian literature: from the “plucky heroine” to the *femme fatale*, conventions of the British novel have created female characters who are purposed in these narratives as “categories” of knowledge and representation. Perceiving “woman” as an “(un)knowable *Weib an sich*” reflects not only the conventions of authorship and representation in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British literature, but the laws that govern ordinary people as well: to codify female experience as “unknowable” is to make the claim that female characters not only reflect but *co-create* the social and sexual identities of their real counterparts, identities defined in this period by divorce.

Divorce is a major problem in Edwardian narratives, creating spaces in which women occupied shifting positions of legal, financial, social and sexual subjection in light of increasing pressures on the liberties and rights of women. By looking at Ford Madox Ford’s tetralogy *Parade’s End* and Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, novels in which the enigmatic female characters claim positions of power over male soldiers, one can see a changing trajectory of representation in the Edwardian period. In response to what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls “writing beyond the ending,” I intend to argue that these indeterminate endings do more than point beyond the closure of the novel. Instead, these endings (inadvertently) do quite the

opposite: they force the reader to make a decision about the text, and to side with a character.

Ultimately, divorce becomes the necessary rubric of understanding women in both novels.

Looking at novels concerning divorce and war – novels literally at the breakdown of traditional representation – readers find that the conventions of female (mis)representation produce a parallel “critical pantheon” of Edwardian literature that needs not only recovery, but extensive rewriting.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

No convention is neutral, purely mimetic, or purely aesthetic.  
-- Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*

In the introduction to *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, editor Margaret R. Higgonet asserts that “the problem of representing women is magnified by the way women [...] internalize the specular, reifying attitudes of society,” concluding that “women cannot be represented as themselves, since we cannot know their identities” (Higgonet xx). Higgonet’s assertion makes interesting, if not contradictory, claims about how fiction – specifically Edwardian fiction – represents women: women “internalize” the hegemonic, exclusionary problems of society, and because they internalize those values, they can never be represented as anything other than the very values that restrict and deny. Yet as Higgonet implies, women do have identities beyond what society dictates for them, identities that are strangely inaccessible to authors and readers alike. Placed in what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms the “exact, contingent space of indeterminacy,” women are paradoxically incapable of being represented, and yet represent the very processes by which they are at once reified and objectified (Sedgwick 15).<sup>1</sup> Higgonet’s claim raises a few concerns about the purpose(s) of fiction as well: if fiction is incapable of “representation,” what (or who) does fiction represent? Can representation correspond with any reality beyond the “specular, reifying attitudes of society”? If the primary

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<sup>1</sup> In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines the “exact, contingent space of indeterminacy” as “the place of shifting over time,” a place “of the mutual boundaries between the political and the sexual [which] is, in fact, the most fertile space of ideological formation” (Sedgwick 15). However, as Sedgwick claims, “the political and the erotic [...] necessarily obscure and misrepresent each other”; located in the object of political and erotic desire, female characters are “necessarily” obscured and misrepresented by their assigned roles in fiction (15). By identifying what Sedgwick calls the “hidden symmetries” and “hidden obliquities” of power between men and between women – specifically, how these symmetries become, in Sedgwick’s terminology, *asymmetrical* – problems of representation can be read as problems not just of society, but specifically of male authorship (22).

purpose of fiction is, above all claims, to “represent” someone, what is at stake if representation fails?

Higgonet’s claim, while problematized by later volumes of feminist criticism, nevertheless marks a significant move for the reading of Edwardian heroines.<sup>2</sup> For Higgonet, reading to “unlock social systems and their evaluative hierarchies” effaces a problem concerning how women are typically represented in Edwardian fiction as “(un)knowable”:

Even contextuality can be perceived as a reflex of bourgeois individualism, an inadequate premise for the study of significance that is generated by systematic relationships. The theoretical premises of this kind of criticism are in part opposed to those of the first, more empirical type. Epistemology here displaces ontology; the feminine functions as category rather than as (un)knowable *Weib an sich*. (Higgonet xvii)

The “(un)knowable *Weib an sich*” is a familiar device for readers: from the “plucky heroine” to the femme fatale, conventions of the British novel have reduced female characters to these stereotypical roles. Rather than possessing fully-formed identities, these characters “function” in these narratives as “categories”; claiming that female characters are characteristically inscrutable provides authors with bodies to populate their fictions, bodies unto which any role or “category” can be projected. Yet perceiving “woman” as an “(un)knowable *Weib an sich*” reflects not only the conventions of authorship and representation in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British literature, but the laws that govern ordinary people as well: as Higgonet demonstrates, these categories typified the “bourgeois individualism” of British society in privileging its patriarchal signification of sexual difference as inequality.<sup>3</sup> To codify female experience as “unknowable” is to make the claim that

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<sup>2</sup> The 2003 collection *Women’s Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*, edited by Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis, explores representation as a problem of modernity, and expands on Higgonet’s study by also discussing race, something glaringly absent from the essays included in Higgonet’s volume.

<sup>3</sup> Higgonet appears to borrow the term “*Weib an sich*,” “woman as such,” from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*. In what Higgonet identifies as the transition during “bourgeois individualism” from “*Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*,” from “community” to “society,” representation is inevitably complicated by the desire to continue to characterize women as “unknowable” based on a precondition of identity, treating identity “as such” rather than as a social

female characters not only reflect but co-create the social and sexual identities of their real counterparts, identities that are, “characteristically-speaking,” incomplete. They are thus treated, in the conventions of male authorship, as products not of social discrimination, but of pre-existing, internal insufficiencies.

I open with Higgonet’s text to explore a larger issue of female representation during the Edwardian period: divorce. As identified in Patricia Stubbs’ 1979 survey *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920* and Jane Eldridge Miller’s influential 1994 text *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel*, divorce is a major problem in the Edwardian period, a space in which women occupied shifting positions of legal, financial, social and sexual subjection in light of increasing pressures on the liberties and rights of women. Divorce also introduces, as Miller and Stubbs both suggest, a complication to the British novel’s linear “marriage plot”: chronicling the trials and tribulations of romance, the “marriage plot” conventionally sought closure in the ideological male-female union offered by marriage, an institution that began to break down in the Edwardian era in the face of societal change. “Usually annexed as part of the late-Victorian age, or dismissed as a kind of literary drought which preceded the flowering of modernism,” Miller writes, the Edwardian period has been typically “left out” of the development of the conventions of the British novel, while “those studies which do consider the Edwardian age as a distinct period in literary history have tended to pay little attention to women, feminism, and the suffrage movement as concerns of or influences upon the fiction of the age” (Miller 1-2). Miller claims that the Edwardian novel serves as a break from traditions of the British novel, traditions that enshrined marriage as the proper close to a narrative

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construction (Higgonet xvii). To treat representation as a problem of depicting an internal space – “female subjectivity” – ignores the greater concern of representation as a social activity, one that necessitates the transitions identified by Higgonet from an insular “community” to a larger “society,” and one that privileges certain (male) conventions and traditions over others.

and concretized the structure of conventional British fiction.<sup>4</sup> Falling under the reductive rubric of “the Woman Question,” which included issues exploring complex and often contradictory intersections with and reactions to societal, political, and sexual achievements and setbacks, divorce became integrated into the British novel as a device to resolve by narrative. “Having created new characters,” Miller writes, “Edwardian novelists were then confronted with the formidable problem of constructing new narratives for them to occupy,” as preexisting narratives of romance, marriage and motherhood proved unwelcoming for the “rebellious” female divorcee:

The principal difficulty they faced was the centrality of marriage to the novel, both as a subject and as a structuring principle; tradition dictated that the dominant narrative desire of female characters be romance, and that the achievement of marriage signify their ultimate fulfillment. Edwardian novelists created modern heroines who refused to accept marriage and motherhood as their only destiny, and defied gender definitions in their ‘unfeminine’ desires for independence and sexual fulfillment and vocation. But they had to place these women within a form which was grounded – not only thematically but structurally – in the ‘naturalness’ of gender opposition and the inviolability of the institution of marriage, a form in which a heroine’s worth was determined by her attractiveness as a romantic object, a form in which female quest narratives were traditionally transformed into narratives of romance, or resulted in failure or death. The rebellious women in Edwardian novels fight against the binary oppositions that reinforce gender polarization and limit women’s choices – oppositions between marriage and vocation, private and public, feminine and masculine; yet traditionally, the novel form relied upon those oppositions in its construction of narrative desire, conflict and closure. (4)

As Miller suggests, the limitations imposed by a system founded on binary oppositions proved not only “inimical” to the new notions of femininity emerging at the turn of the century, but

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<sup>4</sup> In characterizing the Edwardian novel as “a break with tradition,” Miller is careful to note that these novels do not “predate” modernism, but rather they “exemplify, in important and usually overlooked ways, the *process* by which modernist fiction evolved” from Edwardian questions of traditional narrative conventions: “to write about women with sexual frankness and psychological realism instead of sentiment and prudery, to challenge ideals of femininity and maternity, to depict women as active participants in the public sphere, to write about women’s desires for power and autonomy, entailed a radical break with social and cultural traditions” (Miller 7). Co-opting the conventional closure of marriage as a narrative device, “the feminist [Edwardian] novel also reveals not only the provisionality of its own procedures and assumptions but also the provisionality of social organization, the family and, ultimately, essential concepts of identity and self” (Miller 8). Tony Tanner’s 1981 study *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*, as well as Barbara Leckie’s recent publication *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914*, both suggest that divorce problematizes marriage as closure by offering a competing plot device, one that can offer the same closure.

contrary to the “structuring principle” of the Edwardian novel itself. Since the “principal forms of nineteenth-century British fiction” ran contrary to the drives and desires of new forms of feminism and new “characters,” authors would need to repurpose their narratives to account for women.

In this paper I will argue several points. First, I intend to argue that the increasing number of narratives about divorce demonstrates a struggle for men to reclaim space in narratives, and also points to the responsibility of the author in the struggle to provide equal representation for both parties. Ford Madox Ford’s tetralogy *Parade’s End*, published between 1924 and 1928, looks back on the First World War as a space in which Christopher and Sylvia Tietjens battle for footing in the ownership and reputation of Groby Manor. Accordingly, Christopher’s crisis decisively turns from surviving the war to surviving his divorce. In the 1918 novel *The Return of the Soldier*, Rebecca West explores a similar struggle played out between Chris and Kitty Baldry; facing a crisis quite like that of Ford’s protagonist, Chris’s shellshock prompts the possibility of separation from his materialistic wife. However, in relinquishing control of his own narrative, Chris is cast out of his home, and sent back to war. By looking at how representations of female characters operate against men in *Parade’s End* and in *The Return of the Soldier*, one can see how Edwardian novelists were responding to issues of divorce through their representations of male and female characters.

Second, I intend to argue that the drive in Edwardian fiction to characterize women as unknowable is a drive to control women, one that borrows from the rhetoric of divorce and becomes closely entwined with narratives of reclaiming masculinity through war and soldiering. In the two novels I examine, the failure of the soldier ultimately represents a failure to understand women. Continually haunted by the “unknowable” spectre of his wife, Chris Tietjens

witnesses her malign machinations on his social status throughout the four novels. Similarly, as Chris Baldry's rejuvenation is set in the center of *The Return of the Soldier*, its importance to the narrative is only known by the enigmatic women who restore him to sanity. By facing representations that struggle with the very subjects of their masculinity, both male characters struggle to understand the women in their lives in order to understand themselves. As these female characters become purposed as "nurses" to the wounded soldiers, the effort to reclaim masculinity becomes a project to "reenlist" male characters as soldiers.

Third, I will demonstrate that the typical narrative space described as a "web of interlocking male desires" by Sedgwick is problematized in Edwardian fiction by spaces peopled predominantly with women, spaces in which "real men" are virtually absent and in which the interlocking female desires become more important. My critique is not meant to discount Sedgwick's argument in *Between Men*; rather, it is meant to account for an important distinction that Sedgwick makes between the terms "homosocial" and "homosexual," to reconcile the idea of a femininity defined by masculinity with a femininity defined by femininity, and to acknowledge the impossibility of a reading that can account for one without the other. Furthermore, I intend it to emphasize the problem of closure in the divorce narrative as an extension of that very same "unknowability" that plagues representations of women, a problem that seems to represent the end of traditional representation itself.

This project takes into account questions raised by Rita Felski's 1995 text *The Gender of Modernity*: "How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? What *difference*

would such a procedure make?” (Felski 10). As Felski argues, “given the complex entanglement and mutual imbrications of men’s and women’s histories” in “industrial production, rationalization, [...] domination over nature” and the development of the “newly liberated bourgeois subject,” it is necessary to set masculinity and femininity in a dialogical relationship in order to see the resistance and complicity from both parties in shaping these discourses of modernity (3-4, 10). However, this critical dichotomy has generated a cultural logic of reading modernity as “masculine” and has prompted not only the marginalization of female experience, but its exclusion from literatures of modernity and the subsequent privileging of male subjectivity as totalizing and singularly representative of all forms of experience.<sup>5</sup> By taking “feminine phenomena” as central, we can find and explore reconfigurations of not only what it means to be male or female, but how and where masculinity and femininity are represented. What these re-representations of gender accompany in fiction is the breakdown of “traditional” social structures and literary conventions and the creation of new spaces of fiction and new readings of subjectivity in which male experience is no longer privileged. If treating experience not as the origin of gender but rather, in Joan Wallach Scott’s reading, as “that which we want to explain” about gender, the prominent narrative of becoming/being a soldier (and complications

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<sup>5</sup> Much of Felski’s argument is founded on a joint reading of two ideologically-opposed critics of modernity, Marshall Berman and Gail Finney. For Felski, Berman’s “exemplary hero[es] of the modern age” in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* – Faust, Marx, and Baudelaire – are “of course symbols not just of modernity, but also of masculinity, historical markers of the emergence of new forms of bourgeois and working-class male subjectivity” (Felski 1-2). They are thus markers of “the gendering of history, as well as the historicity of gender,” and impose a challenge on invariably defining (in Felski’s terminology, “aligning”) femininity with or against tradition, as a sacrificial “other” excluded from (or diametrically opposed to) a predictably limiting “male” modernity. In Gail Finney’s *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century*, the dichotomous logic of modernity as either masculine or feminine is problematized by women characters who transcend this rubric. As Felski writes, Finney argues for “the imaginative centrality of *female* psychology and sexuality to representations of modernity,” taking figurations of the feminist and the hysteric as characters that emerge outside of (yet in Felski’s critique of Finney, always in reaction to or created by) an “exclusively masculine pantheon” (3). What is significant for Felski in both Berman and Finney is the location of femininity in relation to masculinity and how varied interpretations exemplify the principles of modernity and complicate the role of female authorship. Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis seem to follow-up Felski’s investigative prompts in the 2003 collection *Women’s Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*.

of the “return from” and “return to” soldiering) becomes instead a narrative about women’s experience of modernity, of war, and their overlooked centrality in these narratives (Scott 18).

My pairing of a prominent male author and a prominent female author is intentional. The difference between Ford and West, while certainly in part a matter of gender, is not to be read solely as a reflection of their respective genders; rather, both novelists appear to be dealing with the subject of divorce in their texts through gender. In both novels, the problem of understanding feminine experience becomes an underwritten project of the narrative; rather than simply casting female characters as “unknowable,” these characterizations depict a struggle to understand and to categorize experience as either male or female, a project that opens even wider upon new legislation for divorce, and becomes fractured at the onset of the First World War. Accordingly, the male soldier in both novels becomes implicated in the problems of representing the “unknowable” aspect(s) of identity as well. Victimized as psychologically-wounded soldiers returning to psychologically-unknowable wives, these male characters complicate the representation of women by introducing the trauma of the soldier into the structure of the divorce novel. As a “patient” meant to be “nursed” back to health, the male soldier attempts to utilize the dual trauma of divorce and war to obtain sympathetic representation and reclaim epistemological power in these narratives. In a sense, the relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, even “patients” and “nurses” in these novels are informed by the relationship between author and character; as authors, Ford and West both use these characters for different narrative purposes. While Ford and West represent this struggle in different ways, it is through the pairing of both authors that the intersection of male and female authorship shows the literary employment of divorce and war and their effects on otherwise dominant or “normative” modes of representing subjectivity in fiction.

My reading calls for a return to the Edwardian Novel – specifically novels about and/or written by women – and a critique of its epistemological and ideological formations. The antagonistic positions on sex, gender and identity that persist from this decidedly-bifurcated society suggest much about continued privileging in narrative conventions in modernism and beyond. As Julian Yates asserts in “Shift Work: Observing Women Observing, 1937-1945,” “what is at stake is not merely an act of textual recovery but the narrative function of the modern [...], and the possibility not merely of assembling a parallel or alternative gendered text of modernity, but of telling an entirely different kind of story” (Yates 272). Rather than looking for some indelible quality common to all “(un)knowable” female characters, this reading suggests that subjectivity and representation are conventions of the British novel that breakdown in Edwardian fiction at divorce and war, and prepare experimentations with narrative in modernism(s). However, these fissures do much more than break from convention, and the novels I look at do more than present enigmatic characters and ambiguous endings. In response to what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls “writing beyond the ending,” I intend to argue that these indeterminate endings do more than point beyond the closure of the novel. In *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, DuPlessis defines “writing beyond the ending” as the act of looking for meaning beyond the parameters defined in the text:

Writing beyond the ending means the transgressive invention of narrative strategies, strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narrative. These tactics, among them reparenting, woman-to-woman and brother-to-sister bonds, and forms of the communal protagonist, take issue with the mainstays of the social and ideological organization of gender, as these appear in fiction. Writing beyond the ending, “not repeating your words and following your methods but ... finding new words and creating new methods,” produces a narrative that denies or reconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed, hegemonically poised. (DuPlessis 5)

As DuPlessis writes, “writing beyond the ending” treats the fiction as an exploration of means for resisting or denying the traditional strategies of representing men and women in the interest

in creating new spaces for different representations, “poised” by individuality and subjectivity rather than sex or culture (5). Instead, these endings (inadvertently) do quite the opposite: they force the reader to make a decision about the text, and to side with a character. Ultimately, divorce becomes the necessary rubric of understanding women in both novels. Looking at novels concerning divorce and war – novels literally at the breakdown of traditional representation – readers find that the conventions of female (mis)representation produce a parallel “critical pantheon” of Edwardian literature that needs not only recovery, but extensive rewriting.

## CHAPTER 2 DIVORCE, COVERTURE, AND “THE TROUBLE WITH WOMEN”

As a narrative device as well as an institution, divorce problematizes Edwardian fiction: it is an anxiety born from what Samuel Hynes calls “an odd pivotal position between the nineteenth century and the twentieth,” a “narrow place made turbulent by the thrust and tumble of two powerful opposing tides,” and a device permeating representations of male-female relationships inherited from the Victorian novel (Hynes vii). Between parties “more thoroughly alienated from each other than ever,” divorce was an ever-present socio-political concern, as it became centralized in debates in the Lords and the Commons, and by suffragette social rallies held in Trafalgar Square; accordingly, it is difficult to pin down to particular reactions, and easy to lose in the greater context of suffrage and its characterizations as “women’s revolution” (vii). Thus, advancements towards equal rights in marriage and, subsequently, divorce for women are frequently seen in Edwardian texts as undermining society itself.

In this section, I analyze the use of the terms “coverture” and “divorce” in popular narratives from the Edwardian era; in many divorce novels, both terms imply a position of power held over women that is simultaneously and ubiquitously a form of persecution and enslavement. What both terms seem to connote in fiction is an attack on male-inscribed hierarchies of value, objectification, and identity, all of which had been questioned and their demise anticipated by Late-Victorian and fin-de-siècle literatures. This is not to suggest that all fiction that critiqued marriage successfully collapsed these hierarchies; in fact, as Davida Pines argues in *The Marriage Paradox: Modernist Novels and the Cultural Imperative to Marry*, many novels did quite the opposite, “paradoxically reinforce[ing] the marital norm” (Pines 3). Instead, this juxtaposition of societal advancement and fictional representation can be seen as devices used in certain divorce novels that are meant to emphasize the stress placed on categories of gender, and

the “retaliation” of women’s movements that was seen as a response to both constructions. Coinciding with the First World War, the “attack” of the various women’s movements was codified as a similar (and seemingly more significant) trauma than that of battle and shellshock.

In *Edwardian Stories of Divorce*, Janice Hubbard Harris argues that, at the end of a divorce narrative, the winning party is the gender best represented by the fiction. Like DuPlessis, Harris claims that divorce thus functions as a structural metaphor for the narrative itself: it is a struggle to be represented, a struggle that mirrors societal concerns for divorce, but one that, nonetheless, cannot be reduced simply to societal concerns. As a narrative device – indeed, many plots in the Edwardian era are based solely upon the idea or the act of divorce and its physical and mental aftermath – the “divorce story” typifies the uncertainty of the era, in that it cannot be easily categorized. Harris attempts to categorize these narratives by differentiating between “stock stories,” “counterstories,” and the “divorce novel.”<sup>1</sup> Stock stories, Harris explains, include tabloid divorce stories on trials listed in the Divorce Court Report that appeared in Sunday papers such as *The Dispatch*, *Lloyd’s Weekly News*, *News of the World*, *People*, *Reynold’s News*, and *The Umpire*, which “reflect their location in the paper’s layout,” carrying “the voyeuristic tenor of the preceding page’s theatrical gossip while glancing ahead to the pathos and sensationalism of the crime reports” (Harris 43). As Harris notes, the majority of these stories were written by men, and concerned male experience of divorce. Accordingly, these narratives contributed to the “reigning Edwardian narrative” of reading divorce as a “women’s issue,” and

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Harris for the extensive and laborious research, careful notation, and methods of thematization and categorization in *Edwardian Stories of Divorce*. In my own attempt to construct a reading of the Edwardian divorce novel, a reading that cannot account for all of the complexities found in Harris’s text, I have attempted to adopt Harris’s resistance to reading for category or genre (as Harris makes clear in the introduction, her own categorization of divorce narratives functions to indicate the impossibility of finding a conventional strand throughout the period). In particular, Harris’s resistances to categorical readings as well as her juxtaposition of competing narratives have informed my reading of *Parade’s End*, a series that presents the issue with “complex ambivalence” (Harris 113).

produced familiar tropes such as public humiliation, widespread publicity, parental estrangement, and child neglect.<sup>2</sup> They also placed responsibility for said transgressions largely on women.

Counterstories, on the other hand, include the testimonies and hearings from the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes; appointed in 1909, the fourteen commissioners, hearing testimonies from 246 witnesses over the course of three years, functioned as a forum for women to respond to and refute their marital representations – “to generate and record a national conversation on divorce[,] to recognize the plurality of views expressed[,] and to respond with a policy that captured the conversation” (68, 182). As Harris asserts, “the presence of women’s voices in this public conversation” resisted “the reigning narrative’s position on a range of concerns”: they “refuted the mystical nature of the marriage vow; the advantages of separations over divorces; the social value of a gendered division of labor; the differing significance of male and female adultery; the centrality of adultery as an indication of marital failure; the danger of allowing the working class access to divorce; [and] the fairness of a legal system run entirely by men” (94). Harris argues that the “counterstories” presented overwhelming evidence of support for gender equity, something lost to the explicit function of the stock stories to shock and entertain. “As witnesses testify on the need for women to act as listeners – solicitors, barristers, judges, members of the jury, the assembled public – they are speaking directly to the crucial role interpretive communities play in the construction of meaning,” Harris asserts; “they solicited and listened to the views of the people; they organized

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<sup>2</sup> John Galsworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga* may appear as a counterexample: Irene’s separation from Soames in *The Man of Property* does not paint her as undutiful, but rather as self-governing, and the legal proceedings (Soames’s anxiety to take the divorce to court, Winifred’s divorce) that structure *In Chancery* ultimately prove sympathetic to Irene. Its popularity in the Edwardian era and influence also suggests its use as a counterexample to the “conventional” divorce novel critiqued here as an extension of popular societal conceptions of gender and marriage.

and recorded an extremely complex social conversation,” and “then responded with an analysis of the law that envisioned it as a very powerful way of imagining the real” (100, 102).

If one were to attempt to chart novelistic conventions that were developed from stock stories and counterstories, it may appear that all Edwardian novels typified or explicitly mirrored societal reactions to divorce, assuming the same dichotomies that Harris suggests the issues produced on the public. However, Harris makes an important distinction here, writing that the Edwardian “divorce novel” exhibits different devices than those commonly found in the non-fictional accounts presented by “stock stories” and “counterstories.” As Harris writes, “the Edwardian divorce novel, in all of its variety, offers more, and more complex, plots, on three important issues: the proper role of communal surveillance with respect to marital failure; life after divorce; and the effect of divorce on children” (113). In a survey of thirty-six Edwardian novels, Harris finds that the “most salient feature of the divorce novels is their refusal, as a group, to toe any one narrative line” (109).<sup>3</sup> In conjunction with DuPlessis’s claim that conventional closure decides a (typically male) victor, Harris notes a familiar problem with the sense of closure given in divorce novels, specifically with using “divorce” as a plot device that necessitates resolution:

In exciting ways, [...] Edwardian marriage novels struggled against traditional cultural and narrative assumptions. But the results were uneven. Especially in the crucial moment of the novel’s ending, the allure of a happy closure and reconstituted couple often won out. Do novels specifically about divorce distinguish themselves within this larger category of problematic marriage fictions? If we focus on endings, the differences are negligible. (108-109)

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<sup>3</sup> This survey cannot begin to speak for the volume of texts produced during this period on marriage or divorce, let alone texts in which either framework influences the plot or constitutes a significant portion of its structure. It is interesting to locate *Parade’s End* and *The Return of the Soldier* as divorce novels within Harris’s survey: the 1928 publication of Ford’s novel places it in the series of divorce novels falling outside of Harris’s survey, while West’s novella, published in 1918, falls right into the center. Notably, Ford fits Harris’s description of male writers representing divorce after 1920, and West clearly fits into the “preponderance” of novels written by women, about women (183).

In Harris's reading, the closure presented at the end of a novel represents a legal ruling, with one party guilty and the other innocent, then the ending would seem to either legitimate or deny the events of the narrative; the end of the narrative presents closure for the characters depicted, and no more progression is possible for the characters. This particular reading of "closure" concerns the moralistic novels of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries – the *Bildungsroman*, the marriage plot, and the social problem novel – in which the ending signifies the purpose of the narrative and its intended message to its audience. As Rachel DuPlessis argues in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, the traditional romance plot developed into the prominent narrative, one that mirrored and codified particular representations of sex and gender:

As a narrative pattern, the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal and narrative success. The romance plot separated love and quest, values sexual asymmetry, including the division of labor by gender, is based on extremes of sexual difference, and evokes an aura around the couple itself. In short, the romance plot, broadly speaking, is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole. (DuPlessis 5)

In this sense, the Edwardian novel, borrowing from tradition, is also a novel in which the ending reveals the meaning of the narrative. Since divorce can function as a metaphor for the struggle for representation between men and women in Edwardian fiction (a struggle that, according to Harris and DuPlessis, presents an outcome in which only one side can "win"), the Edwardian divorce novel restricts the development of women by the very structure of the fiction itself.

For Harris, divorce is a device conscious of its emplotment in narrative as a fissure, as a trauma exacted by women on men and meant to be remedied ("nursed" back to health), in turn, by women. As Anthea Trodd asserts in *Women's Writing in English, Britain 1900-1945*, "these writings assumed a congruence between sexual fulfillment and social stability," reading divorce as a transgression from and affront to those societal values (Trodd 17). Once the centrality of marriage was shaken by women's movements at the turn of the century and legally challenged

by the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 (and, as Trodd notes, by the later introduction of financial aid for divorces in the Divorce Law Reform Act of 1948, which helped lower the cost and make it accessible to the working class), other conventions were by association undermined as well (17). Treating sexuality as a construction of social stability, the challenge presented to the familial and institutional representation of “husband” and to the domestic characterization of “wife” by divorce was coded in narratives not only as discord between genders, but as a particularly female transgression.

Given its employment in conventional narratives, divorce was inimical to women’s movements at the turn of the century. As a developing institution, divorce was perceived as a central device in the struggle for women’s rights. In Chapter VI, “The Trouble With Women” in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, Samuel Hynes asserts that “the campaign for women’s rights, in its more dramatic and militant forms, did effect an alienation of men from women and harden the Conservative opposition to reforms, even those reforms which had nothing to do with suffrage” (Hynes 173). As Trodd writes, this alienation has much to do with developments (or the lack thereof) made since the Married Women’s Property Acts of the late-nineteenth century, developments that nevertheless reaffirmed that “women had no significant stake in public or professional life” and “had no real citizenship,” two claims later argued in the 1930s by Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* (Trodd 6). While the rights of middle-class wives changed in the transition into the twentieth century, the extent to which these changes were seen in the working-class (for any married woman who also participated in work) was still uneven:

The Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, around which the major feminist campaign of the nineteenth century was fought, had won married women control of their earnings and of their inherited wealth. A series of acts had advanced the custody and guardianship rights of wives over their children, although it was not until 1925 that they achieved equal guardianship rights with the father. In 1891 a husband’s right to confine his wife under his roof had been successfully

challenged. The inequality of the Divorce Act of 1858, by which husbands could seek a divorce on the grounds of simple adultery, wives only for aggravated adultery, was overthrown in 1923, and in 1937 the grounds were extended to desertion and insanity. (12-13)

As Trodd notes, while the Marriage Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 placed fiscal responsibility into the hands of women, the complications of marriage – adultery, guardianship, and divorce – lasted long into the nineteenth century. Locating her argument in the polemics of the period – Olive Schreiner’s *Women and History* in 1911, Dora Russell’s *Hypatia or Women and Knowledge* in 1925, Ray Strachey’s *The Cause: A Short History of the Women’s Movement in Great Britain* in 1928, Winifred Holtby’s *Women in a Changing Civilization* in 1934, and Woolf’s *Three Guineas* in 1938 – Trodd demonstrates that the struggle between “how to mediate between the rival claims of equality and distinctiveness, and how to justify the centrality of feminism to national life” were the most difficult to reconcile (6). As Trodd continues, it is the “rejection of a particular kind of women’s history, which charts the progress of women towards recognition in, and assimilation with, the patriarchal world” that preoccupies the narratives of this period; rejecting the “ideal of sacrificial womanhood” represented by the Victorian “Angel in the House” as well as its corollary, the coveted yet unattainable “fallen woman,” Edwardian narratives seek to locate female characters in a category that denies epistemology in an attempt to reclaim a position of epistemological power over women (6, 11).<sup>4</sup> In a position of unknowability, the female character is inaccessible to narrator and reader alike; she is, by

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<sup>4</sup> My summary of the multiple forums, groups, movements, claims, and representations of the struggle for women’s rights at the turn of the century can hardly do justice to the sheer volume of work that exists on this topic. From autobiographical narratives recovered from the period to work done by Millicent Fawcett’s National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and Emmeline Pankhurst’s Women’s Social and Political Union, the heterogeneous, sometimes contradictory, forces and movements in this period are impossible to fully cover in a single text. With this claim in mind, my summary is meant simply to introduce the complexity of these discourses to a shared struggle against coverture as a decaying socio-political ideology, a narrative device inherited from Victorian fiction, and a very real restriction on the lives of women.

correlation, unintelligible (unintelligent or, as Woolf suggests, “idiotic”), without agency; a mere plot device, a mystery meant not to be understood.

Perhaps the most significant remnant that Trodd identifies here in the narratives chronicled – the sentiment that seems to initiate and legitimize the objectification, alienation, and submission of these characters – is “coverture.” In Cicely Hamilton’s 1909 treatise *Marriage as a Trade*, marriage is characterized as something with a particularly masculine investment: as the “definite and necessary physical relation to man,” marriage is “practically compulsory” for women, “the result of artificial pressure, of unsound economic and social conditions – conditions which forced her energy into one channel, by the simple expedient of depriving it of every other outlet” (Hamilton 4, 7). By concentrating “all her hopes and ambitions on the one object,” men enshrined marriage as the only option for women (7). Hamilton’s definition of “marriage” implies that the relationship between husband and wife is structurally similar to that of author and character:

Having assumed that she is incomplete without him, he draws the quite permissible conclusion that she exists only for the purpose of attaining to completeness through him – and that where she does not so attain to it, the unfortunate creature is, for all practical purposes, non-existent. (4-5)<sup>5</sup>

“Completeness” is only possible through man; without it, the “female character” is, “for all practical purposes, non-existent” (5). In this formula, Hamilton claims that the female’s identity is not only authored by the male, but possessed by him. This means that all aspects of identity –

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<sup>5</sup> In light of reading Hamilton’s definition of marriage, her definition of “woman” is certainly less problematic: “By a woman,” Hamilton begins, “I understand an individual human being whose life is her own concern[,] whose worth, in my eyes (worth being an entirely personal matter) is in no way advanced or detracted from by the accident of marriage[,] who does not rise in my estimation by reason of a purely physical capacity for bearing children, or sink in my estimation through a lack of that capacity” (Hamilton 2). Not an “actual” or a “potential,” “woman” is here defined by characteristics unassociated (or, for Hamilton, potentially *disassociated*) from the “sexual and maternal” relationships that typify male constructions of “woman” – “in short, I never think of her either as a wife or as a mother,” Hamilton concludes, “I separate the woman from her attributes” (3). While Hamilton acknowledges that this characterization is an ideal, the idea of “woman” defined by something extrinsic from (although not external to) the relationships that codify experience of the world is in itself an appeal to societal change.

subjectivity, personality, social status, legal status, rights – are absolutely dependent upon (in this reading, incorporated by and potentially originating in) male identity.

To return to Hynes' *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, one may read his initial description of the problem in representing female characters as a problem for the other sanctified traditions that, under the umbrella of coverture, are also affected by women's rights. In "The Trouble With Women," Hynes appears to return to the binaries that characterize previous interpretations of Edwardian representations of femininity as demonstrably limiting:

The trouble with women during the Edwardian period was simply that their troubles could not be kept separate and distinct, but kept getting mixed up with each other and with other social issues: contraception threatened the family and the birth rate, divorce threatened the Church and the stability of society, suffrage threatened political balances, and so even the most moderate move toward liberation seemed a rush toward chaos. The women themselves contributed to this state of affairs in the closing years of the period – that is to say the suffragettes did – by the extreme and increasing violence of their demonstrations. Edwardian Englishmen, seeing women rioting, burning, destroying property, and even dying, drew back in alarm from a cause that threatened to loose that rage for chaos upon the world of men. And since men governed England, it is not surprising that, after more than two decades of considering the problems of women, they went to war in 1914 with apparent relief, as a husband might leave a nagging wife, and left the problems unsolved, the liberating actions not even begun. (Hynes 211)

While Trodd and Hynes both characterize the First World War as an interruption in the move toward liberation, Hynes here implies that the severance of war permitted Edwardian Englishmen a distraction from "the problems of women" (211). In this passage, Hynes introduces yet another complication (and, almost necessarily, a legal one) of the slow demise of coverture: divorce, a rupture in the traditional (male) narrative. In *Edwardian Stories of Divorce*, Janice Hubbard Harris writes that "as family law had developed over the preceding two decades, more women and eventually men of all classes were receiving the state's permission to separate"; however, "it was not that significant numbers of Edwardians actually rushed to the law[,] but instead that discourses concerning divorce increased (Harris 20). For Harris,

narratives are sensitive barometers of social change: “the moment ‘marriage’ and ‘the family’ are seen as something other than unchanging and natural practices,” then “the taboos against discussing divorce [are] undermined,” and “marital failure becomes one more private concern open to public scrutiny” (Harris 20, 23). In the wake of the New Woman novels in the 1880s and 1890s, writers of “divorce novels” needed to find ways to “write beyond the conventional,” complicating “intergenerational sexual dynamics” and imagining divorce “beyond the concept of marital offense” (108-109, 149). As I will address in the next chapter, Harris’s reading suggests that the Edwardian divorce novel complicates the normative gender politics of marriage by privileging female inscrutability, reversing its intended use to restrict and deny female agency. However, this depiction of women as unknowable becomes further complicated by the invocation of a fissure that allowed men to claim that same epistemological position – the First World War.

In the demise of coverture and the rise of divorce as legal institutions in the Edwardian era, the role of husband shifted from a strong, distinct masculinity that is always self-defined and self-originating to a masculinity that depends on a female counterpart or counterparts for definition. This shift suggests a crisis of masculinity that held women responsible for men’s victimization in divorce as well as war, and by doing so, unwittingly relocated representational power into the hands of female characters. By tracking the agency of the “female counterparts” in *Parade’s End* and *The Return of the Soldier*, one can see that the normative role of woman as housewife changed from a male-created category to a position of power that granted female characters much more agency and afforded their demystification in narrative. Throughout these narratives, male protagonists are continually paired with female characters who subvert the hierarchy of the conventional family, emasculating their male counterparts. This subversion is

typically represented by divorce, an act that, despite its legality and increasing social permissibility during the Edwardian era, symbolized a loss of power for men. The Victorian idea of coverture – its persistence as a narrative device, and its foundation in familial relationships throughout Victorian fiction – is brought back into Edwardian fiction by male authors in what appears to be an attempt to regain an impossible ideal of marriage untroubled, with gender roles undisturbed. Accordingly, the similarities between trauma and coverture as remedial narrative devices emphasize the struggle for men to reassign new categories to women: if women could not be “completed,” in Hamilton’s phrase, by their relationship to men, then women were *necessarily* “incomprehensible” or, worse, “non-existent” (Hamilton 5, 7). Labeling women as “unknowable” circumvents the stigma of being divorced for one’s own “incomplete” masculinity by suggesting that women deny their own subjectivity by disavowing their male “authors.” As this device proves difficult to manage, men begin to adopt that same status as a claim to their own victimization, a position enabled by the arrival of the First World War.

CHAPTER 3  
THE GREAT WAR AND *PARADE'S END*

It is difficult to conceptualize divorce as a great fissure in Edwardian fiction without invoking that “other” narrative fissure, World War I. Just as narratives of divorce incorporate particular male anxieties and gender conflicts into their structure, narratives of war exacerbate these representational struggles, turning male and female conflicts into, for many critics, a war over representation. In *No Man's Land Volume 2: Sexchanges*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write that “the unmaning terrors of combat lead not just to a generalized sexual anxiety but also to an anger directed specifically against the female, as if the Great War itself were primarily a climatic episode in a battle of the sexes that had already been raging for years” (Gilbert and Gubar 260). Throughout Chapter 7, “Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,” Gilbert and Gubar set male against female as competitors in wartime: “all the metamorphoses of sexuality and sex roles [...] seem to have issued in a crisis that set the ‘whispering ambitions’ of embattled men and women against each other,” a crisis “merely the first in a series of global apocalypses” that would pit the “dehumanized man” against “victorious femininity” (258-259, 261). This “victorious femininity” seems to arise from a new sexual agency; liberated from coverture, female characters now have the license to explicitly control the direction of the narrative.

As a “climatic episode” in Gilbert and Gubar's “battle of the sexes,” the Great War appears to provide level ground for virtually any ending: coverture can no longer function as a narrative strategy; it cannot ensure the “happy” closure of the novel, nor can it control representation of the female subject. In reading Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End*, a series in which the conclusion is decisively inconclusive about the state of marriage, the role of husband and of wife, and the aftermath of war, the use of divorce as a narrative structure is

problematized by a series of transactions without victories. As the only character that thoroughly permeates the disordered narrative, Sylvia represents a transgression of the heteronormative marital values DuPlessis identifies in the conventional British novel. In the narrative, Sylvia does not succumb to any “rightful end,” and her role seems to extend beyond the parameters set by the onset of both divorce and war. In this reading, Sylvia more than reimagines the representation of women in Ford’s series of novels; she repurposes the narrative as a drive to represent what was previously considered “unrepresentable” in Edwardian fiction. If the “rightful end” for women in literature was once, as DuPlessis argues, “social” or “judgmental,” this reading suggests that it changes in Edwardian fiction to “representational,” a category that is (as the divorce novel suggests) wrought with just as many problems and contradictions.

While the critical history on *Parade’s End* is extensive, it is limited by linear approaches to reading the series as strictly a war narrative. Early criticism of the tetralogy such as Ambrose Gordon’s *The Invisible Tent: The War Novels of Ford Madox Ford* (1964), Paul L. Wiley’s *Novelist of Three Worlds: Ford Madox Ford* (1962), and R. A. Cassell’s influential text *Ford Madox Ford: A Study of His Novels* (1962) all commit the fallacy of early-criticism to emphasize Ford’s importance in depicting war. These texts in particular seem to serve Hugh Kenner’s description of Ford’s style as “vastly allusive diffuseness,” casting all claims made by Ford and representations offered in his novels as an authorial intention to commit artistic obscurity (Kenner 149). Treating *Parade’s End* as an allegorical “fairy tale,” Gordon’s critique is later debunked by Gene M. Moore in the article “The Tory in a Time of Change: Social Aspects of Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*”; saving the tetralogy from assessments of genre, Moore attempts to cast the series in a greater socio-political context. After these initial assessments (a period in which no real debate concerning *Parade’s End* emerged), few articles address the work for

anything other than its genealogy in modernist fiction. Recent attempts to resuscitate Ford's work account for this distended history: Sara Haslam's recent volume *Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel, and the Great War* (2002) serves as a contemporary introduction to Ford, as similar contributions from Max Saunders and the Ford Madox Ford Society (Joseph Wiesenfarth, Paul Skinner, and Jenny Plastow) attempt to revitalize Ford's work.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in "Ford's Women: Between Fact and Fiction," Anne Marie Flanagan attempts to locate *Parade's End* in the context of Ford's own complicated critical arguments on women.

The lack of contemporary criticism on *Parade's End* is astonishing, given the extensive genealogy of criticism on Ford's novels. This absence, while it may be attributed to the tendency to identify with Ford's novel *The Good Soldier*, bespeaks an inability to locate the war tetralogy in a particular critical discourse. Most contemporary articles on *Parade's End* attempt to account for the seemingly irreconcilable narration of events, by implicating Ford in a history of impressionism: as Paul B. Armstrong suggests in "The Epistemology of Ford's Impressionism" with the phrase "Fordian bafflement," the elusions and ambiguities presented in all of Ford's work prompt readers to produce decidedly dualistic responses to his texts (Armstrong 2). Instead of reading *Parade's End* looking for textual clues to elucidate the events of the narrative, it is useful to instead look at the ways that Ford's tetralogy, rather than reproducing the "Fordian bafflement," actually represents conventions of Edwardian divorce novels.

In Ford's *Parade's End*, the dynamics of divorce and its representation are conventional, with its main protagonist a relic from an age in which divorce was unthinkable. In the first two books, descriptions of Christopher Tietjens suggest his development from an anachronism into a

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<sup>1</sup> *International Ford Madox Ford Studies* is an ongoing annual publication edited by Max Saunders and published by Rodopi: to date, its eight volumes of criticism account for most of the work about Ford to emerge in the last decade.

tragic hero. Christopher is the youngest son of the Tietjens family and inheritor of Groby Manor, the country estate; coming from old money, he is a character who, as Robie Macauley writes, “is humane in his relationships, feudal in his outlook, Christian in his beliefs, a classicist by education, a Tory in politics” and, in the Twentieth century, “a member of an extinct species” (Macauley viii-ix). Ford describes Christopher as “the last English Tory,” a “species” of man that “died sometime in the Eighteenth century”; when first introduced to Christopher, the narrator notes that “as Tietjens saw the world, you didn’t ‘talk[,]’ perhaps you didn’t even think about how you felt” (Ford 6). His companion Macmaster describes him as “vacant apparently, you couldn’t tell what in the world he was thinking of,” and his confidences, when given, are “only to solicitors, doctors, or the clergy who are not quite men” (15). When introduced to Valentine Wannop, he is described as if a complete anachronism: “with his loosely hung clothes and immense hands, the white patch on the side of his rather cropped head and his masked, rather shapeless features, he affected her queerly as being both in and out of place” (I, 86). Descriptions of Christopher vary throughout the first book of the tetralogy, as rumors and “club gossip” begin to characterize him, alternately, as hero and fool; Yet in Book II, *No More Parades*, these descriptions change as Christopher’s characterization is further colored by his role on the battlefield as administrative officer and then, in *A Man Could Stand Up*, as commander at the front-line, a promotion inadvertently caused by Sylvia’s attempt to disgrace him further by revealing inconsistencies in his findings in the Department of Statistics before the war. After his father’s reported suicide, reports on Sylvia’s “infelicities” (her affairs with Major Drake, Major Perowne, and General Campion, the child born from one of the affairs, and speculation that news of Sylvia’s first affair caused his father’s suicide), and the loss of Groby Manor, Christopher is nevertheless depicted as a tragic hero, forced by General Campion to choose between being

relieved of duty in disgrace or sent to the front-line on promotion. Christopher describes himself when addressed by the general as

really, sir, the English public schoolboy. That's an eighteenth-century product. What with the love of truth that – God help me! – they rammed into me at Clifton and the belief Arnold forced upon Rugby that the vilest of sins – the vilest of all sins – is to peach to the head master! That's me, sir. Other men get over their schooling. I never have. I remain adolescent. These things are obsessions with me. (Ford 490)

As “an eighteenth-century product,” Christopher sees himself as a sacrifice to war and modernity, a relic meant to die with the machinations of his age and has, strangely, survived. “Naturally the civilian population wanted soldiers to be made to look like fools, and to be done in,” Christopher reasons, “They wanted the war won by men who would at the end be either humiliated or dead” (495). Sacrificing himself, Christopher decides that the only noble route to take is to honor his wife's word, even if untrue, and accept the position as commander of the doomed battalion.

While the narrative concerns soldiering, much of the plot concerns developments in the dissolution of Christopher's marriage. Throughout the narrative, Christopher is tormented by his wife Sylvia as to the status of their marriage; in Book I, *Some Do Not...*, the reader is informed that Sylvia and Christopher have been separated since 1912, after Sylvia had run away with her lover Drake, pushing Christopher “into the most barefaced snare, into the cruelest snare, of the worst woman that could be imagined” (14). Despite Sylvia's insistence on a divorce, Christopher cannot fathom consenting to it; he frequently cites the well-being of his son, and believes the act itself to be indecorous. In Books III and IV, Christopher begins to take charge of the accusations made against him by his wife, surviving the war and appearing as the hero of the narrative. By remaining the steadfast gentleman, suffering her mistreatment and refusing to divorce, he becomes the figure “best represented” in the separation. Returning to the trenches in Book III, A

*Man Could Stand Up*, Christopher is seen against the “tortured ground” and the “endless monotony of effort by numbers” that make him stand out against the bleak homogeneity of the battlefield (549-550). Despite his performance, Tietjens is dishonorably discharged from duty by General Campion who Christopher suspects to be involved with Sylvia. In Book IV, *The Last Post*, Christopher slowly rebuilds his reputation through furniture appraisal; upon news of Valentine’s pregnancy, the future appears to be in Christopher’s hands. Here Christopher’s brother Mark, before his passing at the close of the text, insists that Christopher divorce Sylvia:

Marriage, if you do not regard it as a sacrament – as no doubt it ought to be regarded – was nothing more than a token that a couple intended to stick to each other. Nowadays people – the right people – bothered precious little about anything but that. A constant change of partners was a social nuisance; you could not tell whether you could or couldn’t invite a couple together to a tea-fight. And society existed for social functions. (748-750)

As Mark continues, while “there would no doubt be [...] a beastly stink,” the scrutiny would be better than “the sort of veiled ill-fame that Sylvia had contrived to get attached to Christopher” (749). Despite insistence from numerous persons directly and indirectly involved in the intermarital problems, Christopher remains obstinate about the marriage, and refuses the divorce. In his adherence to his “eighteenth century” schooling and performance as a gentleman, Christopher sacrifices his happiness to uphold traditional values. Christopher sees marriage as an essential structure of existence, and at the end of the text remains a symbol of a type of union now defunct. However, his insistence on the permanence and necessity of that structure, and his moral victory in the text, champions his values as those of the narrative itself. Christopher’s masculinity is thus reaffirmed in his immediate return to marriage in his commitment to Valentine, a symbol of the “true” wife.

Ford’s male-centric narrative seems to cast the most extraordinary character of the text, Sylvia, into obscurity. Seen as a cruel, manipulative wife, Sylvia is described as the villain of the

tetralogy; however, her characterization ultimately leads the reader to sympathize with her, despite the narrative's/author's villainization.<sup>2</sup> Foremost, Sylvia is a product of her Victorian upbringing, an upbringing that ensnares her in a rigid Catholic sense of marital duty. Despite this upbringing, and contrary to the details given by Christopher and the supporting male characters, she is cast as being beyond comprehension, her actions "veiled" and her motives unknown. Although the attempt to capture that subjectivity ultimately fails – best represented here in the inability to describe Sylvia and a recourse to descriptions of her inscrutable "nature" – it is indicative of a disruption of male-centric values in Edwardian literature. This disruption, if only momentary, reveals Ford's own anxiety for gender in this period, but it also produces an alarmingly complicated – and, in our attempt to "know" the "(un)knowable *Weib an Sich*," an increasingly contradictory – representation of femininity.

In her brief textual appearances, Sylvia is depicted as enigmatic, unapproachable, and cold. These characterizations are based on a synthesis of Christopher's own thoughts and reflections, the narrator's interjections, and assessments made by other characters. Amidst these impressions, Sylvia's telegrams punctuate the narrative: even in Christopher's seclusion with Valentine, Sylvia's telegram manages to interrupt their embrace (120). Although Sylvia's proper introduction does not come until later, her telegram on page 8 opens the narrative on the very subject of the Tietjens' marriage. A transcription of Christopher's response to her telegram, printed on page 31 and read by Father Consett, gives further insight into the nature of these messages and their imposition in the narrative as a surrogate for Sylvia when away:

"It's bad," he muttered. He made a sound like "Umbleumble... Worse than I feared... umbleumble... 'accept resumption yoke but on rigid conditions.' What's

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<sup>2</sup> By "extraordinary," I do not intend to commit the same fallacy of describing Sylvia as beyond our understanding of her; instead, that her mobility, agency, and command in the narrative suggests her own capabilities – indeed, the capabilities unsuccessfully sublimated – of leading the narrative.

this: especially; it ought to be a 'p,' 'especially regards child reduce establishment ridiculous our position remake settlements in child's sole interests flat not house entertaining minimum am prepared resign office settle Yorkshire but imagine this not suit you child remain sister Effie open visits both wire if this rough outline provisionally acceptable in that case will express draft general position Monday for you and mother reflect upon follow self Tuesday arrive Thursday Lobscheid go Wiesbaden fortnight on social task discussion Thursday limited solely comma emphasised commas to affairs.'" (31)

Fitting an entire conversation into the telegram, Christopher not only establishes Sylvia's only option(s), but appears to anticipate Sylvia's response as well. Christopher's telegram also emphasizes the legal talk of divorce in the narrative – particularly, how confusing it can be – and suggests that it is another device left completely to men.

Despite the variety of voices, they nevertheless carry the same valence of the narrator's condemnation. In her first appearance in *Some Do Not*, Sylvia is being counseled by Father Consett in Germany on her request to divorce Christopher, which she is denied; "'you're revolted at the idea of my going straight from one man's arms to another'" Sylvia remarks, "you want to spare Christopher... the humiliation. [...] I've reckoned on that. It will give me a little of my own back" (40-41). In reaction to the dismissal, Sylvia expresses her only means of resistance, which further condemns her:

"Listen here.... I've always got this to look forward to: I'll settle down by that man's side. I'll be as virtuous as any woman. I've made up my mind to it and I'll be it. And I'll be bored stiff for the rest of my life. Except for one thing. I can torment that man. And I'll do it. Do you understand how I'll do it? There are many ways. But if the worst comes to the worst, I can always drive him silly... by corrupting the child!" She was panting a little, and round her brown eyes the whites showed. "I'll get even with him. I can. I know how, you see. And with you, through him, for tormenting me." (41)

Sylvia here suggests that by playing into the domestic role expected of her, she can "drive [Christopher] silly," subverting her marginality by exploiting the limited power she does possess within the family structure. In the conclusion to this scene, as she "erected her body above her skirts on the sofa, stiffened like a snake's neck above its coils," Father Consett is prompted to

draw his vial of holy water (41). Throughout the rest of the narrative, Father Consett's domestic code follows Sylvia, as she wonders, in *No More Parades*, "if, from where he sat in heaven, Father Consett would be satisfied," and in *The Last Post*, when "up over the landscape, the hills, the sky, she felt the shadow of Father Consett, the arms extended as if in a gigantic cruciform" (394-395, 806).

Similar characterizations of Sylvia pose her as a villainess clearly colored by the fragmented opinions and subjectivities presented by the narrator that seem to reaffirm Christopher's own interests and drives. In the beginning of Part Two of *Some Do Not*, Sylvia is seemingly reintroduced to the reader as a character with self-agency and an exacting control over her representation, a description immediately undermined by the narrator's implication that her intentions are purely sexual:

You couldn't discover in the skin of her face any deadness; in her eyes the shade more of fatigue than she intended to express, but she had purposely increased her air of scornful insolence. That was because she felt that her hold over men increased to the measure of her coldness. Someone, she knew, had once said of a dangerous woman, that when she entered the room every woman kept her husband on the leash. It was Sylvia's pleasure to think that, before she went out of that room, all the women in it realised with mortification – that they needn't! For if coolly and distinctly she had said on entering: "Nothing doing!" as barmaids will to the enterprising, she couldn't plainly have conveyed to the other women that she had no use for their treasured rubbish. (145)

"Man-mad," as the narrator writes, Sylvia "*had* to have men at her feet; that was, as it were, the price of her – purely social – daily bread" (145, 150). Contradictory passages suggest that Sylvia is both temptress (in this role, powerful) and victim. For example, when followed into her room by a young man, one of the "creatures" with "the clipped words, the straight backs and the admirable records – as long as you didn't enquire *too* closely," Sylvia takes control, as "she seemed to him to have become ten foot high with a gift of words that scorched his backbone and the voice of a frozen marble statue: a *chaud-froid* effect" (146). This "sport" ("if it were a sport,

[it] was a sport not without a spice of danger” the narrator remarks) of “turning down” sexual advances may seem to again suggest that Sylvia is cruel and manipulative. However, this reflection is closely followed by reflection on her rape by Drake:

The miserable memory would come, ghost-like, at any time, anywhere. She would see Drake’s face, dark against the white things; she would feel the thin night-gown ripping off her shoulder; but most of all she would seem, in darkness that excluded the light of any room in which she might be, to be transfused by the mental agony that there she had felt: the longing for the brute who had mangled her, the dreadful pain of the mind. The odd thing was that the sight of Drake himself, whom she had seen several times since the outbreak of the war, left her completely without emotion. She had no aversion, but no longing for him.... She had, nevertheless, longing, but she knew it was longing merely to experience again that dreadful feeling. And not with Drake.... (149).

Sylvia’s return to this “miserable memory,” one that causes her to “drive her nails into her palms,” is interpreted and encoded by the narrator as a “longing,” the desire to again be subjugated to male dominance and to return to that “dreadful pain of mind” that is nevertheless read as a desire to be raped (149). Immediately thereafter, the narrator suggests that Sylvia feels “much of the exhilaration that men told her they felt after bringing off a clean right and left, [...] that the same young men felt when they were out shooting with beginners,” again presenting a contradictory reassurance of Sylvia’s complicity in her encounters with otherwise “virtuous” men (149).

Although the most prominent female character (for this reading, certainly the most important), Sylvia is the least-depicted character in the course of events that comprise the narrative; descriptions of and encounters with her are frequently narrated through flashback, stream-of-consciousness representations of what other characters are thinking, or through the interference of the narrator. In “Ford’s Women: Beyond Fact and Fiction,” Anne Marie Flanagan argues that “the sexes in *Parade’s End* exist in an uncertain and suspicious relation to each other,” claiming that Sylvia, as the “*femme fatale*” of the narrative, provokes the struggle over

equanimity (Flanagan 238).<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Sylvia occupies a curious position in the narrative: although often misrepresented, she is *ever-present*; even when not within the contextual boundaries of immediate representation (she is, in fact, not present for most of the major events of the narrative), her voice is a constant influence on the moral code in the narrative and a direct influence on Christopher's thoughts and actions through memories, telegraphs, and interjections from the narrative; and, even in scenes in which it seems that Sylvia should be denied access (in the tradition of the novel, scenes and places exclusively for men), Sylvia appears in person, breaking the illusion of the narrative itself. In the second book, *No More Parades*, Sylvia breaks this illusion by making an appearance at base, after leaving her lover Perowne at Yssingueux; upon seeing Christopher in his element, Sylvia decides to spread a lie about him: "A triumph for Christopher was at that moment so exactly what Sylvia thought she did not want that she decided to tell the general that Christopher was a Socialist" (409). Sylvia's absence becomes not only a theme, Christopher's inability to "see" the female subject in front of him, but a threat; her intrusions break through this selective blindness and make "an atrocious row" (411). In Flanagan's reading, Sylvia contradictorily embodies "the women's movement theme of sex-antagonism"; although she herself "has no inclinations toward the movement," she has simultaneously produced "an attack on female sexual license" and yet exhibits "unnatural sexual appetites" (Flanagan 241-242). She becomes, unlike Valentine, almost impossible to decisively characterize.

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<sup>3</sup> "In spite of [Ford's] ostensible support for women's causes," Flanagan writes, "his writing reveals his tendency to contain and control the advancement of women" (Flanagan 237). Ford's involvement in the Women's Freedom League, the Women's Social and Political Union, the Women's Writer's Suffrage League, and his volatile relationship with Violet Hunt is chronicled at length in Jane Eldridge Miller's *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel*. Howsoever Ford's opinions of and involvement in the suffrage movement contributed to Sylvia, it is useful to note here the characterization from Ford's 1911 essay "The Woman of the Novelists," in which the traditional female character is read as at once "a necessary animal, [...] but she was a very dangerous one" (Ford).

If unseen yet influential, Sylvia does have a particular role in the narrative beyond her (mis)representation – in fact, she appears, more than any other character, to be *irreducible* to any single characterization or persona, to occupy that curious place where, in a particularly Wittgensteinian view, language implies (but doesn't ensure) subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> Here, however, I suggest a different reading, one that attempts to map her influence in the narrative as the narrator's drive to categorize and sublimate dissenting voices. This desire to sublimate is in the interest of preserving the function of the narrative as a divorce novel: Sylvia's forced entry into the convent near Birkenhead in Book I, *Some Do Not*, is intended as the suppression of a dissenting voice, her absence a means of stalling the potential problems caused by her presence. Yet this absence is not secured, and Sylvia, resisting the emplotment of the narrative itself, defies the boundaries of the novel, appearing on base in *No More Parades*. Presenting Christopher with a new war, Sylvia instigates his return to the battlefield, his last haven, and after the war, Sylvia returns at the structural collapse of Groby Manor in *The Last Post*. To return to a claim made at the beginning of this chapter, DuPlessis' "writing beyond the ending," Sylvia is a device for reading beyond the parameters delegated by the narrator, those of a standard model of femininity seen throughout the text. As a foil to Sylvia, Christopher's mistress Valentine Wannop seems to function as a model of "right" femininity in the narrative. Valentine appears firsthand throughout the narrative, often at Christopher's side, and in frequent chapters devoted solely to her

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<sup>4</sup> As Wittgenstein asserts in *Philosophical Investigations*, the "ceremony" of using words to describe feelings – of using a word to "point [...] inwardly" – complicates meaning in a world in which we have no criterion for accessing, let alone *knowing*, the "inward" feelings of others (Wittgenstein 92e, §258). This impression of the failure to communicate as a failure to know anyone is at heart in Ford's novel *The Good Soldier*, a novel in which, as Samuel Hynes suggests in "The Epistemology of *The Good Soldier*," we "do not know [...] that what we see has meaning; if it has, it is an order which the narrator imposes upon phenomena, not one which is inherent there" (Hynes 97). By reading *Parade's End* as a novel that assumes this same confusion, reading for the ways in which the characters fight to control the narrative suggests that the possession of the narrative is itself the only remaining vestige of meaning, and the last attempt to "impose" order on the world.

perspective. In *Some Do Not*, however, Valentine is introduced by the qualities Christopher seems to want to see in all women:

Miss Wannop was a tweeny maid. Say a lady's help, by nature. She was of good family, for the Wannops were first heard of at Birdlip in Gloucestershire in the year 1417 – no doubt enriched after Agincourt. But even brilliant men of good family will now and then throw daughters who are lady helps by nature. That was one of the queernesses of heredity.... And, though Tietjens had even got as far as to realise that Miss Wannop must be a heroine who had sacrificed her young years to her mother's gifts, and no doubt to a brother at school – for he had guessed as far as that – even then Tietjens couldn't make her out as more than a lady help. Heroines are all very well, admirable, they may even be saints; but if they let themselves get careworn in face and go shabby.... Well, they must wait for the gold that shall be amply stored for them in heaven. (Ford 87)

“By nature,” Valentine is a “tweeny maid,” set to the menial work of housekeeping; peculiarly, she could have become a “heroine,” a status reserved for a particular “queer[ness] of heredity” (87). Had Valentine rebelled from her familial sacrifice, she may have become someone quite like Sylvia; as Marianne DeKoven argues in “Valentine Wannop and Thematic Structure in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*,” Valentine occupies, at different points in the narrative, positions of excessive sexuality and sexlessness, becoming a model of ambivalence (DeKoven 58). In this reading, Valentine is suitable for Christopher for precisely that reason: a potential that is never actualized, but capable of manipulation, and thus a fitting model of femininity. In turn, Sylvia's promise to “ruin” Christopher, to “drag [his] name through the mud” and “disturb [his] equanimity” replaces the struggle for divorce; Sylvia's narrative becomes the principal organizing structure of the narrative, overriding Christopher's role. By the fourth and final book, *The Last Post*, Sylvia proposes to General Campion, promising to proceed with the divorce on her own, presumably after the close of the narrative, “beyond the ending” itself.

In light of recasting Sylvia as the unseen heroine of the text, Christopher's masculinity is cast into doubt as events are reevaluated for what they actually reveal about Christopher's anxieties. Much of the text concerns Christopher's trouble over his marital situation: “My

principles prevent me from divorcing any woman, in particular any woman who is the mother of a child,” Christopher states, “Mrs. Tietjens, being a Roman Catholic, is prevented from divorcing me” (346). As the narrative progresses, however, the terms of the relationship become much more strained, and the progression into new legalities enables a shift of power back into Sylvia’s grasp. Christopher’s return to war is seen here instead as a retreat – in fact, his decision to accept the promotion as commander, despite its danger, is largely influenced by the knowledge that he will be away from Sylvia, “the idea of commanding divisional transport [...] like a vision of Paradise to Tietjens” (483). Revisiting this scene – formerly as the enshrinement of Christopher’s masculinity, and now as its collapse – Christopher’s determination to stay at war alters the entire course of the narrative, based solely on Sylvia’s promise of marital peril. In deciding Christopher’s fate, General Campion shares a long exchange concerning marriage, one that reveals the delicacies (and inadequacies) of Christopher’s masculinity:

“But what is a man to do if his wife is unfaithful to him?” The general said as if it were an insult: “Divorce the harlot! Or live with her!...” Only a beast, he went on, would expect a woman to live all her life alone in a cockloft! She’s bound to die. Or go on the streets.... What sort of a fellow wouldn’t see that? Was there any sort of beast who’d expect a woman to live...with a man beside her.... Why, she’d...she’d be bound to.... He’d have to take the consequences of whatever happened. The general repeated: “Whatever happened! If she pulled all the strings of all the shower-baths in the world! [...] Why don’t you divorce?” he asked. Panic came over Tietjens. He knew it would be his last panic of that interview. No brain could stand more. Fragments of scenes of fighting, voices, names, went before his eyes and ears. Elaborate problems.... The whole map of the embattled world ran out in front of him – as large as a field. An embossed map in greenish papier mâché – a ten-acre field [...] with the blood of O Nine Morgan blurring luminously over it. (Ford 492-493)

In the passage, Christopher appears to suffer a psychosomatic breakdown, his “panic” instigating his return to the image of O Nine Morgan stretched impossibly over the terrain of his mind. For Christopher, O Nine Morgan represents the model soldier, a figure whose life bears a striking similarity to his own; accordingly, his death represents the price of upholding one’s masculinity,

and suggests that Christopher himself is soon to follow. The fall of Groby Tree in *The Last Post* concretizes Christopher's failure and Sylvia's triumph: "She had regarded herself as – she had certainly desired to be regarded as – the sword of the Lord smiting the craven and the traitor to Beauty" (805). Even in leaving Valentine to Christopher, Sylvia's surrender is actually a triumph, as "she too had belonged to the Tietjens family, and, before Valentine, had been intimate with their sayings to the point of saturation" (826). She has effectively replaced Christopher in *The Last Post*, as the first person narration never again returns to his embittered consciousness.

*Parade's End*, even if categorically a divorce narrative, fails as a narrative about divorce: never finalized in the narrative, divorce is pushed beyond its close, leaving a fragmented text of mixed messages, lost signals, and empty relationships. Accordingly, Ford's tetralogy fails in its representation of women, but it seems that that failure is intentional: the divorce novel can no longer function as an organizing principle, especially in the breakdown of traditional narrative structures such as marriage and gender. This may initially read as a paradox: how can the divorce novel, already a narrative concerning the breakdown of marriage, fail to represent the very subject it *exists* to represent? In this reading, Ford's "divorce novel" anticipates these breakdowns because it *is* a traditional narrative. With its indeterminate ending, it presents to the reader the need to side with a decided victor, a definitive resolution. It is a traditional narrative in that it encodes the breakdown of marriage as a function of storytelling (as a plot device) and, in a literal battle between sexes, intends to leave the conclusion to the reader's interpretation. Accordingly, it is a narrative determined to fail the very tradition dissolving around it by failing to represent both parties. In the following passage, Sylvia describes Christopher as if he himself were one of these failed narratives:

Men, at any rate, never fulfilled expectations. They might, upon acquaintance, turn out more entertaining than they appeared; but almost always taking up with a man was like reading a book you had read when you had forgotten that you had read it. You had not been for ten minutes in any sort of intimacy with any man before you said: "But I've read all this before...." You knew the opening, you were already bored by the middle, and, especially, you knew the end.... (Ford 394)

Christopher is the traditional, tired narrative, one in which "you knew the end," and in Sylvia, he finds that harrowing impossibility of a resolution beyond familiar conventions (394). Despite the narrative's failure to present Sylvia as character, Sylvia is nevertheless *represented* in the slippage of third and first person retrospective narration: her absence creates a very real presence, one that reveals the crumbling structure of the Victorian novel and the decaying conventions of marriage in the Edwardian novel. And, more than simply revealing this structure, Sylvia points to a shift in the very organizing principle of a "narrative": rather than charting one "lead" character (typically male), narrative is traced through peripheral impressions and appearances. Sylvia's textual appearances challenge the linear structure of narrative: almost an apparition, she is hypothetically impossible to narrate, impossible to make into a story, impossible to represent. As *Parade's End* demonstrates, the Edwardian narrative must be repurposed to not only accommodate but to privilege identities once marginalized, repurposing reading as an activity that can enable rather than deny representation.

CHAPTER 4  
AN “INTERCESSORY BEING”: NARRATION IN *THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER*

If *Parade's End* proposes the reworking of narrative to seek out and represent characters cast into the margins, Rebecca West's first novel *The Return of the Soldier* is a narrative turned inside-out. Published in 1918, *The Return of the Soldier* is centered in World War I, a crisis encoded in West's novel as the breakdown of representation. Its inhabitants populate a reality completely enveloped by the conventions of Victorian and Edwardian fiction: gentlemen are always figurative “soldiers,” now faced with the literal task of “soldiering”; women are angels of the house, put into the service of men as attendants and nurses. However, the titular “soldier” is virtually absent from the narrative: he is not the “lead” character, and in his brief in-text appearances, he is characteristically “unknowable.” His experience at the front has made him “ghostlike, impalpable,” as in “war-films” (West 5, 23). “Ensphered” in “a little globe of ease,” his wife and cousin cannot fathom the depths of his transformation, nor do they have the means of “fixing him” – as the narrator simply notes, “I wished for the return of our soldier” (5). As in *Parade's End*, the characters in *The Return of the Soldier* serve as metonyms for the narrative itself. Chris, Kitty, Margaret and Jenny not only represent the breakdown of conventional representation, their sole function is to stand-in for conventions now vacant in the novel; as if they were paper cut-outs, their thoughts and emotions are worn on their surfaces, their roles dictated for them. Placed in hermetic confinement within the “magic castle” that is Baldry Court, nothing can be concealed from character or reader alike.

West's novel seems to exist in a very narrow space: as Samuel Hynes describes it, it is “a novel of the enclosed world of a few entangled private lives,” a narrative conveying “extraordinary isolation” that “makes its perfection out of its limitations” (Hynes vii). In reading *Parade's End*, the reader is constantly aware of the looming threat of divorce as a national

institution, the breakdown of marriage itself seeming to accompany the trauma of war. However, in reading *The Return of the Soldier*, the term “divorce” is never used in the narrative; it is never spoken between characters or admitted by the narrator as a possible outcome of the events in the text. Even if not explicitly a “Divorce Novel” (it would seem much closer in theme to what Harris identifies as a “Marriage Problem Novel”), divorce haunts West’s novella as a device that threatens to break the structure of the narrative itself. In the midst of war, the narrative conventionally represents something sacred, something that, like marriage, is to be treasured and protected; it is the space that can shield Chris from harm as well as enable Jenny and Kitty to live peaceably. For the few participants in the events of *The Return of the Soldier*, the narrative serves another, perhaps unintentional, purpose: a space for female consensus and collaboration. Chris’ imposition into Jenny and Kitty’s world represents an intrusion into their narrative space, an “affront” to Jenny who, “like most Englishwomen of [her] time,” seeks the resolution of a soldier safe from war, and who is faced with a person who resembles, at best, an invalid (West 5). As Harris argues, “as Edwardian women constructed and shared knowledge with each other, over divorce, the vote, a minimum wage, they built consensus, clarified disagreement, and strengthened their sense of themselves as members of interest groups and as individual citizens” (Harris 98). Much like in *Parade’s End*, the anxiety of dealing with women overwhelms the anxiety of war, and necessitates the soldier’s return to the trenches. Yet in this narrative, the soldier’s return is not self-authorized: it is necessitated and enabled by women, women who continually await “the return of our soldier,” and who accordingly send him back (5).

I take West’s novel as an anomaly in the tradition of “men’s case” versus “woman’s cause,” an antagonism that Gilbert and Gubar use to structure Volume I of *No Man’s Land*, a structure that carries through the remaining volumes as well. For Gilbert and Gubar, the

“disintegration of traditional patriarchal assumptions” follows the entrance of women into a public sphere of publication (Gilbert and Gubar 22). Jenny’s narrative is remarkable for the simple fact that it is *her* story, a fact that becomes clear to the reader in the absence of the titular soldier and, by means of Jenny’s subversive manipulation, his return to war. As Gilbert and Gubar write,

where male-authored descriptions of sexual conflict are generally quite straightforward and almost always feature literal duels, battles, or wrestling matches, women’s works – though they sometimes include physical confrontations – frequently imagine female victory either through duplicity and subterfuge or through providential circumstance. (66)

For Gilbert and Gubar, the “sexual conflict” that would lead to “physical confrontations” in male-authored texts is rewritten in novels like *The Return of the Soldier* as “female victory either through duplicity and subterfuge or through providential circumstance”; while “sexual conflict” typically necessitates another man for confrontation, West’s novel offers only women (66). As the novel presents only the “woman’s case,” it seems that the conclusion of the narrative is similarly advantageous. The decision to send Chris back to war represents the new power of the self-governing circle of women and the discovery of a story that can be co-authored by women. It also demonstrates that Chris, once the authorial “core” of Jenny’s life and the key to her self-knowledge, can no longer reduce these characters to “unknowable” stereotypes: it would seem that Jenny’s revelation is that nothing is hidden, that to suggest that “there are ways pain should not show itself” is to retreat into a world populated by “sad mask[s]” (17, 24). While the narrative is meant to “know” and “cure” Chris, it is repurposed as the process by which readers can know Jenny, and Jenny can know herself. Narration enacts self-discovery; for readers, Jenny’s self-discovery becomes indicative of the drive to escape representation by coverture, and to rewrite experience with an understanding of, in Felski’s phrase, “feminine phenomena” (Felski 10).

Unlike *Parade's End*, critical history on *The Return of the Soldier* is much more varied; however, it is also marred by attempts to locate West in a tradition of modernism. In "Refiguring the Binary, Breaking the Cycle: Rebecca West as Feminist," Bonnie Kime Scott responds to Elaine Showalter's comparison of West to Virginia Woolf in *A Literature of Their Own*, writing that "West's case demonstrates the difficulty of rethinking basic heterosexual, patriarchal structures in the modernist era, and encourages a more expansive definition of modernist experimentation and feminist modernism" (Scott 170). Similar attempts to recategorize West have come from Gloria G. Fromm ("Rebecca West: The Fictions of Fact and the Facts of Fiction") and Moira Ferguson ("Feminist Manichaeism: Rebecca West's Unique Fusion"), who both seem to conclude that West is impossible to isolate inside a single literary tradition. Of the recent critical approaches to West's fiction that account for this critical impasse, Marina MacKay and Wyatt Bonikowski offer readings that account for West's critical implacability as a product of war itself. In "The Lunacy of Men, the Idiocy of Women: Woolf, West, and War," Marina MacKay describes the tradition of representing men and women as a product of war places us in a strange position to privilege certain subjectivities over others characters. MacKay's dichotomy between "lunacy" and "idiocy" is useful: lunacy and idiocy both make claims about epistemology, as "lunacy" suggests consciousness beyond comprehension, while "idiocy" implies insufficiency. Similarly, in "The Return of the Soldier Brings Death Home," Wyatt Bonikowski argues that the inability to understand Chris's trauma produces "a kind of cautionary tale about the inability to acknowledge that which presents itself as a limit to knowledge" (Bonikowski 530). Incorporating readings from MacKay and Bonikowski, treating West's novel as a narrative about the limits of knowledge – specifically, about the "failure" of feminine knowledge – may elucidate difficulties in writing about West's fiction.

In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris Baldry returns from the front with a peculiar amnesia, an impossible case that seems to have made only the last fifteen years – the duration of his marriage to Kitty – disappear. In his absence, his wife Kitty Ellis and his cousin Jenny have devoted themselves to the upkeep of Baldry Court. This task is essential for both characters: “we had made a fine place for Chris,” Jenny comments, “here we had made happiness inevitable for him,” as “this house, this life with us, was the core of his heart” (West 6). To Jenny, Chris embodies more than a mere relative – “he was not like other men,” Jenny assures the reader – or even a soldier; he is himself evidence of “the imminence of the improbable,” a man who Jenny assures is “completely reconciled to life” (“literally there wasn’t room to swing a revelation in his crowded life”) and who yet appears before the reader to have gone through alchemy, encountering an experience “turning to gold all the dark metals of events” to “rich [...] inextinguishable joy” (7-8). To Jenny, Chris is the center of the narrative, and for her the purpose of writing is, when all else has failed, to narrate Chris’ rejuvenation. Yet as Jenny continues to narrate, we learn more of Chris than Jenny tells: his father’s death, his marriage to Kitty (who had “picked up his conception of normal expenditure and carelessly stretched it as a woman stretches a new glove on her hand”), and the loss of his son Oliver (8). Jenny willingly reveals their dependence on Chris, stating that “nothing could ever really become a part of our life until it had been referred to Chris’ attention,” while unwillingly establishing the instable pillar of the narrative (8). Chris’ “return” is not as a husband or a soldier, but as a patient, a psychological transformation that has occurred on the battlefield and has now entered the home itself, as a “strangeness” to which “everything was appalled, [...] even time” (25). For Jenny, the narrative becomes her effort to find the proverbial “good soldier” now fragmented in Chris; by narrating, she is provided the fantasy of restoring her cousin to life.

However apt for his aid Kitty and Jenny appear, they also face a “breach of trust” more sacred to Jenny and Kitty than any other symbol of the narrative: the imposition of Margaret Grey, Chris’ young love, and competition for Chris’ heart (17). Bringing a telegram concerning Chris’ injury in duty, Margaret appears to Kitty and Jenny as a “spreading stain on the fabric of our life,” a symbol of that “red suburban stain” that threatens to take Chris and his wealth away from them both (9, 16). To meet the urgency of Chris’ demand for a time before marriage, Jenny and Kitty are forced to interact with Margaret, through Chris’ own reminiscences of his romance before the war as well as his invitation to Margaret to stay at Baldry Court. Upon first seeing each other, Margaret and Chris perform a scene that thematizes the central trauma of war in the narrative: “with a gesture that was not passionate, but rather the movement of one carrying a wounded man from under fire,” Margaret embraces Chris as he runs across the veritable “No Man’s Land” of Baldry Court (59). As Steve Pinkerton writes in “Trauma and Cure in Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*,” “where Margaret once offered a romantic ideal and a sexual attraction, she now offers him something different, something more essential” (Pinkerton 7). Margaret infringes upon the roles Jenny and Kitty have filled – wife, mother, therapist – and thus represents, in Pinkerton’s reading, a “remarkably intuitive *therapôn*” who appears “as something other than merely symbolic, one-dimensional or inexplicable” (10). Faced with Chris’s “illness,” a woman “repulsively furred with neglect and poverty,” and the transgression that “there are bits of him we don’t know,” the narrative becomes Jenny’s pursuit of a device that can restore Chris and, in his absence, resume control of the “green pleasantness” of their world (West 4, 10, 17).

Jenny’s position as narrator places her in the precarious yet powerful position of having knowledge, of being an “intercessory being” between all parties: Chris alone narrates his memory of Monkey Island only to Jenny, and Margaret confides her history to Jenny. In this

position, Jenny controls the representation of every character; as MacKay argues, when we first meet Jenny, her world revolves around class and beauty, but it is broken by Jenny's knowledge of Chris' romance with Margaret, and Jenny's knowledge of Chris' narrative.<sup>1</sup> For MacKay, Jenny's narrative is an attempt to preserve that original order, despite the "parasitic" dependence on Chris both Jenny and Kitty exhibit. As MacKay writes, "the great house, the magic circle created by upper class women, can no longer be protected from the consequences of its occupants' mercantilism; a suburban "stain" or "rust" is exacting its revenge" (MacKay 132-133). Like the fall of Tietjens' Groby Manor, Baldry Court faces its potential destruction in adultery and divorce, the "rust" of Margaret's Harrowweald encroaching upon Kitty's "manicured" world.

Throughout *The Return of the Soldier*, Jenny claims that they have learned to live without Chris, to treat his amnesia "as a kind of death from which he would emerge ghostlike, impalpable" (West 23). Chris represents for both women an idea more than an individual, and is encoded in the narrative as a plot device, something seemingly beyond reach, "impalpable." Since Chris is physically and emotionally absent, the only person who seems to encroach upon their world is Margaret, a woman continually identified by Jenny and Kitty not by gender or sex but by class.<sup>2</sup> In "Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts," Susan Lanser argues

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<sup>1</sup> While MacKay's project has a different aim, namely in identifying a "parallel trajectory" between West and Woolf and suggest that both were separately "engaged in a project to illuminate the connections between feminist consciousness and the causes and conduct of international conflict," her analysis of West is very useful (MacKay 126). She identifies with West a type of "social and narrative radicalism" identified with earlier modes of modernism, writing that her novels exhibit "classically modernist preoccupations—formal experiments with limited point of view and non-linear narration, thematic experiments in the representation of memory, sexual desire, and the micro-detail of everyday experience" (125-126).

<sup>2</sup> In *Between Men*, Sedgwick claims that the sense of community between men and women in fiction is a construct of unequal (and in a certain sense, contradictory) claims to representation, a construct that necessitates and creates class distinctions as well. This plays out in what Sedgwick describes as the "erotic triangle," a representation of the relationships between male subjects and the feminine object of desire in a narrative. Yet as Sedgwick argues, "both Girard and Freud [...] treat the erotic triangle as symmetrical – in the sense that its structure would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants"

that “female intimacies” are products of cross-class interaction, as female friendship itself “emerged through women’s agency as a powerful resource in the struggle for autonomy and authority,” and “operated through a discourse [...] that carried at least the theoretical possibility of seeming ‘lesbian’” (Lanser 180). As Lanser suggests, female friendship, depending on how it is encoded in the narrative, can function in different ways, enabling and disabling agency and influence.

In this reading, the fact that the narrative seems to concern itself solely with female bonds is crucial: in *The Return of the Soldier*, Kitty and Jenny begin to develop a connection that denies Margaret’s entrance into their coterie, excluding Margaret based on her lower-class status.<sup>3</sup> A “plain” woman, Margaret is described as a “shabby visitor” presenting the “tyrannous emptiness” of an “evil, shiny, pigskin purse,” a woman who Jenny describes as an expensive glove that has been soiled, “as even a good glove that has dropped down behind a bed in a hotel and has lain undisturbed for a day or two is repulsive when the chambermaid retrieves it from the

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(Sedgwick, 23). Sedgwick’s characterization also plays out for relationships between women, although it becomes (as Sedgwick notes) just as problematic: the term “homosocial” is “a neologism [...] formed by analogy with ‘homosexual,’” which attempts to legitimate male-male desire as a masculine drive rather than the culturally-perceived “homosexual” attraction that is perceived as a “perversion” of masculinity (Sedgwick 1). For women, it seems to be used as a structure that at once legitimates and denies their agency in a narrative: Sedgwick’s “inherent and potentially active structural congruence” between homosocial and homosexual desire and patriarchal power suggests that “homosocial/homosexual” distinctions between women are nevertheless status-forming: distinctions of “lesbianism,” Sedgwick suggests, are perceived in this faulty logic as synonymous with friendship, and thus imply class status as well (25). Any same-sex “intimacy,” as Sedgwick argues, becomes “a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (27).

<sup>3</sup> In Sedgwick, Luce Irigaray’s discussion of “heterosexual to male homosocial bonds” and Gayle Rubin’s discussion of the “traffic in women,” the “use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” both seem to get closer to the type of “traffic” that seems to appear in West’s novel (Sedgwick, 26). Indeed, Jenny and Kitty are symbols of Chris’ status, and represent the wealth of Baldry Court. West’s novel, however, is populated almost exclusively by women; if it wasn’t for Chris’ narrative of Monkey Island (as instead Chris himself is no man, but instead a victim), the novel itself would seem to suggest a world without men, a world as matriarchy rather than patriarchy. This distinction would appear to disrupt the otherwise “relatively smooth and palpable continuum of female homosocial desire” that Sedgwick sets up as an alternative to the complicated “male sexual and nonsexual bonds”; without Chris, this “continuum” seems to function nonetheless (Sedgwick 23, 25-26).

dust and fluff” (West 9, 10, 12). These symbols, for Lanser, are the necessary markings of her status, and the factors that deny her reception into the “magic circle” of Baldry Court:

Female friendship, I suggest, intersected with the project of establishing a gendered gentry consciousness by functioning as a status symbol marking women as well-connected and well-breed. From the outset, women had established female friendship on class-ic ground: Astell, Cavendish, and Philips, for example, stressed the necessity of good background in the creation of their female coteries, and one could argue that female friendship legitimated itself precisely by substituting its class standing for the gender status it obviously lacked. Because friendship was defined as character, and character was now rooted in a sensibilité articulated in the 1650s by Scudéry, female friendship could signify and advance the “affective revolution” associated with gentry-class worth by helping, as Irene Q. Brown maintains, to unite “virtuous yet social unequals” in what Goethe called “elective affinities.” This meant that female friendship also served contradictory feminist and patriarchal purposes: women could establish their own value and a certain degree of psychic independence from men while at the same time helping to consolidate the privileges of their class. (Lanser 186)

Serving both “feminist *and* patriarchal purposes,” same-sex bonds “consolidate” class distinctions; when Jenny and Kitty first encounter Margaret, they respond to her in terms of class, and try to distinguish themselves from her solely on that basis. Jenny is seemingly coerced into this behavior by Kitty, who is of high standing and cements the feeling of superiority for Jenny, despite her character’s honesty and humility as narrator.

However, something beyond class starts to appeal to Jenny in Margaret: “there was something about the physical quality of the woman, unlovely though she was, which preserved the occasion from utter baseness” (West 12). As Jenny continues, “it was, strangely enough, only when I looked at Kitty and marked how her brightly coloured prettiness arched over this plain criminal, as though she were a splendid bird of prey and this her sluggish insect food, that I felt the moment degrading” (12). The main action of the text, while chronicling Chris’ “recovery” and the ever-looming threat of divorce, concerns Jenny’s self-discovery of her influence and the ability to read others. It also becomes the only means by which she can relate to the people

around her and, despite their differences, to find connections between Kitty and Margaret, rearranging her “magic circle” to include the subject they originally denied entrance.

Kitty functions as a strange companion (and even stranger counterpart) for Jenny who, as narrator, begins to see through the façade of her grief. The relationship between Jenny and Kitty becomes increasingly complicated through the course of the narrative as Jenny begins to discover herself and align her values closely with Margaret instead of Kitty. At first, Jenny seems to reflect everything Kitty states; for example, upon first meeting Margaret, Jenny notes that “Kitty’s bright eyes met mine and we obeyed that mysterious human impulse to smile triumphantly at the spectacle of a fellow-creature occupied in baseness” (11). In this scene, Kitty and Jenny’s camaraderie suggests a perfect union, both characters assenting to the same critique. As Jenny begins to see Kitty’s means of “manufacturing malice,” she begins to side with Margaret (31).

Unlike Sylvia, Kitty is never depicted as “(un)knowable” – her desires and drives slowly become clear to the reader, as her growing intimacy with Jenny affords her full representation in the narrative. From the beginning, Jenny is slow to realize Kitty’s constant façade; “grave with housewifery,” Kitty is “the falsest thing on earth, [...] in tune with every kind of falsity” (25, 87). In grieving, Kitty inspires no sympathy; compared to Margaret, as Jenny states, “she appeared to me at that moment a faceless figure with flounces, just as most of the servants at Baldry Court appear to me as faceless figures with caps and aprons,” nothing beyond her gestures and appearances (46). Chris seems to address Kitty in a similar fashion, “a symbol of this new life by which he was baffled and oppressed” (24). If his amnesia is, as Dr. Anderson argues in Chapter 6, that “he has forgotten his life here because he is discontented with it,” then his inability to “put up a good show for the neighbours” seems to be his resistance to Kitty’s

materialism (80). Like Sylvia, however, Kitty is frequently described in terms of her material possessions: “the white fire of jewels giving a passion to the spectacle,” she “put up her hands as if to defend her jewels” (27). Ultimately, the “new acquisition of Kitty’s decorative genius” serves as an emblem for her representation in the novel:

This was a shallow black bowl in the centre of which crouched on hands and knees a white naked nymph, her small head intently drooped to the white flowers that floated on the black waters all around her. Beside the pure black of the bowl her rusty plumes looked horrible; beside that white nymph, eternally innocent of all but the contemplation of beauty, her opaque skin and her suffering were offensive; beside its air of being the coolly conceived and leisurely executed production of a hand and brain lifted by their rare quality to the service of the not absolutely necessary, her appearance of having but for the moment ceased to cope with a vexed and needy environment struck one as a cancerous blot on the fair world. (56)

Kitty is continually pictured as the white nymph, “controlling her face into harmony with the appearance of serene virginity,” “cold as moonlight,” “a polished surface that reflected light,” and “the type of woman that makes the body the conqueror of the soul” (26-27, 66, 75). As Mackay suggests, Kitty, like Sylvia, is “the idealized woman who is an object of worship because of the (male) economic success that she represents” (MacKay 132). However, unlike Sylvia, Kitty is nothing but these appearances, her “civilizing mission to flash the jewel of [her] beauty before all men” (West 75). Kitty functions as the necessary counterpart to Jenny’s reservation; as Jenny reassures us, “we each have our peculiar use” (75).

In a novel in which the titular “return” is offset by trauma, and its (un)expected reprise is the fruit of an unlikely friendship, the purpose of the narrative – who the narrative is intended to represent – is diffused into a different type of relationship. The collaborative relationship between Kitty and Jenny provokes a question: if both can function without Chris, if the narrative can prosper in his absence, why does his return matter? Notably, Jenny and Kitty are together only because of his return, an event that provokes a change in Jenny that would otherwise never happen. However, this narrative does not result in transfiguration, but failure. For Jenny, Chris’

“return” provokes a surprising discovery about how we narrate our lives: Chris cannot be reduced to husband or to soldier, as her attempt to create a narrative out of his return demonstrates in its failure. Instead, Jenny learns that narrative is meant to be self-narrated, an experience she discovers upon listening to two other narratives in her own story. In Chapter 3, Chris tells Jenny the story of “his meeting with love on his secret island,” at a “*cottage ornée*” in Bray called “Monkey Island Inn”; for Chris, it possesses a “grace and silliness that belonged to the eighteenth century,” which seems to mirror his own nostalgia (36). As narrator, Jenny continually makes her presence known to the reader: “I have lived so long with the story which he told me that I cannot now remember his shy phrases,” Jenny states in her introduction, “but this is how I have visualized [it],” concluding “I think it is the truth” (33). Jenny’s constant interjections inform the reader that, while originally narrated by Chris, Jenny is now retelling the story: “indeed this Margaret I had never seen,” Jenny admits (36). Once Chris comes to “the end of his life, the last day he could remember,” Jenny continues to narrate: “I was barred out of that day,” but from his “beautiful signs of a noble excitement, I tried to derive the real story” (38).

Chris’ narrative shows Jenny that there is a bond beyond language, as “words between them seemed to bear a significance apart from their meaning,” and that there was “nothing anywhere but beauty” (40-41). Similarly, Jenny’s trip to retrieve Margaret from Wealdstone (“a town of people who could not do as they liked”) affords Jenny the opportunity to see the reality behind Margaret (44). For Jenny, Margaret’s story proves humanizing – “there were only two real people in the world,” Jenny notes, “Chris and this woman whose personality was sounding through her squalor like a beautiful voice singing in a darkened room” (46-47). Confided “in a manner that was at once argumentative and narrative, as though she were telling the whole story to a neighbor over the garden wall,” Margaret admits to Jenny that she wants to see Chris, even if

“he isn’t right in his head and I’m married” (46). Margaret’s narrative thus becomes proof for Jenny of the need to narrate as the only means of connecting to reality, to become a “real” person like Margaret. For Jenny, narrating embodies the completed process of self-discovery, a process she is still attempting to realize. In coming to terms with Chris’s and Margaret’s narratives, Jenny finds that only through the manipulation of rhetoric – in a sense, the mastery of the language used to narrate – can her story succeed where both narratives have failed. By the end of the novel, Jenny has produced a narrative that reveals more about herself than anyone else. Seeking transfiguration for a soldier, Jenny produces a text that, “failing” to represent its male subject, manages to represent herself.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

What happens to Sylvia at the end of *Parade's End*? To Jenny in *The Return of the Soldier*? For critics, the closing scenes of both narratives afford no real answer; for our investigation, this uncertainty is at the heart of the problems with representation in the aftermath of divorce and war. As battles over representation, both divorce and war are encoded in these texts as an attempt to take power away from women. Accordingly, both novels close on scenes in which the transfiguration of the female character is not certain, the final event itself “beyond representation.” While the struggle to represent women and men is rendered in both texts thematically as well as structurally, representation continually attempts to transcend the realms of experience in the closing scenes, ultimately leaving the verdict on that struggle in the hands of the reader. Here I diverge from the critical histories of either text to argue that both novels offer closing scenes that attempt to transcend language (with the very real possibility that transcendence fails) in order to reveal the mistake in thinking this transcendence possible. In other words, these scenes, in suspending judgment, not only force the reader to decide the ending, but to make a claim about how language works. By looking at how the ending of the narratives, in DuPlessis’s reading, both push beyond closure, the transfiguration of the characters can be seen as responses to the dual traumas of divorce and war: they are moments that, rather than denying subjectivity, represent an attempt to reach beyond it. While not contradicting DuPlessis’s reading, this assertion complicates the value of “writing beyond the ending” as a means of granting more representation to women. Instead, making a decision about the ends of each novel ultimately reveals the expansive roles both “unknowable” women have in the narratives, roles that emphatically resist their categorization within these narratives and, perhaps unintentionally, problematize the status of narrative itself in Edwardian fiction.

In *Parade's End*, the narrative runs into the final thoughts of Mark Tietjens as he slowly passes away. In Mark's death stupor, the narrative breaks down, and representation fails. Ultimately, Sylvia represents the fear of a female subject gaining power over a male subject in divorce and war. Sylvia's new centrality in the narrative alters what readers would come to expect from the female subject. Similarly, in *The Return of the Soldier*, the last scene is virtually unknowable – as Pinkerton writes, it is “a scene we can only imagine, but which surely transcends the conventions of language” (Pinkerton 6). Chris has apparently crossed into a new realm of experience: “For Jenny,” Pinkerton notes, “her cousin's stepping outside the bounds of time, memory, and language constitutes a kind of super-sanity,” an unfortunate transcendence that can't push past its human confines (4). In this scene, Margaret presents Chris with the belongings of his deceased child, Oliver. Pinkerton argues that Jenny and Margaret's “therapy” helps make explicit “the spatial and temporal un-locatability of Chris's trauma,” as it locates that trauma in death (4). Here, Pinkerton suggests that “amnesia is Chris's way of performing the untellable,” of acting out his trauma in his actions and gesturing to something beyond experience itself:

Amnesia speaks quite literally to trauma's unfamiliarity. We can read it as the incessant returning of a crisis that cannot be comprehended and which thus emerges in the form of the forgotten or unknown — or, more precisely, it emerges as a forgetting and unknowing. (4)

While Pinkerton argues that this gesturing represents the existence of something beyond language, some indelible identity that representation fails to capture, I am inclined to think that West does not intend for this reading in the end of the novel. Nor does Ford leave readers with Mark's incoherence as an attempt to mean beyond what is spoken.

In both novels, representation fails because representation attempts something *beyond* the scope of its use. Treating women as “unknowable” once worked for male authors because it

permitted subjection – in other words, it was conducive to making characters fit into conventional narratives. Yet divorce and war complicate the traditional narrative and the representations it held true, as experience for men and women began to change, the ability of representation to re-present experience failed. While male authors originally viewed divorce and war as stages for men to reclaim power, the strategy proved inoperative; representing women as unknowable in these narratives ultimately granted women more power and more agency. What both novels suggest is that people are ultimately knowable, and to enshrine knowledge as a position beyond knowing (especially when intended as a means of repressing women) fails once reality itself breaks through. As readers, we have to make decisions about endings, about closure, because otherwise the texts, in failing to represent their subjects, would fail to represent us. In a sense, using divorce and war as narrative devices to represent fissure backfires: the sheer reality of experience found in divorce and war comes through the narratives, and leaves the subjects to speak for themselves. What Jenny seems to discover is that people are knowable, that all potential identities ultimately collapse into the role the reader decides that the characters occupy.

By pushing beyond the closure of the narrative, both novels show the frightening possibility of this happening, of thinking that there are qualities inaccessible to each other; it also validates readers, by placing us in the position to decide the ending. “Once upon a time,” DuPlessis writes, “the end, the rightful end, of women in novels was social – successful courtship, marriage – or judgmental of her sexual and social failure – death” (DuPlessis 1). In DuPlessis’ reading, what the Edwardian divorce novel offers is a “rightful end” beyond social success or condemnation and failure. Instead of taking the outcome of the narrative as final, these treatments account for the events in the text as a process; as Harris notes, it is “to imagine a practice of divorce that would move beyond the concept of marital offense – with one person

guilty, one innocent – and uphold the more ambiguous concept of marital breakdown” (Harris 149). While Harris and DuPlessis both make claims that are meant to invoke change beyond the restrictive close of the divorce novel, I do not find that these two novels accomplish that. By providing an ambiguous ending, Ford and West do not invite “writing beyond the ending.” Instead, both authors ultimately make the reader make a choice about the outcome of each narrative, and to show the reader what the failure to represent not only looks like, but means. In order to know anything about what happens to the characters after the narrative – particularly the female characters – is to repurpose the events of the text as a means of clarifying their new positions. Divorce, once it becomes conceivable (or, for Harris and DuPlessis, representable), becomes unthinkable again at the end of both narratives, precisely because it exposes something about our lives that is irreducible to one representation. If Sylvia and Jenny reveal anything at all about their lives, it is not at the failure of conventional representation, but at its veritable apex, at the limits of what can be known.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joel Peter Simundich received his Master of Arts in English from the University of Florida in the fall of 2010. His thesis, entitled "Writing Beyond Divorce: Conventions of Female Representation in the Edwardian Novel," explores the "dual traumas" of divorce and war on narrative; in novels principally about the failure of representation, female subjects are repurposed as conduits to recovering subjectivities obscured by changing narrative devices. He is currently co-authoring an article about masculinity and soldiering in Ford Madox Ford's novels for future publication.