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Aidan Vick

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Unfinished Sympathy: Women, Class Consciousness, and Modernism

by

Aidan Vick

Dr. Erwin Rosinberg
Adviser

English

Dr. Erwin Rosinberg
Adviser

Dr. Barbara Ladd
Committee Member

Dr. Linda Merrill
Committee Member

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Aidan Vick

Dr. Erwin Rosinberg

Adviser

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Abstract

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Overt declarations of class empathy are rarely expressed by leisure-class women in Modernist literature, but these women equally show a tendency towards empathy in their character. I examine this dichotomy in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party," and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, outlining how factors like stigmatization of interaction, successful dehumanization of the working class, affluence-related guilt, and feelings of helplessness contribute to the disconnect between classes. I also explain how this disconnect is rooted in these women's specific intersection of class and gender, which discourages sociopolitical engagement and positions them in an advantaged class status but a disadvantaged gender status. Upbringing and the formation of identity are essential in instilling class and gender norms within individuals, and they are essential in my analysis of social role. I examine these three texts to argue that the social role of leisure-class women stifles the inclination they have towards empathizing with the working class.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Invisible, Unseen, Unknown.....	8
Chapter 2: Like a Work-Girl.....	24
Chapter 3: Which is <i>My</i> England?.....	40
Conclusion.....	58
Works Cited.....	61
Appendix.....	65

Introduction

Recently, I have found myself second-guessing my interest in the Modernist period — after all, what do Modernist studies tell us about the 21st century? Are the ideas of Modernism not stale, played out, too self-interested? And here, I had to stop myself for a moment — why was I conceiving of Modernism the way scholars would have fifty years ago? In the words of Michael Levenson, I was daunted by “the regime of technique,” distilling artistic innovation to formalism without considering how these techniques are vehicles to express social commentary (4). I was only thinking of the all-male early canon, figures like Picasso and Eliot, whose exceptional craft and reasonable anxieties about modern life are sometimes overshadowed by their self-absorption. They wouldn’t leave my head; I was troubled by the dissonance of wanting to study both gender and a movement that faced widespread backlash from feminist critics at the end of the 20th century: “[the preoccupation with gender] expressed a male Modernist fear of women’s new power, and resulted in the combination of misogyny and triumphal masculinism that many critics see as central, defining features of Modernist work by men” (Dekoven 212). But rigidly defining Modernism diminishes the entire point of studying literature, which is to escape simplification and dig into something deeper, more profound. The preceding viewpoint itself buys into the idea that Modernism *is* defined by the British and American high Modernists, a harmful and reductive assumption.

This fear was doing a disservice to the author who piqued my interest in the movement to begin with: Virginia Woolf, a figure whose stature has become monumental since scholars began constructing a feminine canon of Modernism (Dekoven 213). I was drawn to her writing in the first place for her ability to pick the brain of others, to embody their thoughts and identity and present them narratively. This is not to suggest that Woolf is some champion of the oppressed,

for she had her biases and prejudices too, but interpersonal and inter-group relationships are a primary focus of all of her novels. Thus, I sought to conceive of a project that focuses on human connection (or lack thereof) and Modernism's ability to convey both the expression and repression of emotion. Knowing my two primary sociological interests in literature to be class and gender and primary formal interest to be narrative style, I thought of ways to intersect these three topics.

I settled on three texts to focus on: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party," and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. This group was chosen because all three texts are concerned with issues of social class, albeit in different ways, and all feature a privileged woman as their central character: Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Laura Sheridan in "The Garden Party," and Connie Chatterley in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As conspicuous as the similarities between these three women are, they deviate in several key ways. Clarissa is by far the oldest at fifty-one and Laura the youngest at around thirteen, with Connie somewhere in the middle (though "The Garden Party" seems to take place before World War I, meaning Laura's birth year was likely close to Connie's — more on this later). Clarissa and Laura are both upper-middle-class by British standards, but Connie is a member of the aristocracy. Finally, Clarissa alone lives in the city but was raised in the country, meaning her upbringing is not geographically different. Aside from the three central women, I will also briefly discuss several of the supporting female characters in each text to offer points of comparison with each main protagonist, the most important of these being Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth.

I will primarily be reading how these texts depict societal issues through their use of narration and character perspective. Each utilizes its central character's point of view to establish

their empathetic nature and then contrasts it with their attitudes and actions towards the lower class, which are defined by a sense of disconnect. This disconnect is related to the women's specific intersection of class and gender, as upper-class women had little political autonomy in the Modern Era and were discouraged from engaging in sociopolitical discourse. The way each author broaches these social issues via narrative is unique and affects how I read their intentions in crafting the text. Lawrence's body of work, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* especially, presents the problem of authorial distance. Since he seeks to write pointedly about the experience of women (and from their perspective to boot), he is hampered by the fact that he has never lived this reality; an issue that would not arise in a less politically driven novel. Yet, Lawrence does not seem to have the same reservations as Woolf about writing others' experiences. From Anna and Ursula in *The Rainbow* to Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his works are filled with women's narratives that pertain heavily to their identity and experience of their gender, something that troubled both Woolf and Mansfield as overtly feminist writers.

Carol Siegel outlines the critical responses of both women to Lawrence's works and posits that they felt in competition with Lawrence, trying to establish a literary canon of writing by women, not just about them. Woolf felt his works fell short of their didactic goal but appreciated that he, like all women writers, "saw the world from beneath the tower" and included this in his fiction (Siegel 294). For Mansfield, however, her tumultuous personal relationship with Lawrence only heightened her distaste for his literature, though valid impersonal criticisms nonetheless emerge in her writing. Her primary gripe with Lawrence's version of feminist writing is the emphasis on sexuality as a liberating force for women, which Mansfield and Woolf opposed due to its patriarchal implications (neither women could see an act that results in pregnancy as "liberating") (Siegel 296-99, 301-04). Though perhaps not an entirely

irreconcilable difference, the importance of sex in Connie's experience as a woman means that Woolf and Mansfield would likely never agree with the depictions of ideal gender relations in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* — especially since Connie is pregnant at the end of the novel.

Still, though they are in some ways an incongruous grouping, I believe their literary interest in the social roles of class and gender, and the ways that they influence each other, makes Woolf, Mansfield, and Lawrence an intriguing band — and their literary and personal rivalries only make the rare similarities more notable. Their divergence of opinion on sexuality's role in women's lives does not mean their ideas about gender are entirely incompatible, and all three authors had a particular interest in the intersection of class and gender. As a leisure-class married woman herself, this archetype was frequently employed by Woolf in her novels and Clarissa is an intentionally unconventional protagonist. Though *Mrs. Dalloway* is not uncritical of its title character, Clarissa's understanding of class seems heavily informed by Woolf's own. In "The Garden Party," Mansfield writes of the same social group but focuses on the development of a young woman's social role rather than her thorough embodiment of it in adulthood. Lawrence utilizes the intersection of class and gender to highlight the similar inequalities women and the working class face, while also advocating for heterosexual relationships that cross class boundaries. In fact, all three authors are interested in the marginalization of both women and working-class people, and they all choose to write from the perspective of an upper-class woman rather than a lower-class one. Though this decision does mean the texts largely neglect to uplift marginalized voices, they work to a different end: *Mrs. Dalloway*, "The Garden Party," and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* all show how the social role of leisure-class women actively stifles class empathy, even in women who show an inclination towards it.

The primary method through which this suppression is achieved is the development of gender identity in early childhood and adolescence, a core tenet of contemporary gender studies and the process through which widespread cultural expectations are instilled within the individual. In “From Sex Roles to Gender Structure,” Barbara Risman and Georgiann Davis outline this concept: “Gender structures social life not only by creating gendered selves and cultural expectations that shape interactions, but also by organizing social institutions and organizations” (Risman and Davis 746). So, for the upper-class women concerned in this thesis, their gender role is both internally integrated and affected by circumstance and social environment. Because this role is internalized as personality and not viewed as being shaped by external factors, their influence is often subliminal and goes unchallenged, but is conveyed to the reader through the contrast between the women’s overall demeanors and their indifference towards the impoverished. Identity adoption is especially important given the social context these texts were published in, when conventional women were beginning to gain viable options for adulthood other than marriage.

Closely related is the figure of the New Woman, a trope imagining independent, often urban-dwelling young women who rebuff their family’s pressure to marry. One important subset of New Woman is the female artist, a figure Rachel Blau DuPlessis explores extensively in her book *Writing Beyond the Ending*, in which she writes: “For bourgeois women, torn between their class values and the subset of values historically affirmed for their gender caste, the figure of the female artist expressed the doubled experience of a dominant ideology that was supposed to be muted in them and that therefore became oppositional for their gender” (84). The New Woman, and particularly the female artist, strive for the individualism denied to their gender; however, as DuPlessis mentions, the images of the New Woman and female artist are also closely tied to

class identity and a privilege of circumstance that does not necessitate marriage for economic security. Therefore, both are useful frameworks for the women I am discussing, and they are figures I will engage with throughout this project.

Though my topic is adjacent to and influenced by social and economic philosophy of the Modernist period, these types of criticism will not be a major framework of this thesis and I therefore will largely be focusing on individual embodiment of class rather than structural issues. Class identity is readable in character and since I am focusing on interiority and perspective, the group is only important in the sense that the individual is a member of it. I will rely primarily on the terms middle class and leisure class to mark affluence, and lower class and working class to indicate financial insecurity. Additionally, I will be employing the following outline of the British class system: the upper class is the aristocracy, the middle class is the comfortably employed and their families, and the lower class is those who work in manual labor, are mostly uneducated, and/or are struggling to get by financially.¹ Though the British class system is complicated and often follows informal classifications, I settled on these definitions primarily to distinguish between the privilege of middle-class characters like Clarissa and Laura (who would be deemed upper middle class by most) and the difficulties faced by lower-class individuals, as the aristocratic upper class is only relevant to my final chapter on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

My first chapter scrutinizes the class identity of Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* (published in 1925, set in 1923), examining her ostensible disconnect from sociopolitical issues and its relation to the nature of her upbringing. This chapter engages the most with social conformity of the three, and outlining the extent of Clarissa's complacency in her leisure-class lifestyle is essential to understanding why she does not pursue radical change despite her aversion to her class'

¹ This follows the ABC1 and C2DE groupings of the National Readership Survey's social grade, which excludes the statistically small upper class. See Appendix A for the NRS' specific delineations of social grade.

insincerity. I juxtapose Clarissa's youth with the youth of her daughter, Elizabeth, and delve into Clarissa's dislike of Miss Kilman, Elizabeth's tutor and an economically disadvantaged character. Finally, I analyze the concepts of proportion and conversion and their use within the novel, particularly as a force that Clarissa and the war vet Septimus Warren Smith are indirectly unified against.

The second chapter of the thesis is about "The Garden Party" (published in 1922, most likely set sometime in the Edwardian period), throughout which I will delve into the differing responses of Laura and the rest of her family to the death of a local worker, the news of which interrupts their idyllic garden party. Mansfield's focus on commodities and their use as symbols of affluence accounts for much of my analysis of the text, but I also delineate different narrative styles that are telling of class attitudes. I also engage with the critical conversation surrounding the end of the story and to what extent its epiphanic nature indicates future change for Laura. Lastly, I scrutinize Laura's self-proclaimed artistic nature and its implications in her presentation of class and gender, comparing her to the Modernist figure of the New Woman.

My third chapter focuses on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (published privately in 1928, set contemporaneously) and explores Connie's differing attitudes towards her lover, the gamekeeper Oliver Mellors, and the colliers (coal-miners) of the local village Tevershall despite their similar social class. Though Connie ultimately abandons her elite status and title to be with Mellors, she still largely avoids interaction with the lower class overall. I believe this has much to do with the dehumanization of the workers by Connie's husband, Clifford, who oversees them and creates an environment that stifles expression. I also draw parallels between her oppressive marriage to Clifford and his treatment of the workers. I conclude by scrutinizing the discouragement of class empathy in all three texts and propose why this is a gendered phenomenon.

Chapter 1: Invisible, Unseen, Unknown

Virginia Woolf's contemporary and friend E.M. Forster once said of her: "Her snobbery — for she was a snob — has more courage in it than arrogance. It is connected with her insatiable honesty" (Forster 24). To a contemporary audience that expects a sense of self-awareness in privileged individuals, this seems a rather backhanded compliment. The astoundingly progressive deconstruction of gender norms undertaken by Woolf in novels like *Orlando* may lead 21st-century readers to anticipate a similar approach to social class, but the traditional values her class identity instilled proved more persistent than those of her gender. Yet to say that Woolf is not aware of her privilege or the inequities of British society is wrong. Alex Zwerdling asserts in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* that Woolf wrote rather pointedly about class at a time when it was considered distasteful to discuss such issues: "She had an acute sense of exactly how much class and money contributed to the shaping of the individual. And this insight became one of the major subjects of her work" (Zwerdling 88). Indeed, though Woolf rarely writes about the lower classes in a way that gives their voice a platform or illuminates their struggles, her novels are replete with examples of bourgeois privilege. Characters like Clarissa Dalloway are snobbish and rarely express empathy for the disadvantaged, but the inclusion of these flaws demonstrates the "honesty" in her writing to which Forster alludes. Entitled perspectives towards the lower class in Woolf's novels are oftentimes not empathetic or informed, as was undoubtedly the case for many real people in the Modern Era.

The political views of Woolf's characters are often — like all aspects of their personality — elusive, multi-faceted, and contradictory. *Mrs. Dalloway's* employment of free indirect discourse reminds the reader that, just as we have an intimate knowledge of ourselves inaccessible to others, we have blind spots that others may see in us but we fail to recognize

within ourselves. By emphasizing this complexity, Woolf refutes the notion that the perspectives of literary characters should be clearer and more consistent than those of real people. Feeling frustrated at the contradictions in Clarissa's attitudes towards class, or any aspect of social life, is natural. Numerous scholars, among them Christopher Ames, John Shin, and Alex Zwerdling, have argued for the existence of two congruent halves of the self in Woolf's fiction: the social self and the private self. In the company of others, people present their social selves, simplifying or altering their personality so peers are limited in their exposure to the contradictions and uncertainties that haunt their private lives. In doing so, they present a more self-confident and easily digestible self. Prior to the Modernist period, literary characters were most often written in terms of the social self because of the limited interiority traditional narrative styles offer. However, authors like Woolf expose the private self and the intricacies that accompany it, generating true-to-life characters that are not so easily categorized.

Furthermore, it is essential to remember that the contents of *Mrs. Dalloway* encompass only certain parts of one day in the life of a fifty-one-year-old woman. Any notion that the reader can ascertain an uncompromised, complete picture of Clarissa or another character's true nature is false; the ambiguity surrounding how Clarissa's epiphany at the end of the novel will affect her future is a reminder of this. In the words of Vereen Bell, "Clarissa Dalloway ... is far too complex a moral and intellectual being to be the obvious choice for an ideological model" (Bell 94). Nonetheless, it is necessary for an essay of this nature to oversimplify and categorize for the sake of comprehension. So, though this chapter will employ Clarissa as a representative of her gender, class, and generation, I acknowledge the limitations of such representation and will restrain the use of generalization wherever possible.

The events of *Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, are situated within a tumultuous political context. Not only was Marxist-Leninist socialism growing in prominence around the globe thanks to the visibility of the Russian Revolution, but droves of workers were demanding more equitable treatment in countries like the United States and England. Within Britain, the Labour party gained traction in the early 20th century and only became more mainstream following the end of the war, usurping the Liberal party as the primary opposition to the Conservative party in 1922 following the former's internal collapse (Webb). With an agenda demanding better wages and social mobility, it became increasingly difficult for the leisure class to feign ignorance of the poor working conditions in which many citizens operated. However, this task was perhaps less difficult for upper- and middle-class women, whose involvement in the political system was still in its infancy following the enactment of suffrage in 1918. First-wave feminism was often criticized for its emphasis on equality for economically elite women and the exclusion of provisions for working women within its demands (Burkett and Brunell). As a result, class was still not at the forefront of progressive women's political engagement in the 1920s, a shortcoming that interrupted the feminist movement's potential to intersect with concurrent social and racial movements. Even as a woman of privilege, Clarissa expresses feeling "invisible, unseen; unknown" (*MD* 11); one can only imagine the exclusion lower-class women must have felt.

With the period's political context in mind, it is important to note that Clarissa's snobbery does not seem rooted in malice towards the lower classes. Instead, her cloistered upbringing has greatly limited her exposure to the class disparities of England and, even after having moved to London, her daily routine only forces her to interact with the working class on a limited and impersonal basis, most often with her servants. Further, she never appears to come

into contact with the abjectly impoverished, the kinds of manual laborers Clifford exploits in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The poorest character Clarissa interacts with regularly is her daughter Elizabeth's tutor, Miss Kilman, whose specific circumstances Clarissa doesn't seem particularly interested in, dismissively thinking about "how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be" (MD 12). Accordingly, Clarissa's understanding of class distinctions seems limited and her ability to empathize with those who truly struggle to survive is curbed by her inadequate exposure to this class of worker. This obliviousness is exemplified when she projects her own momentary glee onto the poor early in the novel: "[they] can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life" (MD 4). Also, when she thinks back to her friend Sally Seton's financial situation in their youth, Clarissa posits that "she literally hadn't a penny that night when she came to them — had pawned a brooch to come down" (MD 33). Though Sally was of a lower class than Clarissa and Peter at the time, her presence at the estate of Bourton alone indicates she has affluent social connections. Woolf is an author acutely attuned to the personality and aura of physical locations (i.e. the beach house in the *Time Passes* section of *To the Lighthouse*), and Bourton evokes the air of the leisure class and its admiration of commodities. Clarissa describes the "little vases all the way down the table" filled with hollyhocks and dahlias; her white frock with pink gauze, cigars, the picturesque terrace with sunset views (MD 34). Yet Sally, a guest there, is Clarissa's point of reference for despondency; and, as Sally does not effectively embody the strife of the impoverished in her time at Bourton, Clarissa has no real understanding of what penury looks like.

Even so, Clarissa's limited interactions with the few lower-class people in her life are awkwardly strained at best and harmful at worst. Sally Seton observes Clarissa's stormy

relationship with her impoverished cousin Ellie Henderson at the party, which prompts Sally to note that “Clarissa *was* rather hard on people” (*MD* 191). This passage follows Sally’s ruminations on her own friendship with Clarissa, which Clarissa sours with her repeated refusal to visit Sally and her husband out in the country owing to Clarissa’s belief that Sally “had married beneath her, her husband being — she was proud of it — a miner’s son” (*MD* 190). In both instances, Clarissa perpetuates the non-interaction between classes and her snobbery does seem to exceed the standard of her class at first glance. But, it is important to remember that both of these examples are seen through Sally’s eyes. Sally is an example of a middle-class woman who is more socially aware than Clarissa, but Sally has also experienced economic hardship in her lifetime and is a rare example of a woman who has both ascended the social ladder and married beneath her, establishing her as an aberration within her social group. Thus, it is perhaps her proximity to Clarissa that aggrandizes Clarissa’s snobbery rather than an excess of it in her character.

Indeed, other parts of the novel provide evidence that Clarissa’s attitudes are, in fact, the *de facto* norm of her peers. When her husband, Richard, lunches at Lady Bruton’s, the narrator describes the servants setting the table:

“And so there began a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of aproned white-capped maids, handmaidens not of necessity, but adepts in a mystery or grand deception practiced by hostesses in Mayfair from one-thirty to two, when, with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases, and there rises instead this profound illusion in the first place about the food — how it is not paid for; and then that the table spreads itself voluntarily with glass and silver, little mats, saucers of red fruit...” (*MD* 104).

Though the workers are mentioned early in the passage, their labor goes largely unnoticed by the guests. To the narrator, who at this moment is seeing through Lady Bruton's eyes, the table seems to set itself in a kind of "illusion" that discounts the hours of work the servants put into meal preparation. The effort is not attributed to them but to the hostess, whose "wave of the hand" puts the table-setting into motion. The maids are simply part of the scene, replaceable by any other worker of their class and ultimately "not of necessity." Lady Bruton is so used to having her meals served to her that she forgets human labor is their source, and the workers remain unseen and unacknowledged by the leisure class once again.

This disregard pervades the upper class and seems heavily associated with their upbringing, which Vereen Bell notes in his article "Misreading *Mrs. Dalloway*":

"What Clarissa lacks is a meaningful connection to the real world. In this respect she is not only an expression of her class, but she exceeds the norm. Her upbringing at Bourton had been Victorian and sheltered in the extreme, under Aunt Helena's watchful eye ... and except for the bizarre and meaningless tragedy of her sister's death, her life appears to have been sufficiently idyllic to give convention and its restraints an aura of attractive innocence" (Bell 98).

The distinction that Clarissa's detachment is "an expression of her class" is important, for it underlines how the society she lives within discourages her from engaging with socio-political topics. Clarissa is not incapable of this kind of thought; in her youth, she and Sally Seton "meant to found a society to abolish private property" and read authors like Plato, William Morris, and (presumably Percy) Shelley (*MD* 33). However, she sacrifices this autonomy in exchange for an advantageous marriage, or at least believes she has. In middle age, her politics are primarily fed

to her by Richard, who works in the British government and only passingly discusses matters of importance with her.

As such, I disagree with Bell that Clarissa entirely lacks a meaningful connection to reality — Clarissa proves herself capable of great sympathy for those whose suffering she can relate to. When news of the suicide of her literary double, the World War I veteran Septimus Warren Smith, reaches Clarissa at her party, she understands it as a rejection of control. Septimus, who suffers from shell shock, is subjected to the medical philosophy of the psychiatrist Sir William Bradshaw, a believer in the healing powers of proportion and conversion. Proportion, best understood as the British leisure class's concept of a normal and successful life, is imposed on those who are seen as deviant through the use of conversion, which forces the deviant to conform and reach a socially acceptable level of proportion (*MD* 99-100). In Septimus' case, Sir William recommends six months of isolation in the country, and when he and Dr. Holmes attempt to force Septimus to come with them, Septimus opts to jump from his window rather than be left "in their power" (*MD* 147). Though Clarissa never meets Septimus, she connects with him via their mutual aversion to the social control proportion and conversion institute. She remarks her distaste for men like Sir William, who attempt to "[force] your soul," and admires Septimus for rejecting their control, thinking: "Death was defiance ... She felt glad that he had done it" (*MD* 184-86). Though they face oppression in different facets of life, Clarissa imagines a bond between them because the source of their suffering is normativity. Through her rejection of proportion and conversion, Clarissa proves herself capable of engaging in criticism of her class and demonstrates an awareness of how socially normative behavior is created and enforced. If this is the case, why does Clarissa not similarly empathize with the lower class?

Clarissa does not, however, empathize similarly with the lower class. Her tendency towards empathy is stifled by the social expectations of her class and gender identity, which deem attributes like cross-class interaction unsavory. Being largely sheltered from external issues in her youth and then marrying immediately afterward, Clarissa was never encouraged to develop a politically conscious mind. She is even cognizant of this fact, wishing she was “interested in politics like a man” or, more specifically, a woman like Lady Bexborough, who Clarissa sees as “dignified” and “sincere” (*MD* 10). While these descriptors may first call class difference to mind, the context in which Clarissa employs them suggests she envies Lady Bexborough’s masculine qualities because they allow the open expression of thought. Clarissa’s lacking political engagement is later emphasized when she considers the atrocities committed against the Armenians in what is likely the novel’s least favorable depiction of her. She thinks:

“[Richard] was already halfway to the House of Commons, to his Armenians, his Albanians, having settled her on the sofa, looking at his roses. And people would say, “Clarissa Dalloway is spoilt.” She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she had heard Richard say so over and over again) — no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses” (*MD* 120).

Clarissa’s ignorance of the Armenian Genocide is inexcusable and perfectly captures her disconnect from the realm of politics. Moments like this defy Christopher Ames’ assertion that “Clarissa comes off too well to be the vehicle of an extended social critique” (Ames 93). Rather, it is precisely because Clarissa is naturally empathetic that one can read such a scathing critique of class within her character. Her wanting empathy is not entirely, or even mostly, an individual failure on Clarissa’s part; instead, it is the failure of Victorian and Edwardian society to infuse a

sense of social responsibility within its citizens. As a woman, Clarissa is discouraged from pursuing the kind of social criticism that reveals economic hardship to the leisure class, and the effect is abundantly clear in this section.

Also within the above passage are reminders of Clarissa's role as a housewife, first referring to the roses as her husband's before claiming them as her own. The Victorian separation of spheres lives on in the Dalloways' marriage, with Richard spending most of his time out of the house while Clarissa primarily leaves to run errands, never shedding her role as Richard's wife even outside of the domestic sphere. As DuPlessis puts it in *Writing Beyond the Ending*: "[Victorian] women are trained to a personality, formed by social constraints that compel an undivided commitment to one path; allusions to the psychological economy of romance make change seem impossible" (DuPlessis 90). Though Clarissa may wish to be more politically engaged and autonomous, the idea of "choosing" between marriage and ambition has been drilled into her from a young age; as a result, she accepts marriage as her path and is content to continue loving her roses and caring nothing for the Armenians. Additionally, flowers are traditionally identified as feminine items, and Clarissa's love for them is symbolic of an affinity for the comfort of married life and her leisure-class status. Flowers also feature prominently in the scene following Clarissa's first allusion to Miss Kilman, in which she expresses distaste for Miss Kilman's constant reminders of her poverty (*MD* 12-13). The proximity of flowers to scenes in which Clarissa is forced to engage with marginalized people is no accident, and they seem to be a way of soothing her discomfort in the presence of the oppressed and returning her to the disconnected state her privilege enables, with an added irony that they symbolize the very social structure in which she is subordinated.

Generously, one can at least admire that Clarissa does not adopt a veneer of care like Lady Bruton, who (with assistance from Hugh Whitbread, another pompous socialite) writes inconsequential essays to the *Times* in a sanctimonious show of political engagement (*MD* 109). Instead, Clarissa's attitude seems to mirror Woolf's own sense of what Zwerdling terms "middle-class guilt," disliking the British social structure but living too pleasantly within it to attempt downward social mobility or embrace the radical nature of socialism (98). This guilt is manifested in Clarissa's dislike of Miss Kilman, who she feels "was never in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority, your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were" (*MD* 12). The feeling of inferiority Clarissa notes is the discomfort of having one's privilege laid bare; she feels that the presence of someone who has to struggle to survive makes her life seem effortless, her conflicts trivial. Again, Clarissa's feelings echo Woolf's: "I'm one of those who are hampered by the psychological hindrance of owning capital" (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume I*, 101). She attempts to silence this guilt superficially, either by comforting herself with commodities like flowers or by imagining herself as a kind of humanitarian that rejects the stereotypical images of greed surrounding the wealthy. She bandages her damaged ego by being kind to her servants: "thank you, thank you, she went on saying in gratitude to her servants generally for helping her to be like this, to be what she wanted, gentle, generous-hearted. Her servants liked her" (*MD* 39). This perception allows Clarissa to exclude herself as an agent in class oppression by imagining herself as an ally, gentle and generous rather than cold and domineering. The result is reassurance of her own virtue, as she does not appreciate the workers for their service but for offering an object for her savior complex to act on. The only inter-class interaction Clarissa can envision replicates the hierarchy that

causes her discomfort but falsely gives her the impression that she is working to remedy the divisions between class groups.

But *Mrs. Dalloway* is not bereft of hope even if Clarissa seems unlikely to change. She may be the central figure of a deeply modern novel, but she is decidedly of the old guard. There is at least one generation of women younger than her whose lives have not yet been molded in the shape of proportion; a generation who, at Clarissa's deeply symbolic party, is "clearly in the minority" (Ames 91). The absence of young guests is significant because it means the children of the leisure classes are not being fully exposed to the homogenizing gatherings of the British social elite or its enforcers, like Sir William Bradshaw. Included within this age group is Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth, who at a young age is already leading a markedly more socially involved life than her mother. Instead of being raised in the countryside, Elizabeth lives with her parents in London and is being privately tutored in history by Miss Kilman, whose philosophy, though of a religious nature, is considerate of those she doesn't know: "[she] would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians" (*MD* 12). As a result, one must imagine her curriculum for Elizabeth would include some discussion of collective strife and economic inequality in both Britain and the rest of the world.

Therefore, Clarissa dislikes Miss Kilman not only because she is physically drawing Elizabeth away from her and potentially into a disreputable same-gender relationship, but also for pulling her from Clarissa's influence and image of the life her daughter should have. Though Clarissa generally detests the insincerity of middle-class life, she also recognizes its undeniable advantages and wishes for her daughter to benefit from the same privilege she does. Clarissa senses an instinct towards conversion in Miss Kilman because of her religious convictions and despises what she sees as an attempt to indoctrinate her daughter, not realizing she is equally

pulling Elizabeth in the opposite direction. Because of her mother's influence, Elizabeth is susceptible to repeating Clarissa's life pattern: an auspicious marriage, a stable income, and, above all, a comfortably sheltered existence.

However, Elizabeth is not fully committed to this path within *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her mother even notes the generational difference between them, remarking: "Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them" (*MD* 11). Elizabeth is already less allured by the material symbols of wealth than her mother, and her relationship with Miss Kilman exposes her to poverty.

"But then Miss Kilman was frightfully clever. Elizabeth had never thought about the poor. They lived with everything they wanted, — her mother had breakfast in bed every day; Lucy carried it up ... But Miss Kilman said (one of those Tuesday mornings when the lesson was over), 'My grandfather kept an oil and colour shop in Kensington.' Miss Kilman made one feel so small" (*MD* 131).

The necessity of exposure to awareness is embodied in Elizabeth's confession that she "had never thought about the poor" before encountering Miss Kilman. Like her mother, her reaction to this exposure is guilt; but, unlike her mother, Elizabeth admires Miss Kilman and her knowledge, implying an openness to social discourse similar to what Clarissa expresses in her youth. More generally, Miss Kilman opens Elizabeth's eyes to lifestyles different from her mother's. On an omnibus in London, Elizabeth considers the possible career options available to her: "She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament" (*MD* 136). That this scene comes after a meeting with Miss Kilman is no coincidence, as it is she who informs Elizabeth of the professions newly open to women. However, her mother's influence is not far from her mind either. The looming presence of Clarissa's traditional lifestyle is evoked in Elizabeth's thought

that “she was, of course, rather lazy,” acknowledging a privileged life is available to her should she choose not to pursue her loftier ambitions (*MD* 137). Still, Elizabeth is a reminder that social norms and attitudes are taught and that detachment is not inherent to privilege; through exposure to people like Miss Kilman, she and the rest of her generation can help bridge the gap between classes.

Both Elizabeth and Clarissa show how society influences the individual, and the close internal style of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s narration is essential to the portrayal of this within the novel. To understand internalization's importance, one need only look at a text without it. Luckily, the Dalloways also appear in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, in which Clarissa is every bit the stodgy and affected embodiment of her class that many read her as in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Both she and Richard are completely out of touch and seemingly unaware of their privilege, riding mules in Spain “to understand how the peasants live” and disparagingly speaking of a suffragette (*The Voyage Out* 34, 38). The impact of their presence on Rachel, an adolescent girl and the novel's main character, is strikingly similar to how social norms affect Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*: “In the glass [Rachel] wore an expression of tense melancholy, for she had come to the depressing conclusion, since the arrival of the Dalloways, that her face was not the face she wanted, and in all probability never would be” (*TVO* 36). Even in her earliest work, Woolf is already acutely aware of the powerful influence class has on self-image; though she does not, as she later will in *Mrs. Dalloway*, reveal its continuing influence on those who have already achieved normative success.

Still, the corrupting influence of proportion and conversion can be read in Rachel's sudden discontent, and Woolf includes obviously negative tonal cues within the prose. Similarly, the passage in *Mrs. Dalloway* in which the narrator describes these concepts and their

importance to Sir William Bradshaw is one of the few points in the narration that both distances itself from one character's perspective and features unambiguous tonal cues ("Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose") (*MD* 99-101). As Molly Hite notes, *Mrs. Dalloway* typically does not offer suggestions of how the reader should judge Clarissa or any of the novel's other characters, so their presence in this section is striking (Hite 249). The narration unambiguously portrays proportion and conversion as harmful towards those it is enacted upon. As I mentioned earlier, Sir William Bradshaw uses these concepts, his "goddesses," as the foundation of his medical treatment, which is woefully inadequate in relieving Septimus' psychological distress (*MD* 100). Clarissa is also notably opposed to the inclination towards conversion in Sir Bradshaw and Miss Kilman, though it would be excessive to say she is a victim in the same way Septimus is. Instead, proportion and conversion seem to cause Clarissa discontent with her lifestyle, as she conforms to the expectations of her social position but realizes supposed "normalcy" can be hollow and unfulfilling. She wishes at times to be more like the untethered Peter Walsh, who she imagines as a kind of free-spirited wanderer who acts "as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage" (*MD* 47). The narration, however, reveals that Peter is not content with his life either, showing the force conversion exerts on those who do not fit proportion's image of success. Because of how British society is structured, proportion fails all except those who are both privileged and malicious enough to fully buy into it, but its elusiveness fills those who cannot conform to its shape with longing.

Since *The Voyage Out* has neither *Mrs. Dalloway*'s narrative style nor exploration of proportion and conversion, Clarissa is portrayed far less favorably in this text. Even if one still reads Clarissa's class attitudes in *Mrs. Dalloway* negatively, the novel at least shows that these values are socially imparted and not entirely a character flaw on Clarissa's part, which would be

a reasonable conclusion to draw from her portrayal in *The Voyage Out*. One of Woolf's most astute observations is that class and gender identities are taught, and she learns to manifest this idea in her writing by focusing on memory and perspective rather than dialogue and action. *Mrs. Dalloway* makes up for the absence of Clarissa's perspective in *The Voyage Out*, but none of Woolf's texts offer a poor character with such complexity. As such, we can only view them through the eyes of others — others who, as I have shown, lack the insight to be a fair judge of their character or situation. The emphasis Woolf places on perspective and class identity underline the importance of exposure to the development of class consciousness in privileged individuals. *Mrs. Dalloway* does not seek to expose inequality but is still a critique of class structures in its own way. As I have mentioned, Woolf opts to scrutinize the disconnected comfort and extreme privilege that permeates the leisure class because it is the subset of society she is most familiar with.

Mrs. Dalloway shows the harm of enacting social categories as aspects of identity, as doing so creates the perception that class differences are inherent and uncompromising. Clarissa sees her class and gender as a part of her identity and takes the accompanying expectations as a given when they don't have to be. As Woolf noted on class divisions in an essay, "There is no animosity, perhaps, but there is no communication. We are enclosed, and separate, and cut off" (*Collected Essays Volume I*, 219). When divulging her dislike for Miss Kilman, Clarissa posits that "with another throw of the dice, had the black been uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No." (*MD* 12). Clarissa views her differences with Miss Kilman as irreconcilable but astutely remarks that the order of rank in hierarchical structures is as arbitrary as a dice roll. The "world," then, may be better understood as Clarissa's world, or the social reality she occupies, as the indicator "this" suggests the existence of other

inaccessible realities in which the two women are not antithetical. These alternative worlds can only come to be if the British class system is altered, an idea D.H. Lawrence takes even further in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

David Bradshaw notes in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* that “Woolf’s radical critique of ‘the fabric of things’ is subtly persuasive, never bluntly didactic” (Bradshaw 191). It is perhaps this subtlety that leads many to read her works as unconcerned with wealth inequality. Like Clarissa, she benefits too greatly from the British social structure to condemn it entirely without seeming hypocritical. However, also like Clarissa, she recognizes that the promise of satisfaction in wealth is empty. *Mrs. Dalloway* is critical of the British class hierarchy, but it does this by castigating the top rather than elevating the bottom. The novel shows that society’s privileged members are constantly struggling to conform to the expectations of proportion, revealing that the perceived differences between the leisure class and the working class are socially constructed. While not absolving the affluent of blame entirely, this struggle does highlight the larger forces that keep the poor persecuted and the wealthy from doing anything to help them. Thus, the absence of lower-class empathy in *Mrs. Dalloway* would be most effectively remedied by structural change to how the classes are seen in relation to each other.

Chapter 2: Like a Work-Girl

Katherine Mansfield was famously one of the only authors whose ability Woolf envied, so it is not surprising that many critics have written on the parallels between “The Garden Party” and *Mrs. Dalloway*, remarking on everything from the similar intrusions of death on social functions to their common interest in flowers and clothes as symbolic objects. Both women were deeply invested in exploring social conventions and interiority, and both wrote with a sharp and distinctive tongue, never losing their fundamental narrative voice even in wildly different stories. Given that Woolf admired Mansfield and the two even shared a correspondence, citing “The Garden Party” as a potential influence for *Mrs. Dalloway* is not at all far-fetched. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the similarities of their affluent social climates and the discomfort or dissonance that certain leisure-class women feel as a result of their privilege. Francisco José Cortés Vieco directly compares the two stories but primarily focuses on the impact of strangers’ deaths on their protagonists, analyzing Clarissa and Laura’s place within a social structure but not the impact of the structure itself (Vieco 96-97).

As such, this chapter aims to scrutinize the role of social learning and development in “The Garden Party” while also outlining points of divergence, exploring to what extent external influence is (or is not) tempered by Laura’s visit to the lower-class Scott household. I will argue that Laura, like Clarissa, demonstrates an aversion to the social molding that occurs within modern middle-class families. However, unlike Clarissa, Laura is still young enough to avoid conformity, with the potential of adopting the role of the New Woman and rejecting the predestined lifestyle her class status imposes. To do so, Laura must understand her privilege and willingly reject the characteristics of her class identity, a task that she consciously embraces but never fully acts out within the story. Therefore, I see “The Garden Party” as a middle point

between the latent rejection of social norms in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the voluntary downward mobility of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, with Laura acting against her class identity but ultimately retaining it, at least within the story itself.

Despite their numerous similarities, there are two fundamental differences between *Mrs. Dalloway* and “The Garden Party”: one, the latter is set in New Zealand rather than England, and two, “The Garden Party” is presumed by most scholars to take place before the war because many elements of the story mirror Mansfield’s childhood. The discrepancy in geographic setting is not particularly significant to this essay, as the social environment seems largely the same. However, the temporal divergence is notable, especially considering she wrote the story after the war. Whatever span of years one considers to constitute the Modernist period, most would agree that the pre- and post-war years were markedly different in terms of political climate. With both feminist and socialist movements occurring primarily after the war in Western countries, the Edwardian society of “The Garden Party” is, fortunately, similar to the environment Clarissa was raised in, making comparisons of their upbringing easier. However, this context is also important in measuring the likelihood that Laura will ultimately reject her anticipated social role given that there is less of a precedent in doing so. As I highlighted with Elizabeth in the last chapter, the visibility of alternative possibilities opens the mind to new ways of living.

Like much of the literature of its time, “The Garden Party” is a kind of *Bildungsroman* about Laura Sheridan, a leisure-class girl around the age of adolescence. Her family is throwing a lavish garden party and she derives much pleasure from acting the part of the host, ambling about in excitement as the event is set up. However, Laura overhears news of a man from the less affluent part of town who has died in a work-related accident and implores her older sister, Jose, and mother to cancel the party, feeling it “terribly heartless” to continue the festivities (“The

Garden Party” 205). To her surprise, both women think she is ridiculous for her concern. Jose says: “Stop the garden-party? My dear Laura, don’t be so absurd. Of course we can’t do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to. Don’t be so extravagant” (“TGP” 204). Here, Jose unintentionally reveals the true source of her indifference: “Nobody expects us to.” The class difference between the deceased and the Sheridans means that there is no expectation of interaction, and therefore no expectation of sympathy beyond vague and impersonal acts of condolence, like the basket of party leftovers they later send.

Interestingly, both Jose and Mrs. Sheridan mention sympathy when talking to Laura, but in ways that show the fundamental difference between them. Jose seems to recognize the transgressive nature of her callousness and assures Laura that she is “just as sympathetic” but that expending energy worrying is a waste: “You won’t bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental” (“TGP” 204). Aside from the blatant prejudice of assuming Scott was drunk, her response is suggestive of her relationship to class; while she is obviously correct that there is not adequate time to worry about every person’s death, she treats Scott as someone she has no association with rather than a neighbor. In essence, Scott’s death doesn’t matter to the Sheridans because he is othered, showing the extent to which social hierarchies can diminish interpersonal relations. Laura’s mother makes a similar point but does not duplicitously express her sympathy: “You are being very absurd, Laura ... People like that don’t expect sacrifices from us. And it’s not very sympathetic to spoil everybody’s enjoyment as you’re doing now” (“TGP” 205). The repeated use of “sympathy” in both passages shows that the concept is on Mansfield’s mind in the story, but its ironic use suggests an awareness of the apathy class categories create. The difference between Jose and Mrs. Sheridan is that Jose still believes she should be sympathetic. Mrs. Sheridan is old enough that she does not bother pretending; her selfish interests are

unabashedly expressed. Like Clarissa with the Armenians, she knows that false sympathy does nothing to ease the Scott family's suffering. Instead, she wishes for Laura to be sympathetic towards those who her actions do impact: the Sheridans and the party guests. This kind of cold rationality is disheartening, but unfortunately commonplace, and both reactions show why the expression of genuine lower-class sympathy is rarely seen in the story.

As the preceding paragraph shows, Mansfield subtly engages with class issues in the story's narrative techniques. Like Woolf, Mansfield often utilizes free indirect discourse to sardonically illustrate the biases of her characters. Examples of this come when Jose notes that she "loved giving orders to the servants, and they loved obeying her" or when Mrs. Sheridan chides Laura for her concern, remarking it "not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment as you're doing now" ("TGP" 201, 205). In doing so, Mansfield cleverly uses the stream-of-consciousness narration to impart social criticism, and the homogeneous voice of the Sheridans points to the fact that these biases are part of the family's class identity. Aside from when the narrator adopts Laura's perspective, the shift between viewpoints barely seems like a shift at all. There is no degree of self-awareness and very little empathy to be found in any of the other characters; Laura's family, and particularly her mother, have come to terms with their privilege and don't bother to question their place within the class hierarchy. This acceptance is further emphasized, as Christine Darrohn notes, when Mansfield utilizes superfluous language within the dialogue to mock the British upper-class dialect, most notably in the final line of the story, Laurie's "*isn't it, darling?*" (Darrohn 525; "TGP" 210). The overemphasized vernacular effectively communicates the Sheridans' indoctrination into leisure-class society and suggests a desire to replicate the hauteur of old aristocratic rulers.

Mansfield also stresses the importance of commodities to the Sheridans' lifestyle, an act that further bolsters their sense of class superiority. Like Clarissa's flowers, the possessions the Sheridan family own allow them to dissociate from life's problems and enter a state of reality where visible reminders of wealth impart feelings of success and affluence. The party itself can be read this way, as its ostensible purpose of social interaction is barely mentioned in the narration. Instead, Mansfield devotes far more page space to descriptions of the setting, which paint the event as almost excessively agreeable. The story opens with a reference to the "ideal" weather, which is instantly commodified in the following sentence: "They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it." Similarly, hundreds of roses "had come out in a single night" as if they knew that they were "the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties" ("TGP" 197). The notion that nature can be bought or acts to benefit bourgeois leisure is absurd, but the convergence of seemingly perfect circumstances serves to accentuate the Sheridans' idyllic middle-class life. In Adam Sorkin's words, "it is clear that neither the occurrence nor the sense of the purchase of power over nature is unusual to their household" (Sorkin 445). Wealth and status play an exaggerated role in the lives of the Sheridans despite their middle-class status, effectively showing how aristocratic tendencies have been translated to the modern bourgeois ruling class.

The man-made commodities in the story are no less luxurious than the natural. Their yard has a garden and tennis court; they own a piano, photo frames made of silver, and glass door-knobs; they have a cook and gardener and hire out waiters, moving men, and a band for the party. The narrator regularly describes the clothes the Sheridans are wearing, from a silk petticoat to a black hat with a velvet ribbon; by contrast, the servant, Sadie, wears a print skirt. The Sheridans' party-planning is described in great detail, yet despite Mrs. Sheridan's assertion

of her exhausting effort, none of the actual preparations are carried out by the family. Instead, hired labor is responsible for the food catering, the furniture moving, and the entertainment. The work done by the Sheridans is exclusively creative and largely trivial, their success or failure producing slight aesthetic differences that would likely go unnoticed. Yet, like the scene at Lady Bruton's in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the labor of the paid workers is erased by Mrs. Sheridan's declaration of her own effort, saying "All over, all over, thank heaven ... I'm exhausted. Yes, it's been very successful. But oh, these parties, these parties!" ("TGP" 207). Through both their actions and possessions, the Sheridans' wealth is abundantly visible in this part of the story, which illuminates its absence in the impoverished neighboring area that Laura later visits. The narration does not so much describe the neighborhood using the presence of dirt and grime, but rather the absence of visible wealth.

The poorer locale is, however, described in a severe tone when the narration views it through the eyes of a Sheridan. Jose, Laura's sister, outlines the street's "little mean dwellings" and swarming children in a derogatory paragraph: "The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken," "so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys" ("TGP" 204). Laura and Laurie emerge finding it "disgusting and sordid," but the narration itself never provides details of this: the worst we see is some litter and congestion ("TGP" 204). The neighborhood does not seem so much dangerous as it does plain. When she delivers the basket, Laura is not frightened by criminals or garbage, but rather "Women in shawls and men's tweed caps hurr[ying] by" and "A low hum [coming] from the mean little cottages" ("TGP" 208). For all the family's insistence that the neighborhood is fearsome and reprehensible, no real threats emerge. Instead, it seems to be the reputation that the family fears more than anything, building up an image of the less affluent district that

overemphasizes its difference. In doing so, their empathy is curtailed by preexisting moralistic judgments about the people who live there; we see this when Jose assumes that Scott was drunk when he died. Because the poor are so heavily othered for their lack of possessions, their needs are assumed to be materialistic, hence the charity basket of leftovers the Sheridans send. This kind of charity does not help the Scotts in any concrete way but relieves some of the middle-class guilt the Sheridans express after Mr. Sheridan shares his concern about the family.

Yet, Laura is different from the rest of her household, a fact she is conscious of: “how curious, she seemed to be different from them all” (“TGP” 197). Some critics, such as William Atkinson, assert that this deviance is simply the result of her age, as she has not been fully trained to fulfill the expectations of her social role. He believes Laura wishes to distance herself from her family because her sense of self is rapidly developing, and this feeling of idiosyncrasy will dwindle as she ages, transitioning from “a mildly rebellious adolescence to a young-womanhood that does not question the status quo” (Atkinson 53). This interpretation is perfectly reasonable, and one can read the above quote as ironic — a suggestion that she is not, in fact, different from them and only naively believes this. However, I believe more underlies her empathy than a desire to be different, as she seems to possess a level of self-consciousness that exceeds her social position’s norm. At one point, the narration notes that “Laura’s *upbringing* [emphasis added] made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye” (“TGP” 198). This idea is further supported by her response to one of the workers briefly spurning masculinity and smelling a flower, thinking “It’s all the fault ... of these absurd class distinctions” (“TGP” 199). There is undoubtedly a degree of Mansfield’s signature irony in Laura’s stated aversion to class identity, particularly in her

emphasis on feeling differences “not a bit, not an atom” (“TGP” 199), but the fact that she thinks this way at all is a step in the right direction.

However, Laura’s values clash with the values of her family, which exert a strong influence on her demeanor. This conflict comes to a head when she hears of Scott’s death but is also present earlier in the story, particularly in the discussion of her self-proclaimed artistic nature. Creatively inclined protagonists often end up rejecting the boundaries of normal society, especially in Modernist *Künstlerromans* like James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise*. Laura seems to fit this archetype at first glance, but she is not yet at the point where she rejects society via action rather than principle. Further, the influence of her family threatens her movement in this direction, as her participation in the party planning offers an outlet for her creative inclinations that does not require her to discard her social role: “she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else” (“TGP” 197). This outlet offers a type of artistic expression that is compatible with marriage and other traditional feminine roles. In *Writing Beyond the Ending*, DuPlessis explores the artistry of mothers in turn-of-the-century literature, saying: “She has written, sung, made, or created, but her work, because in unconventional media, is muted and unrecognized. The media in which she works are often the materials of ‘everyday use’ (to borrow a phrase from Alice Walker), and her works are artisanal” (DuPlessis 94). Though the role of the New Woman is distinctly modern, DuPlessis shows that Laura’s creativity does not definitively forecast an outsider position.

Many critics read the scene in which Laura receives her mother’s hat as indicative of Laura’s complacency within the system, as the hat distracts her from Scott’s death and instead directs her attention towards her own appearance. Though I do think Mansfield intends for the

hat to beckon commodity culture in a similar way to how Woolf uses flowers, there are value judgments inherent in reading this scene as a criticism of Mrs. Sheridan, Laura, or women in general. While discussing women and consumerism in *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski rejects the notion that an appreciation for fashion or similar possessions upholds patriarchal gender structures by keeping women placid. Instead, she posits that:

“greater weight be given to the potential for active negotiation and recontextualization of meaning in the process of consumption. The traditional Left and feminist discomfort with consumer culture has been criticized for an excessive puritanism and asceticism, often moored in a nostalgic vision of a premodern authentic subject and an untenable, utilitarian definition of ‘real needs’” (Felski 68).

In other words, reading this scene as critical places a rather unfair burden on Laura to willfully reject any comfort or enjoyment derived from commodities. In criticizing social issues, particularly class-related ones, blame is often placed at the feet of individuals, which is counterproductive when examining larger social phenomena. William Atkinson, for example, reads far too much malicious intent in Mrs. Sheridan lending her hat to Laura: “Mrs. Sheridan uses the hat in two discrete ways ... when [Laura] tries on the hat, she no longer recognises her self, the self that was worried about the dead man’s family. Her old classification is dissolving, and the new one remains inchoate” (Atkinson 56). I find it hard to believe that Mrs. Sheridan aims to institute social control by giving Laura her hat. More likely, she wishes to distract and comfort her upset daughter. Whether it does affect Laura’s class identity is a different question, but intent matters greatly when discussing how and why older women in society discourage class empathy. By blaming the individual as an enforcer of the structure, the power of the structure itself is downplayed. As Raymond Williams writes on class empathy, “recognition of evil was

balanced by fear of becoming involved. Sympathy was transformed, not into action, but into withdrawal” (109).

Several critics also read Laura’s interactions with the working class to be indicative of disconnectedness, but I interpret these differently. One particular scene that has drawn much scholarly attention is Laura’s encounter with the men putting up the marquee, where she attempts to adopt the role of the empowered host while simultaneously staying a social equal of the workers, enjoying their friendliness but still unsure of the power dynamics of the situation. Her leisure-class status would ostensibly give her more authority than the workers, but this is complicated by both her age and gender — not because the men won’t listen to her, but because she lacks the confidence to assert herself in front of them. Though she begins by suggesting where to put the marquee, she ends up forfeiting her jurisdiction to the workers despite her doubts: “Must [the trees] be hidden by a marquee? / They must” (“TGP” 198-99). Laura lacks experience in the social role she adopts in this interaction, so she ultimately switches her mindset and instead tries to adopt the role of the “work-girl,” leveling herself with the workers to allay the uncertain power dynamics (“TGP” 199).

I do not necessarily think it wrong to read her “feeling like a work-girl” as a fetishization of the other, as many critics do, but this angle overlooks the fact that Laura is still a young girl, and role-playing the positions of older people is how children navigate interactions in adult society. Her attempt to feel like a working woman at this moment may be performative, but she is also only performing the parts of domestic woman and hostess when she helps her mother plan the party. Critics such as Atkinson and Darrohn who criticize Laura for her shaky handling of class issues seem to ignore the text’s tonal cues that we are supposed to sympathize with her. As Adam Sorkin argues, “She is positively as sensitive and receptive an individual as, given the

right human material, wealth — class — can create” (Sorkin 448). Like Clarissa, the social expectation of indifference attempts to quell her instinct to empathize with others, but Laura is not yet so far in her social development for the reader to abandon hope completely. Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze is correct when she says that Laura’s inability to fully cast off her class role “does not diminish the intensity of Laura’s cry, ‘we can’t possibly have a garden party with a man dead outside the front gate’” (Thorndike-Breeze 69).

Laura is also separated from much of her family by age difference rather than generational difference, marking another departure from the dynamics of *Mrs. Dalloway*. This distinction is important because Laura’s upbringing does not seem markedly different from her parents’, as her older siblings seem to have been successfully shaped in their parents’ image. Therefore, Laura deviates in two ways: one, in being the youngest and least socially developed of her family; and two, in her aforementioned artistic temperament. This separates her from a character like Elizabeth, whose upbringing is substantially different from those of previous generations in her family. The difference is perhaps rooted in the pre- vs. post-war dichotomy established above. If we presume Laura to be 13 in “The Garden Party,” and that the story takes place circa 1910, then she would be in her mid-20s in 1923 when *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place. Laura and Elizabeth would be raised in dramatically different social environments given the occurrence of World War I. As such, the class empathy both girls display cannot be merely rooted in generational difference; indeed, though she has even less exposure to poverty, Clarissa exhibits similar sentiments in her youth.

Downplaying generational difference distinguishes “The Garden Party” from *Mrs. Dalloway*, and the nature of death’s intrusion in “The Garden Party” deviates as well. The initial impact of Scott’s death on Laura is nominal, prompting action but not psychologically altering

her. It is not until Laura visits Scott's house and views the body that she is psychologically affected, whereas simply hearing of Septimus' death sends Clarissa into contemplation. Structurally, this makes sense — given that epiphanies typically occur at the end of Modernist texts, the displacement of this moment aligns with the story's culmination taking place at the Scott household rather than the party. The delay also signals why each woman is affected. For Clarissa, she empathizes with the circumstances of Septimus' suicide, appreciating his refusal of conversion and internalizing the perceived power of his statement, whether intended by him or not. For Laura, it is the novelty of facing death directly that prompts her emotional response. Scott is deindividualized in death; his body, no longer tied to his social role, is "far from" commodity culture, from "garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks," from the social categories that divide people in life ("TGP" 209). As criticism of the story often points out, Laura aestheticizes his death, helping her come to terms with her psychological discomfort. However, part of why she can do this is the ability to see Scott as a human stripped of social categories. This nakedness is part of Laura's aestheticization, as she recognizes these as a source of suffering in life. He is no longer valued in terms of affluence, but Laura unintentionally reintroduces class dynamics with her presence, reestablishing the difference between herself and the others. As a result, Laura feels uncomfortable and even a little guilty, asking Scott to "forgive my hat," one of the story's symbols of material wealth ("TGP" 210). She knows she has disrupted the strangely peaceful scene by transcending the established class boundaries.

Karen Shaup's analysis of Laura's artistic tendencies in her article "Consuming Beauty: Aesthetic Experience in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party'" offers insight into both her deviance from her family and the oddity of epiphany. Shaup focuses on Laura's proclaimed artistic nature and her use of aestheticization as a mode of understanding the "disorder of life,"

including death (Shaup 225). The story can be read as a fairly traditional *Künstlerroman* in the sense that Laura loses a degree of her innocence in the viewing of another's death and responds to this aesthetically, attempting to make sense of the world and the human condition through art. Both Shaup and Atkinson analyze her response but come to differing conclusions. Atkinson asserts that Laura successfully reconciles the dissonance Scott's body creates: "The aestheticisation of the corpse served both to strip it of its terror and to mystify the class distinctions which the status-reversal had foregrounded" (Atkinson 60). On the other hand, Shaup argues that, though Laura's vision is described in terms of consumption, she nonetheless "disavow[s] materialism as she finds his transcendence through death admirable" (Shaup 242). I believe the evidence within the story itself favors Shaup's reading: as I mentioned earlier, class issues and commodities are at the forefront of Laura's mind when she views Scott's body. Atkinson is correct that certain kinds of aestheticization can be dangerous; the garden party's lavish atmosphere is often described in aesthetic terms, and its nature as a distraction from life seems to be the primary source of the guests' enjoyment of it. Therefore, translating a similar effect to Laura's aestheticization of the body is not unreasonable. However, it remains unclear what exactly Laura finds "marvellous" about the experience ("TGP" 210). If, as Atkinson suggests, it is Laura's ability to detach herself from the tangible presence of class differences, why does she read the source of Scott's happiness as being separated from commodities? Indeed, asking to "forgive my hat" shows that Laura is still conscious of her class and the symbolic representations of it following the epiphany. The aestheticization Laura undertakes envisions the happiness of a man whose class-based persecution has ended. As Shaup suggests, "When she adopts an aestheticist perspective, Laura carves out a space for a critique of the colonial class system" (Shaup 227).

However, Laura's criticism is not adopted with conviction. Like Elizabeth in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Laura is still susceptible to the influence of her class role and the attempts of her family to conform her to its shape. The story does not end at the Scott household, but instead with Laura's reunion with her brother, reminding the reader that Laura has not been severed from her family but for a short time. As mentioned earlier, the closing line "*isn't it, darling?*" employs overemphasized vernacular to communicate Laura's return to the world of privilege, where she is susceptible to the comfort of commodities and the stripping of emotion and idiosyncrasy from language. Whether Laura's individuality is enough to overcome the steep odds against her is ultimately ambiguous. However, unlike some critics, I do not think this ambiguity leans strongly in favor of a pessimistic reading. William Atkinson argues that "if Laura returns to her mother's sphere without demur, then Mrs. Sheridan will have succeeded in integrating her daughter into her own social caste," but does Laura not waver when she becomes self-conscious of her hat and its symbolic meaning (Atkinson 59-60)? Laura's encounter with Scott's body is clearly not a moment of sudden, uncompromised clarity, but it equally is not entirely invaluable, as Atkinson suggests. Laura's individuality, intelligence, and artistic temperament provide enough evidence to make a more progressive reading at least plausible.

Though artistry is decidedly not tied to class empathy, women artists in particular seemed to express a greater predilection towards empathy because of their subversive image, and I do not think Laura diverging in both empathy and artistic temperament is coincidental. Indeed, the modern female artist can be understood as a subcategory of the New Woman, sacrificing marriage and economic stability in the pursuit of their ambitions and self-actualization. Thus, the active sacrifice of privilege these women undergo places them in a subjugated social position that may galvanize them to empathize with other marginalized groups. While we do not know

what kind of adult Laura develops into, one can plausibly forecast Laura as a New Woman given her age, self-consciousness, and artistic inclinations. Laura may become similar to Lily Briscoe in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, a female painter who repeatedly contends with the pressure to marry and the devaluation of women as artists, ultimately coming to relative peace with these doubts by completing her artistic vision. While speculation of this kind may not seem particularly constructive, I think Mansfield invites the reader to ponder Laura's life path given the story draws from the *Bildungsroman* structure and, particularly, the inclusion of an epiphany, even if this epiphany is limited in its efficacy.

Ultimately, what is the common tie between Laura and young Clarissa, Laura and Elizabeth, or Laura and Mansfield? Is it simply that, as women, occupying an unprivileged position in society arouses empathy? Both *Mrs. Dalloway* and "The Garden Party" tease at a more widespread class empathy from privileged women but are pessimistic about its feasibility in the current social structure. If one reads characters like Laura and Elizabeth as taking steps forward, they are certainly not portrayed as being in the majority of their group. Any optimism from either Woolf or Mansfield is guarded, both knowing the ability of social inequality to survive periods of ostensible change. "The Garden Party" and *Mrs. Dalloway* both indicate that class empathy is discouraged in the social development of young women, and any tendency towards it is snuffed out by their peers because women are not expected to engage in class issues, save through performative charity acts and the like. Though politically motivated, both texts' ideologies are still grounded in reality; the current social structure prevails, and one can only deviate from this, not deconstruct it. The emergence of the New Woman as a social category in the modern period does improve the odds of this empathy persisting, as it offers women a role that doesn't strip them of their individuality. However, in exchange, they must give up security

and status, a compromise that disincentivizes this route for most. While there is reason to be optimistic about Laura's future, larger social trends are a different story, and the ultimate outcome of Modern Era class divisions is imagined in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Chapter 3: Which is My England?

As is true with any of Lawrence's novels, criticism of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is divided and sometimes incendiary. He seems to invite it, after all; his books are littered with contradictions, caught somewhere between feminism and misogyny, anarchy and order, individualism and socialism. Thankfully, the aspect of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that has the most critical consensus is its disapproval of the current class structure and its criticisms of industrialized capitalism, though even this results in vastly different conclusions (e.g. Carol Siegel's notion that Lawrence wants to replace the current class hierarchy with one that favors people like him, which I think is more rooted in his radical image than the contents of his novels (298)). Thus, the aim of this chapter is not to advocate for Lawrence's political views, nor is it to favor his portrayal of class over Woolf's or Mansfield's, all of which I find equally thought-provoking. Instead, I wish to highlight the similarities I see in all three authors' interest in the class empathy of women and how they present it in their writing — specifically, through character perspective and identity construction. Though it will inevitably engage with Lawrence's opinions, the foundation of my argument is not what I think Lawrence was preaching in his texts, but rather what his texts say; after all, my arguments are about narrative, not philosophy. Ignoring Lawrence's presence is admittedly not an easy task — as Paul Dawson says, “The sense we get throughout the book is of never quite knowing which sentiments are more or less Connie's and which are more or less the narrator's” (182). Still, Connie is more than just a mouthpiece for Lawrence, and the complexity of her class attitudes outlined in this chapter is proof of this.

As I mentioned in the general introduction to this project, I find it odd that Modernism is so heavily associated with emotional disconnect.² I expect much of it is rooted in Modernist plastic arts; it is easy to read sentimental barrenness in Cézanne's card players and sitting women or in Bonnard's black-garbed streetwalkers. Equally, the attention paid to the painstaking craft of texts like *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* sometimes overshadows their social dimensions — the former seeks to crystallize human thought in language and its predominant topical concern, as Merve Emre recently argued in *The New Yorker*, is love (Emre 72). I would posit that, on the whole, emotion and interpersonal connection *define* a great deal of what is considered Modernist. After all, the anxiety of the age is most often that people are moving away from interpersonal intimacy, and one of its most prominent literary motifs, stream-of-consciousness, quite literally reveals the thoughts and emotions of characters. D.H. Lawrence is a stylistically and thematically unique voice in the period but maintains this emphasis, as arguably no contemporary of his is as deeply interested in interpersonal relationships.

Take *Women in Love*, a novel that is as much about the same-gender relationship between Birkin and Gerald as it is their marriages to Ursula and Gudrun. Lawrence's concern here is not only about the state of intimacy between men and women, but also the total suppression of tenderness and emotional expression in homosocial relationships. In one passage, Birkin looks at an old, handcrafted chair and reflects on the age of England the object was made in: "it had living thoughts to unfold even then, and pure happiness in unfolding them. And now, we can only fish among the rubbish-heaps for the remnants of their old expression. There is no production in us now, only sordid and foul mechanicalness" (*Women in Love* 347). Birkin implies a human ability to instill objects with a sense of non-monetary value through artisanal

² Alys Moody outlines this well in "Indifferent and Detached: Modernism and the Aesthetic Affect."

expression, that the chair is beautiful not only for its physical features but for the effort expended in its creation. The mechanized generation of the post-industrial age strips objects of this sentimental value, which also means their creators are not emotionally expressing themselves through work. As I will discuss at length in this chapter, Lawrence conveys the same sentiment in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as the workers take on the qualities of their work rather than the other way around. This inversion objectifies the human rather than humanizing the object, a process that benefits the owners of capital but destroys the proletariat workers.

Highlighting the dehumanization of the workers is essential to understanding how they are perceived by others. We see this at play in the difference between Connie Chatterley's attitude towards Oliver Mellors, who is not dehumanized, and the coal-miners of Tevershall. Mellors is the gamekeeper of Wragby and is also of a lower-class background, conveyed both through exposition and his distinctive dialect. Though Connie is initially put off "the excess of vernacular in his speech" (*LCL* 94), she discovers that Mellors is not only literate but well-read despite his upbringing. Connie learns that Mellors is capable of code-switching, a linguistic tactic used to respond to shifts in social context by altering one's dialect (*OED Online*). Though most commonly discussed in racial or ethnic contexts, code-switching is also employed by economically disadvantaged individuals to mask their class divergence when in a predominantly affluent environment. The intended effect, in the words of Raja Rao, is to "convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own," an idea that applies to divergence within languages as well as between (Rao 43). One example of Mellors employing this technique comes after having sex with Connie, when he monologues about money and modern men but finds Connie distracted, only "half listening" (*LCL* 220). Mellors resumes talking after a brief hiatus, but his dialect has changed: fewer words are shortened, his sentences are largely complete, and

the exclamation marks that litter the first section of his speech are gone. Though Connie believes “he was really talking to himself,” I believe Mellors code-switches to get her to listen (*LCL* 221). Mellors does not feel the need to code-switch around Connie all the time, but the fact that he does when he wants her to closely listen suggests that Connie is more responsive to language that mirrors her own.

Mellors’ ability to code-switch is one part of a larger set of attributes that differentiates him from the colliers in Connie’s eyes. For one, Mellors’ poverty is not as severe as the coal miners’. He lives in a cabin on Wragby land, a far more bucolic atmosphere than the bleak Tevershall. His work also primarily takes place in nature, the opposite of the heavily industrialized mines and factories of modern England. Connie also loves that Mellors is attuned to emotions, both his own and hers, which distinguishes him from her husband, Clifford, and the dejected workers in Tevershall. Though he differs in class status from the aristocratic men of old England, his spirit is decidedly old-fashioned. Like the chair-maker in *Women in Love*, Mellors’ work serves as an emotional outlet — not in the act of completing it, but in its setting. Lawrence equates nature with expression and industrialization with oppression; the former with old England and the latter with new England. We know Connie aligns herself with old England as well, a stance that has less to do with class status, as she thinks, and more with an aversion to modern capitalism (*LCL* 156). The old England was also socially stratified, but Connie wishes to resurrect the mythical authenticity of bygone days. In her mind, the poor were still poor, but the nature of their work was not psychologically overbearing and permitted genuine connections to others and to nature. Now, the lack of discernible humanity in her perception of the workers diminishes her inclination to empathize with them.

Surprisingly, the distinction between old and new England is first mentioned by Clifford when he talks about the forests of Wragby with Connie, saying: “we’ve preserved it. Except for us it would go ... it would be gone already, like the rest of the forest. One must preserve some of the old England!” (*LCL* 45). Here again, nature is equated with old England, but it is also still tied to class identity; the Chatterley family has maintained it (or rather has hired people to maintain it) to symbolically preserve the old England. However, as Clifford’s exploitation of the colliers worsens throughout the novel, the notion of old England detaches itself from him and moves into Mellors, suggesting attitude supersedes class status in its embodiment. The transition is seen symbolically when Clifford’s wheelchair breaks down while going up a hill: faced with a natural obstacle, Clifford refuses the help offered by Connie and Mellors and instead tries to force his chair to work, stubbornly trying to prove that the machine can succeed on its own. He ends up breaking it to the point that Mellors has to carry him and the chair up the hill, with Mellors nearly fainting from the effort. At this point in the novel, Clifford wants to rely entirely on mechanisms to function, expressing a distinctly masculine obstinacy and a complete departure from the association with old England. The contrast between old and new England is fully realized in this scene: the old England is Connie, Mellors, nature, and fellowship; the new England is Clifford, machines, and self-inflicted seclusion. This contrast could also be imagined in the difference between the chair from *Women in Love* and Clifford’s wheelchair. Though the chair does help Clifford, its necessity is not natural — Clifford sustained the injury fighting in World War I, being blown to bits by factory-made weapons.

Despite different upbringings, Connie and Mellors are aligned in their opposition to mechanical life, a position both reach through personal suffering at the hands of new English attitudes. Mellors experiences his trauma in his first marriage to Bertha, who brutalizes him

during sex and makes the act mechanical, lacking sensitivity and tenderness. The lack of intimacy in their marriage mirrors the disconnectedness of new England, and Mellors' passivity in intercourse dehumanizes him in a process analogous to the one the miners go through, although he is ultimately able to escape from his circumstances. Connie's youth, on the other hand, is considerably more pleasant, with even greater prosperity and privilege than Clarissa. She and her sister have what the narration deems "an aesthetically unconventional upbringing," their mother being a member of the socialist group known as the Fabian Society and their father allowing the women in his family above-average autonomy (*LCL* 8). Connie and Hilda are allowed to study abroad in their adolescence, where both women engage with philosophical and sociological discourse in Germany: "just as good as the men themselves; only better, since they were women" (*LCL* 8). As the preceding quote suggests, the two are well within the gender minority of their group, and Connie begins to explore her sexuality while in Dresden, though she deems it "a bit of an anti-climax" and inferior to the joy of open discussion (*LCL* 9). She is of a high enough social class (and a willing enough family) to have had an unconventional upbringing — she is outspoken, lives outside the influence of her parents for a time, and is sexually active. As such, she is not molded in the same form as the other young women in this thesis, whose upbringings are largely conventional for their class.

In the novel's present day, however, the excitement of Connie's younger years has abated and she is stuck in a deeply unsatisfying marriage with Clifford. This stems in part from Clifford being sexually mutilated by his war injuries, but Connie particularly detests his emotional frigidness and the intellectual pundits he spends his time with. Connie feels that her marriage is causing the deterioration of her health and beauty: "She was old, old at twenty-seven, with no gleam and sparkle in the flesh" (*LCL* 70) — it is the emotional barrenness of their marriage, and

not the sexual, that tortures her. The bigoted ostracism she receives from Clifford's circle augments her suffering; when she decides to speak after a long-winded conversation about women, she instantly notices their resentment at her discussion of sexuality. Because of her upbringing, Connie's expectations of life are different from most women. She has been told it is acceptable to speak her mind, argue with men, and consider issues deeply. As such, she is not content to appreciate the small pleasantries of being a housewife and becomes unbearably bored in her marriage because she is not granted autonomy. Her desire for self-expression is reflected in the design of Wragby itself: "Her room was the only gay, modern one in the house, the only spot in Wragby where her personality was at all revealed. Clifford had never seen it" (*LCL* 26). Not only is Connie prevented from expressing herself through domestic design, as Clarissa does, but Clifford seems to have no interest in her as a person whatsoever given that he has never been in her private space. In a pretty literal example of Woolf's "room of one's own" concept, we see the extent to which Connie's individuality is stifled in her private life.

Furthermore, Connie differs ideologically from Clifford and his circle. She refuses to embrace the cold intellectualism of post-war modern thought and instead takes a more humanist approach to philosophy. Connie believes that her difference from them is gendered, and there is no doubt that her status as a woman excludes her from participating in their discussions. However, there is more to her dislike than this. Following the passage in which she laments her rapidly aging body, the narration reveals that "in her bitterness burned a cold indignation against Clifford, and his writings and his talk: against all the men of his sort who defrauded a woman even of her own body" (*LCL* 71). She may in part be referring to the fact that Clifford is disabled and cannot satisfy her sexual needs. However, the inclusion of "all men of his sort" extends beyond physical impairment and also alludes to emotional neglect that resembles the

traditionally masculine ideal of detachment, equating his disability with a more widespread impairment of emotion (clearly, disability studies was not in his wheelhouse). In conventional terms, the dichotomy between Connie and Clifford is still gendered. Women are often associated with the body and men the soul dating back to early Christianity, as Eve was made from Adam's rib and Adam from God's image in Genesis. Lust, a sin of the flesh, is also most commonly associated with women in the literary tradition (Charney 181). Women are perceived as more emotional in the patriarchal imagination, while men are more rational and intellectual. Therefore, it makes sense for Connie's emotional needs to be tied to her body if Lawrence is working within this framework.

However, the presence of Mellors in the novel disrupts this contrast, as he is simultaneously emotional, intelligent, and traditionally masculine. What Connie suffers from is the modern rejection of masculine tenderness, an act that is based as much on class as it is on gender. It would not make sense for emotion to be attributed at the bottom of the gender hierarchy and the top of the class, so leisure-class culture is also associated with some degree of emotional detachment. Simply look to the *fin-de-siècle* trope of the *flâneur* for the embodiment of both the class and gender implications of objective observation. Deborah Parsons argues in *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* that *flânerie* declined in the later Modern Era because the *flâneur* no longer had control of his experience of urban life: "originally both observer and controller of the urban spectacle, as this becomes more and more diversified and fragmentary he withdraws from it, able to assign it coherence only from a panoramic, or detached and totalizing, vantage point and subjectivity" (33). If men are losing control of the urban sphere as it diversifies in class and gender (see Clarissa's acts of *flânerie* in *Mrs. Dalloway*), then control must be exerted elsewhere — hence, the turn towards more isolated and

intellectual masculinity. The opportunities afforded to the New Woman in urban life are exactly those that are revoked from Victorian women in country settings, as masculine domination returns to the private sphere after its brief sabbatical in the public.

Thus, Connie's repression at the hands of Clifford draws out her instinctual empathy. As a woman stuck in an oppressive and dehumanizing marriage, she can relate to the subversion the colliers face from the same man. In the not-so-voluntary adopted role of housewife, Connie loses autonomy and individuality in much the same way that the colliers do in their role as laborers, although Connie's circumstances are decidedly less dire than the miners'. Because her life is rich in commodities, her social role allows her to sometimes dissociate from her unhappiness, submerging her discontent similarly to what we have seen in *Mrs. Dalloway* and "The Garden Party." When playing the part of hostess, she adopts her social self and her interior self is momentarily repressed: "it was curious how everything disappeared from her consciousness while she played it" (*LCL* 121). Like flowers do for Clarissa or her mother's hat does for Laura, hosting distracts from sociopolitical concerns and offers Connie the opportunity to briefly disregard what grieves her and become someone else, like an actor in a play, or at least a coherent and unequivocal version of herself. Role-playing seems to distract Connie from both her class guilt and her miserable marriage, letting her escape her dissonant headspace.

Yet, as I mentioned, this suspension is ephemeral, and reminders of her troubled state inevitably reemerge. For one, Connie feels her class difference every time she interacts with those in less fortunate circumstances: she describes "The curious, false amiability with which the miners' wives met her overtures; the curiously offensive tinge of — Oh dear me! I *am* somebody now, with Lady Chatterley talking to me! ... which she always heard twanging in the women's half-fawning voices" (*LCL* 17). What Connie finds "curiously offensive" about this attitude is

both the presumption of aloofness and the wives' refusal to treat her normally, being falsely polite because they have to. Much like when Laura visits the Scott household, Connie's class difference is palpable and becomes the sole aspect of her identity that the wives pay mind to, preventing connection over anything they may have in common. A similar encounter occurs when she first meets Mellors' mother after bringing home Oliver's daughter. Class is on both women's minds for the entirety of the meeting; Mellors' mother is embarrassed to be seen "in my coarse apron, and a dirty face" and profusely thanks Connie for bringing home the girl, while Connie notes first about the old woman the "black smudge on her nose" and is "heartily relieved to get away from the contact" when she leaves (*LCL* 61-62). The use of the word "contact" is suggestive of how deeply Connie feels her difference from the old woman, as it is not anything personal about her that she dislikes — it is only the combination of two incompatible statuses that generates distress.

However she may try to ignore them, class differences inevitably hit Connie in the face — especially when she drives through the poor industrial community of Tevershall in what is undoubtedly the novel's most blatant engagement with industrial oppression. In a lengthy rumination on the exploitation of the colliers in the area, Connie expresses disgust at the deterioration of the community. In seemingly contrary terms, she disparages both the power-obsessed ruling class and the proletariat workers, men she terms "non-existent" (*LCL* 159) for their complete submersion into labor:

"When Connie saw the great lorries full of steel-workers from Sheffield, weird, distorted, smallish beings like men, off for an excursion to Matlock, her bowels fainted and she thought: Ah God, what has man done to man? What have the leaders of men been doing to their fellow men? They have reduced them to less than humanness" (*LCL* 153).

She seems to dislike the colliers in the same way that Clarissa dislikes Miss Kilman, discomforted by the dehumanizing effect of oppressive labor and self-aware of her privilege in avoiding these circumstances. It is clear that the circumstances Connie abhors are not the fault of the workers, which she is conscious of, but she cannot disconnect their environment from their person. They are the embodiment of the class hierarchy at its most oppressive, the cumulative effect of industrial contamination. She often unfavorably compares them to Mellors, who is still vividly alive despite his social class, but the environment of Tevershall seems to prevent this kind of willpower in the colliers. To Connie, they have become something inhuman, more like golems than men — “Fauna of the elements, carbon, iron, silicon: elementals. They had perhaps some of the weird, inhuman beauty of minerals, the lustre of coal” (*LCL* 159). In her mind, the miners are so closely tied to the resource they harvest that they adopt the physical attributes of minerals, although presumably not in a literal sense (it’s hard to imagine that men who work underground emit a “lustre”). Instead, this conflation is part of Connie’s attempt to dehumanize the workers so that her guilt is repressed, though it is unclear whether this is a conscious or unconscious effort.

However, both the setting and workers are still clearly human. The hyper-mechanical descriptions of the community accentuate its difference from the bucolic Wragby, once again emphasizing class difference. Dismal sentences like “The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of the gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling” are frequent in this section, as Lawrence attempts to strip the locale of any possible positive association (*LCL* 152). Even the few amenities the town formerly had offered only distractions from the meager living conditions: “a chapel or two and a shop or two and a little pub or two”

(*LCL* 154). The remedies these locations offer are religion, commodities, and alcohol, none of which assuage the structural inequities of the community. Beyond the recurrent associations of nature with freedom and industrialization with oppression, these descriptions outline the differences in opportunity presented to the leisure and labor classes. Lawrence refutes notions of meritocracy by creating an environment so oppressive that social mobility is virtually impossible. Connie's affection for Mellors would lead one to assume her to be sympathetic, but she seems unable to relate in any capacity to the lifeless workers. As a gamekeeper, Mellors' work retains some of the authenticity of old England that Connie puts on a pedestal. But, in the coal miners' complete dehumanization, they essentially become a formless mass of bodies that embody the physical ugliness of industrialization but lack the emotional attributes that draw empathy.

This section also reintroduces the dichotomy of old and new England, as Connie is torn between the affinity she has for the pre-industrial English aristocracy and the unavoidable presence of abject poverty in modern Tevershall. The old castles and grand houses of England's past remain in the town, but they are abandoned and have a somber air, standing "like ghosts" around the new, industrial community (*LCL* 155). Connie's affinity is clearly for the England of old and estates like the "huge and splendid" Chadwick Hall, but she knows that these days are gone and the homes only "create the illusion of a connexion with the Elizabethans," leading her to question: "England, my England! But which is *my* England?" (*LCL* 155-56). To lean into the past is to seek comfort in a time when her class was truly the ruling class of England and was fully disconnected from the poor both geographically and interactionally. However, Connie understands the escapist nature of nostalgia and feels it a disservice to ignore the horrific conditions the miners face, even if this England, the modern England, is disconcerting to her.

What emerges from this dissonance is the resentment she feels towards the colliers — not because of their class per se, but because their presence disrupts her ability to escape into sentimentality. It is precisely because she cannot help empathizing with them that she wishes they were gone. Like someone battling a lengthy illness, it is the persistent agony that both demands the empathy of others and makes it emotionally exhausting for them to continually provide. Connie's feelings may be selfish, but she also does not possess the power to rescue them from their circumstances or even to alleviate their sorrows in any consequential way. Thus, all their presence does for her is increase her feelings of class guilt, an attitude many of her equals share: "The gentry were departing to pleasanter places, where they could spend their money without having to see how it was made" (*LCL* 156). Georg Schwarzmann believes Connie's character is revolutionary because "Her rejection of Clifford and her decision for Mellors reveal a modern mind willing to sever the ties to a comfortable yet uncompassionate and obsolete social system" (93). However, this is only true in a limited sense; Connie does reject the class hierarchy, but this does not result in a profoundly different life for anyone but herself. Though risky and unconventional, her downward mobility is still a self-interested act and reveals little other than that she is not categorically opposed to interacting with the working class. She may be a blueprint for what Lawrence deems healthier class attitudes, but I cannot see her as the radical firebrand some make her out to be.

In my analysis of "The Garden Party," I posited that heartfelt empathy from an upper-class individual is often not received well even if it is genuine. Because the expected amount of class engagement is minimal for both groups, attempts to bridge the gap often seem performative, self-aggrandizing, and even mocking. Families like the Scotts seem to resent Laura's ability to freely enter their space and draw such attention in doing so, but there is also

cynicism at the idea of an upper-class person feeling bad about a labor-related death since they would never be in a similar situation. The same sentiments emerge in Connie's recollection of Squire Winter, a member of the landed gentry who remained in his estate as the community around it became increasingly impoverished. When walking her to his gate, he expresses visible discomfort in the presence of the colliers. According to Connie,

“The colliers were not *personally* hostile: not at all. But their spirit was cold, and shoving him out. And, deep down, there was a profound grudge. They ‘worked for him.’ And in their ugliness, they resented his elegant, well-groomed, well-bred existence. ‘Who’s he!’ It was the *difference* they resented” (*LCL* 158).

Like with Laura, it is Squire Winter's palpable air of wealth that the others scorn, a constant reminder of the advantages he was arbitrarily given in life. And, according to the narrator, “he believed they were right to resent the difference,” providing yet another example of a character who feels that their privilege is unfair but is unable to individually upend the larger societal forces at play: “he represented a system, and he would not be shoved out” (*LCL* 158). *Lady Chatterley's Lover* suggests that communities like Tevershall are not only class segregated because the upper-class flee as the poor move in; rather, the distaste is mutual, as even the aristocrats willing to stay are deeply loathed. At this point in the development of industrialization, the differences are irreconcilable barring systemic change.

This need for systemic change is seen in the novel's portrayal of another woman: Mrs. Bolton, Clifford's caretaker turned Oedipal lover whose lower-class background offers insight into how class divides people both vertically and laterally:

“She liked the colliers, whom she had nursed for so long; but she felt very superior to them. She felt almost upper class; and at the same time a resentment against the ruling

class smouldered in her. The masters! In a dispute between masters and men, she was always for the men. But when there was no question of contest, she was pining to be superior, to be one of the upper class. The upper class fascinated her, appealing to her peculiar English passion for superiority” (*LCL* 81).

Mrs. Bolton resents the ruling class but recognizes the undeniable advantage of membership in it, a sentiment similar to how Clarissa feels — privileged life may be superficial, but it is still better to be at the top. Mrs. Bolton’s desire is not to deconstruct the system, but rather to reorient herself within the existing hierarchy; this, I think, is why she is depicted unfavorably in such a class-conscious novel. However, in fairness, this is the attitude she has been taught to have. When people are reduced to class, social relations are inherently hierarchical and thus competitive. Connie expresses similar feelings about gender after she abandons her marriage: “she was free of the dominion of *other women*. Ah! That in itself was a relief, like being given another life” (*LCL* 253). What Connie feels is not a distaste towards femininity, but rather the competitive animosity generated by being at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The ability to bend social structure to one’s will offers a similar feeling of power to that of living outside of its influence. The narration reveals that Clifford enjoys educating Mrs. Bolton about how to act upper-class because it “[gives] him a sense of power” (*LCL* 99). As a member of the ruling class, Clifford possesses the power to elevate the status of those he chooses, exerting control over a system deeply entrenched within British society. Thus, their relationship is mutually beneficial: Clifford gains another outlet of control, and Mrs. Bolton gains access to knowledge that elevates her status. Even if one knows the class system to be unfair, as she clearly does, it is easier (though not easy) to uplift oneself individually than to disrupt the social order completely. As ideological as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* may be, Lawrence

seems to know that widespread social mobility is not very feasible. People like Connie and Mellors are exceptional, and people like Mrs. Bolton are the norm — not admirers of the system, but trapped within it; resigned to its existence. Take Connie's sister Hilda, a self-proclaimed socialist exposed to the same upbringing as Connie. When Connie tells her of her plan to run off with Mellors, Hilda is disgusted that she would abandon her class status: “I may be on [the workers'] side in a political crisis, but being on their side makes me know how impossible it is to mix one's life with theirs. Not out of snobbery, but just because the whole rhythm is different.’ / Hilda had lived among the real political intellectuals, so she was disastrously unanswerable” (LCL 241). Hilda differentiates entirely between empathy and interaction, and her statement that “the whole rhythm is different” echoes the mutual discomfort felt by Squire Winters and the miners of Tevershall. If Hilda is not even willing to accept someone from the working class as vivacious and learned as Mellors, then she is far from feeling a connection with the colliers. Connie's assertion that Hilda's life among intellectuals has affected her is surprising given her own social circle, but it points to an impressionability that Connie lacks because she despises her husband's friends.

Jae-Kyung Koh imagines this novel as a restorative treatise in his article “D.H. Lawrence's World Vision of Cultural Regeneration in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*,” an idea commonly attributed to Lawrence's novels (as I mentioned before, much of the critical attention surrounding *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is about the extent to which the narrative's politics are didactic). Koh concludes that “the love between Mellors and Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* represents Lawrence's recognition that there may be the possibility in postwar Britain of new kinds of relationships which will transcend class boundaries and which, ultimately, will be the basis of a revitalized social order” (204). I agree with the first half of this statement, but not the

second. For as much as Connie genuinely loves Mellors and sacrifices her social status to be with him, for as extensive as her class empathy seems to be, she is still extremely uncomfortable in the presence of people whose individuality has been erased by capitalism; who cannot meet her somewhere in the middle. Her unease is three-parted: the inhuman qualities of the workers disgust her, she senses their resentment towards her, and feels guilty about her place in the social order.

Lawrence advocates so strongly for individual expression because he sees dehumanization as an effective tool for erasing empathy. In the end, he, like Woolf and Mansfield, seems very restrained in his optimism that things will get better for the working class. In Mellors' closing letter to Connie, he writes: "If things go on as they are, there's nothing lies in the future but death and destruction, for these industrial masses" (*LCL* 301). There is no indication within the text itself that anything in England will get better, and the small hint of optimism in Mellors' closing line to Connie, "John Thomas says good-night to lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart," is about their relationship, not about broader structural issues (*LCL* 303). I think Koh knows this given how hesitantly he phrases the concluding argument ("there may be the possibility") of an otherwise excellent and steadfast article. If Lawrence does use the relationship between Mellors and Connie as a vision of cultural restoration, the hope comes from Connie's ability to act with agency, to take a stand against an oppressive system. Lawrence himself takes a similar approach: according to Raymond Williams, "he was deeply committed, all his life, to the idea of re-forming society. But his main energy went, and had to go, to the business of personal liberation from the system ... Mitigation of the physical discomforts, of the actual injustices, or of the sense of lost

opportunity, was no kind of liberation from the ‘base forcing of all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition’ (204).

However, if this change is to be rendered systemically, what needs to change are people’s attitudes, the ways they are *taught* to think about class — and, the change needs to occur within those who have the power to do something about it. In the world of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, of Clifford and the colliers, this change seems a long way away from happening.

Conclusion

The inability to provoke change, to act with agency at all, is the ultimate source of wealthy women's disconnect from class issues. Not only does their specific combination of class and gender identity discourage them from viewing the lower classes, but it also bars them from participating in the political processes that could improve the workers' circumstances. When Clarissa says she cares "not a bit" for the Armenians, she may not mean this in a literal sense (*MD* 120). Rather, she may be suggesting that she does not care because caring is futile: it does nothing to help the Armenians and only causes her unwanted stress. Though perhaps a nihilistic outlook, democracy generates apathy when the public feels that its voice is ignored, and the voices of women were not yet being heard on a national stage in the Modern Era. In all three texts, the central woman rejects patriarchal social control, whether in principle or through action. Clarissa feels a supernatural bond to Septimus Smith because they both face the harrowing imposition of proportion and conversion. Laura transgresses class boundaries and offers empathy to the poor family of a recently deceased worker despite her family's insistence that nothing needs to be done. Connie leaves her emotionally abusive marriage and embraces the self-actualization granted by tenderness in romance. Yet, they all fail to effectively assist the working class in a meaningful way, even if they want to.

I have proposed numerous sources of class division throughout this thesis: stigmatization of interaction, successful dehumanization of the working class, affluence-related guilt, and feelings of helplessness. However, all of these point to class identity and the othering of the working class. The very idea that one would view another as inherently different because of a difference in material possessions is strange, but money is so closely tied to all facets of modern life that it defines who we are and how we live our lives. It is also the reason that the actions of

an individual are futile in combating larger societal issues: they are only a member of their class, not the spokesperson of it. If Lawrence is to be believed, perhaps the best an individual can do is live outside of the system, enabling a better (or at least more authentic) life for oneself but failing to help anyone else along the way.

So, what is the answer? Should we simply not care about class issues because we can't do anything to fix them? I certainly hope that is not anyone's takeaway from this thesis, nor is it an idea I believe whatsoever. However, it does help answer my initial question of why the women in these stories, who otherwise possess a tendency towards empathy, seem to care only fleetingly about the suffering of the poor. Guilt is not a pleasant sensation and is even less so when one cannot do anything to stem its flow. Therefore, the easiest and most ataractic solution is to ignore it, to distract one's attention away from it. Clarissa and Connie employ this strategy, and, reading pessimistically, Laura will eventually adopt it when she learns that she is powerless to help people like the Scotts. From a subjugated position in society, it is difficult to elevate the status of one's own group and nigh impossible to do it for another. Privileged women of the interwar period were still women, and though they had gained the right to vote, their involvement in the political processes of England was still minimal.

My analysis of these texts shows the importance of elevating marginalized voices, of actualizing the instinct to empathize with others. These women face gender oppression but feel disconnected from other groups for all the reasons mentioned above. But, their characters reveal that this is not an inherent division, nor is it one that social hierarchies have effectively employed to the point that all empathy is erased. Obviously, women are not the only ones who feel for others, but their gender role in the Modern Era prevents them from using this empathy on a sociopolitical stage in the way a man could. Therefore, the realization of feminist ambitions not

only elevates the voices of women, but has the potential to intersect with class (and other) issues if women see the common forces keeping them all subjugated. Empowerment can be a strong source of hope, and the helplessness that the women of this thesis feel towards class issues may not be so pervasive had they been given a proper platform to share their perspective. For the authors who felt the same, they were able to find the platform of writing and share these sentiments in a way that both expresses the frustration of being denied political autonomy and proves why they needed it more than ever.

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Appendix

Classifications are taken from the National Readership Survey, which discriminates categories based on the occupation of the household's chief earner:

A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional
C2	Skilled manual workers
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

<https://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>