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Wells, Forster, Firbank, Lewis, Hu le , Compton-Burnett, Green: the modernist novel's e periments with narrative (, ,)

"So much life with (so to speak) so little living"[1] – thus Henr James disparages the fiction of H. G. Wells during a debate about the nature of the novel that helps to establish the canon of modern fiction. Whereas the canonical modernists – Conrad, Ford, Jo ce, Woolf, Lawrence – follow James in developing narrative and linguistic innovations to accommodate a newl scrupulous attention to epistemolog and ps cholog , the seven writers surve ed here generall spurn stream of consciousness, often appear indifferent to the e ploration of the ps che, and sometimes follow Wells in renouncing Jamesian formal unit . Thus E. M. Forster breaks with modernist practice in rel ing on a prominent, morali ing narrator, W ndham Lewis attacks his contemporaries' obsession with interiorit , and Wells and Aldous Hu le embrace a didacticism at odds with reigning protocols. Ronald Firbank, Iv Compton-Burnett, and Henr Green follow James in their attention to st le, but the depart from modernist orthodo in representing surfaces rather than depths. In voice, structure, st le, and characteri ation, however, a rebellious spirit in all these novelists challenges both inherited and emergent ideas of what a novel is and how a novel's prose can read.

H. G. Wells

The author of science fiction adventures, speculative utopias, and social satires, H. G. Wells has come – due in part to James's criticism – to represent precisel those values (materialism) and methods (didacticism) that modernism rejects. Resisting James's demand for a unif ing consciousness, Wells argues that such a focus leads to highl wrought but sterile "tales of nothingness"; the novel, he insists, is not a unified whole but rather "a discursive

thing," and the discursiveness that he champions offers an important alternative to Jamesian closure (Edel and Ra , Henry James, 249, 136). Wells begins his career writing "scientific romances," which initiate the modern science fiction tradition and spawn numerous adaptations in literature, film, and (famousl) radio. Developing the Victorian adventure genre of Haggard, Stevenson, and Kipling, Wells's tales e ploit popular scientific notions (vivisection, time travel, alien life) to give a veneer of realist credibilit and a frisson of futurist e citement to ancient motifs such as invisibilit or the island kingdom. Characteri ation is sketch , un-Jamesian, and subordinated to plot; the plots, equall un-Jamesian, reduce the protagonist to the brute conditions of survival. Chapters end with melodramatic discoveries, as in The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896): "Could it be ... I thought, that such a thing as the vivisection of men was possible? The question shot like lightning across a tumultuous sk ."[2] Frequentl a first-person (alwa s male) narrator travels to a new environment, confronts its m steries, gathers information, and pu les out conclusions. Yet initial conclusions can prove fault , allowing for reversals and recognitions, and implicitl championing a stead English empiricism.

For all their stock formulae, however, Wellsian adventures reveal surprising resemblances to the modernist te ts against which the are often contrasted, suggesting that the James/Wells debate poses a false choice. The techniques of the impressionism attributed to James, Conrad, and Ford are there in the earl Wells's use of narration:

> I heard something breathing, saw something crouched together close beside me. I held m breath, tr ing to see what it was. It began to move slowl , interminabl . Then something soft and warm and moist passed across m hand.
>
> All m muscles contracted. I snatched m hand awa . A cr of alarm began, and was stifled in m throat. (IDM, 191)

Onl later is this sensation identified as an animal's "licking kiss." This impressionist technique, which Ian Watt has named dela ed decoding, provides subjective and objective perspectives at once, rendering an event's impact on the senses before the focali ing character can cognitivel overcome its strangeness. Wells's impressionism even comes complete with modernist invocations of the limits of representation: "I am afraid I cannot conve the peculiar sensations of time travelling. The are e cessivel unpleasant."[3]

Darwinism is the greatest intellectual provocation for Wells's fantasies. In Dr. Moreau, Darwin's discover of human–animal kinship makes possible the transformation of beasts into men; in The War of the Worlds (1898),

environmental pressure has rendered the Martians smarter, stronger, and crueler than humans, who "must be to them at least as alien and as lowl as are the monke s and lemurs to us."[4] Indeed, the net cast b Darwinism in the *fi*n de siècle snares multiple social problems – about race, gender, class, se ualit – and Wells fuses questions about the origin of the species with the social concerns of nineteenth-centur utopianists. The evolution of the species in The Time Machine therefore reflects class struggle, as the subterranean, laboring Morlocks ascend at night to pre on their leisured, effete Eloi "masters." Similarl implicit is the presence of empire, saturated with racial an ieties: in The War of the Worlds, the Martian invasion is compared to the British conquest of Tasmania. Wells's visionar fantasies are thus disrupted b gothic nightmares, and his Victorian progressive ideals jostle against *fi*n de siècle fears of degeneration.

For the rest of his career Wells e ploits the discursive possibilities of fiction to advance his socio-political views. Those views are laid out comprehensivel in A Modern Utopia (1905), a fiction–philosoph h brid in which a beneficent world state has established female suffrage, near-universal education, racial equalit , minimum wages, vegetarianism, and electric train travel. Despite this utopia's liberalism, however, to maintain its health Wells envisions a government of oligarchs who recogni e, from their (mis)reading of Darwin, that "life is a conflict between superior and inferior t pes";[5] and although Wells scorns the use of Darwin to justif nationalism, patriotism, and racism, he proposes state-enforced eugenicist limits on the reproductive rights of the drunk, the irresponsible, and the insane.

While Wells's Utopia aims to solve social problems, his realist fiction of the Edwardian ears is content to e plore them. Ann Veronica (1909), for e ample, champions new roles for women through a oung heroine who defies her father in her pursuit of a scientific education, her suffragist activism, and a scandalous affair with a married teacher. Darwinism is adduced to support the naturalness of se ualit , and to promote a feminism at odds with the teetotaling, vegetarian, and se uall phobic spiritualism preached b Ann Veronica's friend Miss Miniver. In Ann Veronica, as in do ens of his other novels, fiction becomes Wells's vehicle for dramati ing an ambitious social reform grounded in scientific materialism.

E. M. Forster

In her canon-making essa "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924) Virginia Woolf denigrates Wells and other Edwardian "materialists" in favor of more "spiritual" Georgians of her own generation. One Georgian she praises is

E. M. Forster, who shares Woolf's ps chological interests and charts delicate fluctuations in the mental lives of his characters; his first novel, Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905), is a Jamesian tale of an ambassador sent to retrieve a love-struck Englishwoman from morall dangerous Ital . Yet Forster is hardl Woolf's model modernist. He inserts his own voice loudl into his narrative, refusing to withdraw in god-like Jo cean detachment behind the artwork. Like Wells in Tono-Bungay (1909) Forster revives the "condition-of-England" sub-genre, and he openl sides with Wells in the debate with James, arguing that "a rigid pattern" too often "shuts the doors on life."[6]

In his most famous novels, Howards End (1910) and A Passage to India (1924), Forster intertwines the lives of characters around resonant s mbols (such as the Marabar Caves in A Passage) while upending the Austenian marriage plot. In Howards End an engagement promised in the first pages dissolves, and the child born at the novel's end is illegitimate; in A Passage another engagement crumbles, and the bachelor Fielding pronounces marriage to be "absurd"[7] – though in a t pical Forsterian iron , he himself later marries. Forster himself scorns the "idiotic use of marriage as a finale" (AN 38), rejecting its heteronor-mativit along with its wooden conventionalit . And although readers complain about conventions in Forster's own plotting, his use of coincidence can highlight parallels or disparities between classes, races, or genders. Forster's focus is thus the search for human connection, forged across boundaries – of class and gender in Howards End, of nation and religion in A Passage. Yet while his novels advocate liberal humanist values, Forster modifies his liberalism with a quasi-Romantic recognition of what he calls "the unseen" or "Infinit ," embodied in both novels b a wise, aging, ultimatel beatified mother: Mrs. Wilco in Howards End, Mrs. Moore in A Passage. Even as he critiques Christianit , Forster remains unreconciled to Wellsian materialism.

In Howards End materialism is represented b ceaseless construction in London, b motorcars spewing smoke across the countr side, and b a pervasive flu "even in the hearts of men."[8] The novel ju taposes such materialism, associated with the capitalist and patriarchal Wilco famil , with a spiritualism based in culture, e pressed b the socialist, feminist Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen. Forster's s mpathies are with the Schlegels, but he concedes that their bohemian life requires capital accrued b empire, and he recogni es the condescension with which the confront the upward striving of the clerk Leonard Bast. And although the book's conclu-sion might seem like escapism – Margaret, now married to Henr Wilco , and Helen, now single mother to Leonard's child, inherit the countr house of the title – Forster's id ll cannot accommodate Leonard himself, who has been

killed for his se ual transgression. Thus, although the novel's epigraph, "onl connect," is Forster's most famous e pression of his ideals, connection remains more an injunction than an accomplishment.

A Passage to India, which centers on an Englishwoman's false charge of attempted rape against an Indian doctor, similarl stresses the comple ities of human relations, and is even more war than its predecessor of "spurious unit " (94). Whenever Forster's characters triumph over national or religious differences, the novelist tacks the other wa , revealing new conflicts and new points of view; as the doctor sa s, "Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing" (160). As Forster indicts the Wilco es' conservatism while remaining skeptical of the Schlegels' socialism in Howards End, so in A Passage he condemns the arrogance of the English without ideali ing the Indians. Indeed, the ever-widening perspectives in the novel include those of monke s, insects, and even stones, as Forster situates his ethnograph of Anglo-India within a deep time fathomed b nineteenth-centur geolog :

> In the da s of the prehistoric ocean the southern part of the peninsula alread e isted, and the high parts of Dravidia have been land since land began, and have seen on the one side the sinking of a continent that joined them to Africa, and on the other the upheaval of the Himala as from a sea. The are older than an thing in the world. (135)

Neither the star-ga ing Bloom of Ulysses' "Ithaca" nor the eon-leaping hero of Wells's Time Machine takes a more cosmic view.

Forster's idios ncratic narrative voice enables him to mi ironic skepticism with moral conviction. The narrator of Howards End is b turns pedantic, ironic, and l rical, and indulges in present-tense generali ations: "It is thus, if there is an rule, that we ought to die – neither as victim nor as fanatic, but as the seafarer who can greet with an equal e e the deep that he is entering, and the shore that he must leave" (107). The narrator assumes the first person, describes himself as male, and even rehearses an argument with his grocer about raisins. The narrator of A Passage is less earnest and intrusive, but he too makes e plicit signals to the reader and makes sweeping claims about English and Indians as social groups. This later voice, however, prefers to drop bits of wisdom in passing, or to promote its views through deadpan ironies. ("A i was led off weeping. Mr. McBr de was shocked at his downfall, but no Indian ever surprised him, because he had a theor about climatic ones" [184].) In both novels eccentricities of voice illustrate the continuing dialectic in Forster between earnestness and iron , between defending liberal values and recog- ni ing the incompleteness of those values.

W ndham Lewis

Forster might then connect the passion of Woolf and the prose of Wells, finding middle ground between Woolf's spiritualists and materialists. Yet Woolf's ver schema rests upon dichotomies – between essa and novel, content and form, matter and spirit – that circumscribe the wa the modernist novel is theori ed. So argues W ndham Lewis, who dismisses "the old battle of the Woolfs and Bennetts" as "a rather childish, that is to sa an over-simple, encounter."[9] Lewis denies that the Paterian-Jamesian tradition has an monopol on access to the soul, and asserts that Bloomsbur aesthetics have reduced the novel to a "salon scale" favored because it can "accommodate [the] not ver robust talents" of the writer-critics who deplo it (MWA 166, 167). Yet neither does Lewis endorse the methods of Wells and Bennett. In fact, Lewis's booster E ra Pound lauds Lewis's Tarr (1918) for dispensing with "the particular oleosities of the Wellsian genre,"[10] and Lewis himself mocks Wells's utopian imaginings.[11] For Lewis the ver terms of the James–Wells or Woolf–Bennett debate ignore the "vigor" of works such as Ulysses, and, implicitl , of his own fiction.

Consequentl , Lewis relishes combat with both bourgeois culture and the bohemian modernism that claims to oppose it. As a novelist, he works in what Northrop Fr e called the "low mimetic" and "ironic" modes, in which the characters are held in lower esteem than their narrators. Tarr mocks the would-be artists of the Parisian Left Bank; The Apes of God (1930) sends up the pretensions of Bloomsbur and the Sitwell salon; The Revenge for Love (1937) derides the radical chic of O ford-educated communists. As an editor, he attempts to set the terms for a British avant-garde b using his maga ine Blast (1914–1915) to denounce all rival cultural-artistic movements including naturalism, Impressionism, aestheticism, and Futurism. As a cultural critic, he lambasts the emergent modernist canon: James, Eliot, Stein, Proust, Jo ce, Woolf, Hemingwa , Faulkner – even Pound, his old partner in crime. Linking these figures to a Bergsonian "time-cult" that overvalues subjective e perience, Lewis advocates instead an aesthetic of the e e, e ternal rather than internal, classical rather than romantic, spatial rather than temporal, derived from his own e perience as a painter, and allied to the genre of satire.

The title character of Tarr la s out his author's anti-modernist modernism, claiming that one condition of art "is absence of soul, in the sentimental human sense."[12] He continues, rebuking Pater: "The lines and masses of the statue are its soul. No restless, quick flame-like ego is imagined for the inside of it. It has no inside" (300). Lewis b no means e punges the representation of thought;

Firbank, Compton-Burnett, and (sometimes) Green do that more thoroughl . His target is rather a narcissistic obsession with consciousness at the e pense of the realit principle. Hence Tarr repeatedl subjects its characters to contingencies, debunking their artistic ambitions and frustrating their efforts at asserting personal will. In The Revenge for Love champagne socialists can never sort out part line from authentic commitment, "bluff" from "belief," and characters appear less as "human persons" than "as big portentous wa - dolls, m steriousl doped with some impenetrable nonsense, out of a Caligari's drug-cabinet."[13] At the novel's end, the heroine's own personalit fractures, as she is torn between private, sentimental fantas , and the brutal realit she confronts in war-torn Spain. For Lewis, the internal life does not transcend the dead e ternalit of the real; instead, realit e poses interiorit as a mere hiding place.

Lewis's thinking and his aggression are entangled with his distinctive prose st le, which Pound praises as "volcanic" and "brimming with energ " (Literary Essays, 424, 425). In Hugh Kenner's words, Lewis creates a "Vorticist prose" that is "composed of phrases, not actions," one that emphasi es nouns and adjectives over verbs, like the block-print salvoes of Blast's Vorticist manifesto. (Kenner cites from "Enem of the Stars" [1914]: "The stars shone madl in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of pre .")[14] The vitalit of this st le persists throughout Lewis's work:

> "Speak, mujer."
>
> He thundered the "moo-hhhair!" in a shortwinded pant, as if the African aspirate was too much for his sedentar flesh and there was a shortage of wind in his paunch, e hausted b the calls made upon it b the hurtling jota.
>
> (RL 23)

If the clash of languages here intimates a political conflict between England and Spain, it also foregrounds the materialit of the signifier, and fractures words into letters and phonemes. Alliterative repetitions and stead accretions of phrases give the sentence a baroque artificialit that offers no l rical prettiness, nothing in the manner of the middle-brow "beaut -doctor-class" Lewis scorns (RL 143). In other places Lewis deplo s a grotesque metaphoricit , informed b his painter's e e: "His spine was not as straight as the spine of an honest man should be. A tell-tale crook made an arc at the top of it, on which his head hung – instead of standing up stoutl upon his shoulders, like a rooster upon a dunghill in the act of crowing" (RL 118). The energ of Lewis's Vorticist prose derives from a combination of diction, s nta , metaphor, and, not least, underl ing dramatic conflict, creating an electric tension; this

tension e ists equall on the macro-level of the novels, whether in the unceasing verbal sparring between or within characters, or its frequent eruption into actual violence.

Ronald Firbank

Ronald Firbank is as un-Jamesian as Wells or Lewis, though his writing shows little kinship with either Wells's sociological discourses or Lewis's linguistic violence. In Firbank's case, as E. M. Forster notes,[15] it is the lightness of his comic tone that pushes him to the margins of the canon, to the speciali ed tradition of the camp novel. Not that such a categori ation lacks merit; Firbank's short novels brim with queer se ualit , self-mocking pla with melodrama, and general delight in opulence and ritual (Catholicism and clothing are equall grist for his mill). Like Ma Beerbohm, Firbank makes cameos in his own fiction, and he revels in scatological and se ual innuendo. The language can be as baroque as Lewis's, though with a decidedl less orner tone: "[She] regard[ed] dreamil the sun's sinking disk, that was illuminating all the Western sk with incarnadine and flamingo-rose. Ominous in the falling dusk, the savannah rolled awa , its radiant hues effaced beneath a rapid tide of deepening shadow."[16]

Yet neither Firbank's camp indulgences nor his queer thematics mitigates his technical radicalism. Robert Kiernan calls his books "milestones in the effort of the twentieth-centur novel to free itself from nineteenth-centur realism," and the open possibilities in both composition and characteri ation.[17] Firbank's achievement in composition is, in the words of his disciple Evel n Waugh, to break "the chain of cause and effect" b splintering realist narrative into a collage of fragments which garner interest primaril as local bursts of humor, l ricism, or mood.[18] (The Waste Land, with its ju taposed fragments, its overheard voices, its parata es and e cisions, shares this achievement.) As for characteri ation, Firbank's lack of interest in plumbing interior depths produces an "objective" method that proves useful not onl to Waugh but also to Hu le , Green, Compton-Burnett, and Anthon Powell. Like Lewis, Firbank emplo s a poetics of surface – even if his affectionate caricatures differ tonall from Lewis's satiric assaults. The result is a thorough suspension of the moral; in Forster's words, Firbank's books "do not introduce the soul nor its attendant scener of Right and Wrong" (140). Firbank goes where Forster's didacticism never allows, brushing awa dut and wisdom to surround the reader with the pleasure of the te t.

Two techniques are notable in Firbank's achievement of this freedom. The first is a deconstruction of the conventions of the printed te t that derives from

Tristram Shandy. Footnotes, scraps of songs, foreign phrases, onomatopoeic spelling, e clamation points, and capital letters decorate Firbank's page. (In The Flower Beneath the Foot (1923), a nun's imprecation is rendered in s mbols appropriate to her office: "Maladetta ✠✠✠✠!" [89].) Dashes and ellipses compel the reader to collaborate in the author's naughtiness. When a valet opens a bottle of champagne:

> "What he calls a demi-brune, sir. In Naples we sa spumanti!"
> "To – with it."
> "Non e tanto amaro, sir; it's more sharp, as ou'd sa , than bitter . . ."
> ". . .. . .!!!!!!"
> And language unmonastic far into the night reigned supreme. (107)

Firbank also masters the arrangement of patches of comic dialogue, unattributed or logicall disconnected, so that the sound, in Alan Hollinghurst's phrase, "picked up as if b a roving microphone."[19] As Waugh writes: "from the fashionable chatter of his period, vapid and interminable . . . [he] plucked, like tin brilliant feathers from the breast of a bird, the particles of his design" (58). The writer becomes a stenographer, displa ing the verbal found objects of modernit for the reader's delectation.

Firbank's engagement with modernit is thus marked b both immersion and escape. He works with modern forms of discourse like gossip columns and modern milieu like nightclubs, and his characters pursue social advancement, sometimes desperatel , in tightl knit enclaves. Yet the absurdities of modern manners also represent an escape: the greater tides of histor with their wars and revolutions never wash the sea-coasts of his Bohemias. Firbank enjo s his characters' sensuous pleasures and recogni es their pain, but these feelings are tempered b the detachment of the collector looking for the brilliant fragment. Firbank therefore serves as a pioneer for homose ual writers not b a ps chological treatment of the struggles of ga love (as Forster attempts in Maurice [1971]), but through his use of iron , indifference, and parod , which suspend moralit to reveal desire in both confining and liberating forms. As Christopher Lane argues, "Firbank brings heterose ualit into relief as an elaborate construction" b "casting heterose ualit as an arduous social ritual that veers awa from the 'natural' Firbankian affection of each gender for its own."[20]

Firbank's management of feeling and form e tends the erotic into all manner of sublimated pleasures. For Hollinghurst, Firbank recogni es "that human behaviour is governed and given meaning b caprice, impulse and earning, whether erotic, aesthetic or m stical," while Brigid Broph links her

"defence" of his work to a defense of the novel itself, which has been vilified since Cervantes' da for its affinities with da dreaming and the masturbator .[21] Indeed, Firbank's books are full of reveries and da dreams (as well as the occasional masturbation joke); the pleasures of idle fantasies are the long-repressed pleasures of reading, released from Victorian notions of moral uplift or functional utilit . The political force in Firbank lies in his ver frivolit .

Aldous Hu le

Improbabl blending the influences of Firbank and Wells is Aldous Hu le . Hu le 's first novels, written in the 1920s and described as conversation novels or parlor satires, feature Firbankian e changes of dialogue among the idle and overeducated, arranged in counterpoint; in the 1930s, he undertakes Wellsian speculations that incorporate science fiction and utopian themes, while displa ing Wells's rejection of Jamesian unities. Ignoring Proust's dictum that an artwork with ideas in it is like an object with its price tag on, Hu le gains a reputation as a public intellectual, and later as a counter-culture guru. (His book advocating LSD, The Doors of Perception [1954], takes its title from Blake and gave Jim Morrison the name for his rock band.)

Although Lewis openl ridicules Hu le 's Point Counter Point (1928) for its "tone of vulgar complicit with the drearies of suburban librar -readers" (MWA 302), Hu le follows Lewis in satiri ing modernism itself, and he fills his works with mediocre artists who search for aesthetic principles in a modernit where the greatness of Shakespeare and Michelangelo is no longer attainable. A painter, L piatt, voices Hu le 's rejection of Bloomsbur 's (modernist) ideal of significant form:

> Life onl comes out of life, out of passion and feeling; it can't come out of theories. That's the stupidit of all this chatter about art for art's sake and the esthetic emotions and purel formal values.[22]

Instead L piatt advocates a reintegration of art and life, an art not for art's sake but for god's sake. Yet Hu le , refusing to spare his own mouthpiece, renders L piatt a talentless poseur whose own formulaic st le is best suited for Cin ano advertisements.

The failure of Hu le 's artists to find governing values is s mptomatic of a culture where the belief-s stems of religion and tradition are no longer tenable, but where modern substitutes (promiscuit , parties, intellectual talk) offer onl moral and se ual confusion. Antic Hay (1923) offers a stead

bu of chatter and rapid movement from scene to scene that formall replicates the mindless activit of 1920s' London. A familiar catalogue of entertainments and technological developments – "Cinemas, newspapers, maga ines, gramophones, football matches, wireless telephones" (31) – saturates the public sphere, and even Gumbril's tailor recogni es these amusements not as the liberating gifts of a new capitalist utopia, but as further restraints on the imprisoned modern subject: "take them or leave them if ou want to amuse ourself. The ordinar man can't leave them. He takes; and what's that but slaver ?" (31). This rejection of capitalist modernit takes center stage in the later science fiction and openl didactic writings.

Hu le 's most famous novel, Brave New World (1932), retains Hu le 's earlier novels of ideas in its critique of modernit , its incorporation of intellectual conversation, and its narrative scaffolding of an ill-fated romance. Yet it also inaugurates a new e ploration of genres that continues in After Many a Summer (1939), which weds the Holl wood novel to sci-fi speculation about evolution; and in Ape and Essence (1948), a post-nuclear d stopia written largel in the form of a screenpla . Like Forster's science fiction effort, "The Machine Stops" (1909), Brave New World is a rejoinder to Wells's utopian progressivism; as Jerome Meckier puts it, Hu le takes Wells's proposals about free love, social engineering, and world government "to an alarmingl successful and essentiall insane conclusion."[23] (Crome Yellow [1921] alread spoofs Wells as Mr. Scogan, a pompous elder intellectual who predicts the demise of the famil and forecasts a centrall planned societ [Meckier, Aldous Huxley, 176].) Because Brave New World's critique e tends to Soviet totalitarianism, the novel has gained outsi e prominence in American secondar school curricula; still, it remains, alongside Wells's oeuvre, a foundational te t for the d stopian sub-genre.

Brave New World gestures at modernist st le – an earl chapter moves several sub-plots along through a Firbankian collage of dialogue snippets – but it is unabashedl a novel of ideas. It presents a future in which humans are mass-produced in labs b an all-controlling world state; manipulated through eugenics and behaviorism to accede to the needs of societ ; raised communall rather than in families; kept in line through happiness drugs and mass entertainments; and prevented from falling in love through the normali ation of promiscuit . Yet this future feels like the 1930s: luggage is carried b negro porters, numbers are looked up in telephone books, and men invariabl initiate se and drive the hovercraft on dates. The stor pits a Lawrentian primitive, raised on an Indian reservation in New Me ico, against the modern d stopia he calls the brave new world. As Hu le 's fellow California émigré Theodor Adorno notes, the novel's prediction of the mass production of humans

works as a metaphor for the deadening sameness of modernit , a uniformit of thought that includes "the standardi ed consciousness of millions which revolves in the grooves cut b the communications industr ."[24] Yet Adorno also discerns that Hu le 's vision of rampant promiscuit "fails to distinguish between the liberation of se ualit and its debasement" (103), aligns the author with reactionar moralists, and condemns capitalism for satisf ing human needs rather than for failing to do so.

Fearing that the gains made b science and material progress will outstrip the human capacit to manage their implications, Hu le sei es on the fle ibilit of the novelistic form, its protean abilit to absorb all manner of prose genres, to address his social concerns. Like Wells before him, he fuses novel and essa to further a counter-strain of modernism that implicitl critici es the claims of autonomous form.

Iv Compton-Burnett

Iv Compton-Burnett e tends Firbank's innovations with dialogue in a different direction, retaining from the Jamesian tradition a structural severit and a cool observation of the oddities and ironies of human behavior. Her twent novels displa a striking consistenc of content, tone, and st le. Even the titles – which balance alliterative or parallel terms on either side of an "and" (Parents and Children, Elders and Betters, A Family and a Fortune, A God and His Gifts) – are so similar as to suggest a compulsive returning to the scene of some primal literar crime. Her focus is the landed gentr who interested Austen and George Eliot; her stories, usuall set in the late Victorian ears of the author's childhood, concern the passions, hatreds, jealousies, cruelties, deceptions, and occasional kindnesses of domestic life. The central source of cruelt is t picall a t rannical, miserl parent whose brutalit breeds alliances, conspiracies, and affairs among the weaker members of the household – children, wives, tutors, governesses, and omnipresent financiall dependent adult relations. While the s mmetr and patterning of Compton-Burnett's plots owe a debt to James, the also show a kinship to the middlebrow whodunits of her contemporar Agatha Christie, who similarl withholds crucial plot events until the necessar dramatic moment. Hence Compton-Burnett's stories hinge on revelations of dark secrets: incestuous affairs, illegitimate children, forged wills, secret elopements, murder, infanticide. Yet because the prevailing affect of the novels is blank and detached, these novels seem to skirt the melodramatic rather than to indulge it.

While her focus on rural, isolated families from the past suggests a reluctance to face modernit , Compton-Burnett is a sociall engaged satirist who eviscerates sentimental fictions about domesticit . Marriage often seems a refuge for the desperate and a source of the perpetuation of suffering. Even more than Forster she debunks the marriage plot; in A House and Its Head (1935) two female cousins (probabl lovers) speculate on "a feeling of escape in the spinster population," and burst into "fits of laughter" at the thought of marr ing the local rector.[25] The frequenc with which inheritance becomes a cause for hatred suggests a further critique of a patrilineal econom . Religion is shown to be a tool of oppression and a shelter for h pocrites.

As astonishing and unique as the narrative content of the novels is their technique. As in parts of Firbank, narration is reduced to a minimum; scenes consist of long e changes of dialogue. Even the plot is advanced through talk, and the reader ma learn of events onl when one character relates them to another. The characters are ph sicall described onl when first introduced, and then in a manner that can seem deliberatel perfunctor or parodic of realism. Meanwhile, the meton mic impulse of realism is virtuall non-e istent; characters can enter or e it, walk from home to church, or even die without narratorial acknowledgment. This almost e clusive reliance on dialogue banishes both Forsterian narratorial comment and Woolfian e position of the contents of the mind.

Compton-Burnett's dialogue itself appears st li ed and aphoristic because of the formal manners of the class she treats, the intelligence she grants her characters, and the disdain she displa s for the conventions of realism. She is not given to Firbank's illusion-shredding jokes, but her manner itself signals the inescapabilit of artifice, and her obedience to self-imposed rules implies the belief that master is revealed through limitation. Still, the author's enigmatic wit emerges in the wa that she bends these rules; when she dips beneath the surface of dialogue to reveal characters' thoughts, she keeps to the dialogue form:

> "Is that what ou are supposed to be doing, George?" said a voice that George took at first to be of divine origin, but recogni ed in a moment as of a more alarming source.
>
> "No. No, sir."
>
> "Then wh are ou doing it?"
>
> "Because I am so plainl fed, that the dining-room pudding was irresistible," said George, but onl in his heart.[26]

Because of this dialogic method, often the characters' speech is talk about talk itself. Characters question and parse each other's language, comment on each

other's words and silences, probe sub-te ts, dismantle figures of speech – and force the same kind of scrutin on the reader. Indeed, the come to resemble ordinar language philosophers as the anal e speech acts in their comple social conte ts. Meanings ramif , and language becomes a weapon and a shield in domestic battle. Consequentl , insides and depths can onl be provisionall surmised from the painstaking anal sis of surfaces:

> "Is that fire smoking?" said Horace Lamb.
> "Yes, it appears to be, m dear bo ."
> "I am not asking what it appears to be doing. I asked if it was smoking."
> "Appearances are not held to be a clue to the truth," said his cousin.
> "But we seem to have no other." (MM 3)

This opening encapsulates the problem of Compton-Burnett's fiction, in which appearances ma not indicate truth, et the remain the onl guide available.

The meticulous pursuit of meanings and truths behind words and surfaces ultimatel suggests a cruelt underl ing human relations, and, like Freud, Compton-Burnett suggests that the modernist ma be seen as a temporal refugee from a traumatic Victorian past. Fredrick Karl even compares Marcus Lamb's rebuke of his father in Manservant and Maidservant (1947) to Kafka's letter to his father:[27] "We are afraid of ou. You know we are . . . You did not let us have an thing; ou would not let us be ourselves. If it had not been for Mother, we would rather have been dead" (MM 233). Harsh words like these are spoken in novel after novel, since Compton-Burnett's unhapp families are all unhapp in e actl the same wa .

Henr Green

In his rigorous self-effacement, his reliance on evocative s mbols, and his foregrounding of st le, Henr Green continues the high modernist, Jamesian tradition. Yet he also generall presents characters from the outside rather than the inside, deplo ing free indirect discourse or interior monologue onl sporadicall ; late in his career he takes up novels in dialogue – Nothing (1950), Doting (1952) – in the manner of Compton-Burnett. Although his literar manner is quite different from that found in Wells's or Hu le 's novels of ideas, his works show a persistent interest in social questions, especiall those of class, and he even offers an unorthodo d stopia in Concluding (1948). In an idios ncratic wa Green thus reconciles the two sides of the James–Wells debate.

Green's work is notable both for its consistenc and its variet . Like Compton-Burnett, his titles follow a pattern: all are single words (if the reader supplies a h phen in Party Going); si of the nine are gerunds (if one includes the false gerund, Nothing). The consistenc in naming reflects a consistent practice – a stead attention to the nuances and peculiarities of human behavior. Yet Green also treats characters from across the social spectrum. Living (1929) focuses on workers in a Birmingham iron foundr , Party Going (1939) on wealth oung socialites, Caught (1943) on firemen during wartime, Loving (1945) on English servants in Ireland. This attention registers the social and economic realities of his time – whether through ironic contrasts in Party Going between bright oung things and their servants, or through ironic parallels in Living between upper- and lower-class stories of erotic rejection. Although both s mpath and satire creep into Green's fiction, for the most part he closel observes his characters' behavior with minimal moral judgment and an implicit valuing of the ordinar .

The language of Green's novels demonstrates a distinctive st le, or cluster of st les. In his earliest novels he omits articles and certain deictics ("He looked into grate which had pink paper fan in it");[28] his sentences use punctuation sparingl , presenting, as his admirer John Updike sa s, "bold phrases roped together b a slack and fle ible grammar."[29] This language sometimes fosters l ricism, but it also creates awkward disturbances that command the reader's attention. Like Gertrude Stein, he repeats words and phrases with minor variations in order to capture the rh thm of thought rather than its e act language: "So in his thinking he thought now Mr Dupret is d ing. He thought how he'd worked fifteen ears for Mr Dupret. 'And never a cross word between us.' He began now in his thinking" (LI 281). In Green's own apt description, his prose is "not quick as poetr but rather a gathering web of insinuations."[30] To this narratorial language, Green adds the spoken idioms of his characters, and he follows Dickens and the Jo ce of Ulysses' "C clops" in achieving a richness of image and implication through attention to local idiolects: "The 're like a pair of squirrels before the winter la in' in a store with our propert mum against their marriage if the ever find a parson to be joined in matrimon which I take leave to doubt" (LO 162).

Green professes that "the author must keep completel out of the picture,"[31] and his technique tends toward the dramatic. Scene and character take precedence over authorial or narratorial interpretation of events, and he even themati es his skepticism about knowing other minds, as if to justif his narrative practice: "no one can be sure the know what others are thinking an more than an one can sa where someone is when the are asleep" (PG

463). From time to time his narrator will point a moral, or acknowledge the created nature of his tales, et these interventions are so rare that the appear as deliberate idios ncrasies or blank jokes, co acknowledgments of the rela ation of technique.

Green's use of s mbols similarl teases rather than satisfies the reader's desire for meaning. On the first page of Party Going a woman finds a dead pigeon in a train station, washes it in the lavator , and wraps it in brown paper; wh , we never learn. Loving, set in an Irish castle, begins with, "Once upon a da ," ends with "happil ever after," and features a lost ring – but the reader must strain to read this work as a fair tale. As Green comments, "Life, after all, is one discrepanc after another" (AF 13). Hence unlike other e ponents of surface or scenic methods – Lewis, Firbank, Waugh, and (to a lesser e tent) Compton-Burnett – Green does not make his characters into t pes. His omission of e plicit motive works to deepen his characters' ps chological comple it , illustrating what Yeats sa s of Hamlet – that nothing has life e cept the incomplete. Green's characters are in addition often notable for a vital sensuousness, like that of Amabel of Party Going dr ing herself after a bath: "As she went over herself with her towel it was plain that she loved her own shape and skin. When she dried her breasts she wiped them with as much care as she would puppies after she had given them their bath, smiling all the time" (PG 480). In short, Green's self-effacement allows his cast of characters to emerge, vibrant in the colors of their varied settings. Thus while Forster rebukes Jamesian formalism for "shutting the doors on life," Green's own attention to technique does just the opposite. Like man other not-quite-canonical modernists, his narrative e periments open doors to what James himself calls not life but living.

Notes

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