The Coterie as Commodity

Huxley, Lawrence, Rhys, and the Business of Revenge

Sean Latham (Contributor Webpage)

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Abstract and Keywords
The continuing expansion of the mass media in the 20th century, and particularly the emergence of mass-mediated celebrity culture, meant that an ever-growing audience imagined they had access to even the most exclusive circles. Uniquely positioned to exploit this fraught tension between the public and the private, the roman à clef became an increasingly popular genre, catering to a market hungry for scandal and snobbery. This chapter focuses narrowly on two such coteries, one in England and the other in Paris. The first organized itself around the imposing figure of Lady Ottoline Morrell, who, despite her generosity, was frequently satirized in romans à clef by D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and others. Far from simpleminded acts of revenge, these works deliberately exploit the genre in order to escape the hermetic aestheticism of highbrow modernism and thus reap the considerable rewards of the wider literary marketplace. In expatriate Paris, Jean Rhys deployed the roman à clef in similarly strategic ways, using the masochistic protagonist in Quartet to attack Ford Madox Ford’s misogynistic bohemianism. Poised at the boundary between public and private, the roman à clef thrives at the intersection between gender, genre, modernism, and celebrity.

Keywords: modernism, roman à clef, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Jean Rhys, Ottoline Morrell, celebrity, revenge, Women in Love, feminism
The experiments Joyce and Lewis conducted at the interface between modernism, libel law, and the roman à clef were often extraordinary, but they were by no means unique. Narratives of all kinds throughout the early twentieth century began to put so much pressure on the news/novel divide that the publishing industry as a whole took notice. In the June 1931 issue of *The Bookman*, Hugh Ross Williamson devoted his monthly editorial column to the resurgent skepticism provoked by the roman à clef and the scandalous reading habits it cultivated. In a series of paragraphs with headings such as “Honest at a Discount” and “Drawing from Life,” he laments the increasing “affinity of history to fiction” as well as the wide popularity of a “modern school of historians who contrive to make [biography] more entertaining than the legitimate novel.”¹ He imagines ominous consequences for both the novel and history as each begins to blur into the other and thus surrender its own autonomous and unique claims to truth. “A great number of novels today,” he continues, “are of course romans à clef, and now that so many authors are also reviewers of each other’s work, this game has become a sort of family pastime.”² A magazine devoted precisely to the business of authorship and publishing, *The Bookman* was very much a part of this same family, and no matter how serious the editor’s concerns, his reviews and advertising columns were nonetheless filled with references to the sort of works he critiques.
In this same essay, in fact, he tackles one of the most famous cases of the day: the publication in 1930 of Somerset Maugham’s *Cakes and Ale*, a roman à clef that (p.125) seemed to lay bare the secret life and loves of Thomas Hardy. Maugham himself vehemently denied he had done any such thing, seeking, no doubt, to protect himself from a libel suit threatened by Hugh Walpole, who is savagely portrayed in the book as the manipulative opportunist Alroy Kear. The scandal, however, was well publicized and in 1931 Elinor Mordaunt (writing under the pseudonym “A. Riposte”) published a roman à clef of her own, entitled *Gin and Bitters*, which cast an equally caustic eye upon Maugham himself. Fearful of a libel suit herself, Mordaunt published the book in the United States, where William Soskin, writing for *The New York Evening Post*, pointed out the book’s “propagandist purpose.” After describing this expanding literary quarrel, *The Bookman* closes its editorial by lamenting the “astounding egoism” of writers: “An author’s assumption that the foibles of his own little coterie must be of surpassing interest to the great reading public is surely unwarranted. Had not they been told, what percentage of readers of either ‘Cakes and Ale’ or ‘Gin and Bitters’ would have suspected an ulterior motive? Surely in both cases it would have been better to have refrained from comment and left the family circle to its game.” Surprisingly, Williamson appears entirely resigned to a conception of literary creativity in which fiction is, in fact, largely derived from real events. He seeks only to suppress these presumably vulgar origins and thus hush up the roman à clef’s ambiguities by concealing them behind a shroud of authorial and critical silence.
As we have seen throughout *The Art of Scandal*, self-consciously experimental writers in the early twentieth century developed the roman à clef to forge new aesthetic and epistemological structures capable of reengaging their art with the public sphere. Readers themselves responded in often unexpected ways, helping revivify a genre the realist novel had supposedly suppressed. Both Williamson’s editorial, and the scandal that occasioned it, furthermore suggest just how acute the crisis provoked by the roman à clef’s resurgence had become. The grafting of fact onto fiction evident in the works of Wilde and Freud as well as in their reception had quickly expanded into a thoroughgoing critique of the realist novel and its institutions—a process we now associate with literary modernism. The pleasures of such scandalous innovation, however, have been partially defused not only by the Eliotic insistence on “impersonality,” but by the constitutive fiction that modernism is staked on a “great divide” between elite and mass culture. This essentially blunts the roman à clef’s power, channeling critical attention away from the news/novel divide and toward matters of style, difficulty, and symbolism. Yet Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* instructively insist that the autonomy of modernist cultural production has always been an illusion: the outgrowth of a marketplace complex and diverse enough to afford the author, at least, a sense of “purposelessness” and “anonymity.” The rise of what they call “the culture industry,” however, changes this formulation so that “what is new is not that [art] is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one; that art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods constitutes the charm of novelty.”

The early twentieth century, in other words, is largely defined not by an autonomy that was itself only a vestigial illusion of the marketplace, but by a more direct engagement between producers and consumers made possible by the aggressive growth of a public sphere that dismantled and replaced Williamson’s “family circle” of elite cultural producers. Ironically, as the marketplace for literary goods expanded exponentially in the early twentieth century, authors themselves increasingly lost that sense of “anonymity” Adorno and Horkheimer describe, finding themselves and their works entangled in a vast web of magazines, reviews, newspapers, and quarterlies, all of which sought to appeal to different segments of a highly differentiated reading public.
Ever since Bonnie Kime Scott’s 1990 book, *The Gender of Modernism*, we have been aware of the complexity of modernist production; her diagram linking the various authors to one another reveals with startling clarity the dense web of relationships connecting early twentieth century artists, writers, and publishers. What’s missing from this diagram—and indeed from most critical analyses of modernism itself—is the even more intricate web of relationships and interconnections between modernist producers and their immediate consumers. In a 1924 essay entitled “The Patron and Crocus,” Virginia Woolf, herself one of the densest points of intersection in Scott’s diagram, examines precisely this part of the modernist equation. “For whom should we write?” she asks. Resorting to the language of “patronage,” she notes that “the present supply of patrons is of unexampled and bewildering variety. There is the daily Press, the weekly Press, the monthly Press; the English public and the American public; the best-seller public and the worst-seller public; the highbrow public and the red-blood public; all now organized self-conscious entities capable through their various mouthpieces of making their needs known and their displeasure felt.” As owner with her husband Leonard of the increasingly successful Hogarth Press, Woolf knew exactly what she was talking about: by the early twentieth century the market for literary goods had become incredibly complex and she had proven adept at negotiating it. No longer governed by massive anthologies and three-volume novels circulated through lending libraries, this market became as highly fragmented as that for any other consumer good. Indeed, one way to think of modernism—as Woolf herself appears to suggest in this essay—is not as a shared set of aesthetic traits or thematic concerns, (p.127) but as merely one segment of a diversified cultural marketplace. In other words, we should think of modernism not only as a site of production, but also as a mode and method of consumption as well.
Woolf, in fact, goes wrong in the essay only when she turns suddenly away from this penetrating insight and falls back upon the phantom “patron,” a romanticized entity presumably capable of preserving genuine art in the face of mass culture. In doing so, she abruptly shifts her emphasis to the production side of the equation and then mystifies it, severing elite cultural goods from the mass-marketplace by appealing to the intimate connection between the producers and the consumers we now typically associate with modernism’s coterie cultures. Both real and imaginative spaces, these sites often function in histories of the period as aesthetic utopias turned jealously inward upon themselves in order to cultivate the early twentieth century’s greatest writers. This chapter will argue, however, that these coteries played a formative role in shaping what Aaron Jaffe provocatively calls the “modernist brand”: the fully commodified image of an elite culture that markets itself precisely as a site of anticommercial aesthetic values. After all, while physical spaces like Woolf’s Bloomsbury, Ottoline Morrell’s salon at Garsington Manor, the Left Bank of Paris, and the brownstones of Greenwich Village may have provided real points of contact for modernist producers, they also functioned as icons of imagined bohemian autonomy and sexual liberation. As such, they became lucrative profit centers for writers who regularly used the roman à clef in order to “sell out” their patrons to a diverse reading public eager both for the vicarious experiences and scandalous details of these salons. Inextricably embedded in the celebrity culture of modernity itself, these coteries and the romans à clef that flowed from them expose the active interface between elite production and mass consumption. In doing so, they simultaneously reveal the ways in which modernism, itself a constitutive part of Adorno and Horkheimer’s “culture industry,” aspires to the status of art and commodity simultaneously.
The widespread experimentation with the roman à clef in the early twentieth century and the genre’s own provocative infectiousness are essential to understanding the ways modernism can be productively reconfigured not as the far shore of a “great divide,” but as a carefully cultivated segment of the mass marketplace itself. The genre’s often incisive critique of modernist claims to aesthetic autonomy, however, can quickly wither over time as its scandalous connection to a particular place and time fades. A book like D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, for example, has generally been canonized as a work of high modernism, despite the fact that it contains in its pages a vengeful and rather easily recognized portrait of his onetime patron, Lady Ottoline Morrell. Similarly, Jean Rhys’s early works, *(p.128)* including *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, have, since their republication in the 1960s, been generally received as the autonomous novels of a forgotten woman writer rather than clever and lucrative acts of public reprisal against her former lover, Ford Madox Ford. For their contemporary audiences, however, such books provided an alluring glimpse into the celebrity culture of elite producers themselves, often succeeding in the marketplace precisely because they “sold out” the “family circle” and effectively transformed it into a cultural commodity. Elite producers, like Rhys and Lawrence, deployed the roman à clef’s ambiguities to critique the presumption of aesthetic autonomy so essential to coterie culture while simultaneously working out their own relationship to the literary marketplace. It allowed them to trade successfully on their insider knowledge while disavowing the calculated instrumentality of their texts. The roman à clef, therefore, became an aesthetic crucible in which formal experimentation could be alloyed to a profitable engagement with commercial culture.
Such innovative practices, however, have long been ignored or suppressed, not only by the more general critical dismissal of the roman à clef, but by a distinctly gendered set of tropes that transfer such obsessions with the marketplace onto the abject figures of women. As Susan Stanford Friedman argues, high modernism itself is characterized by a doubled representation of women. On the one hand, “WOMAN” served as a signifier of what Alice Jardine calls “epistemological crisis,” a crisis itself often structured, according to Rita Felski, around “her close association with consumerism and the marketplace.”

On the other hand, this symbolic presence is paired with “the active presence of women as innovative and important figures in the formation of modernist poetics and practice.” In using the roman à clef to rethink the modernist marketplace, this chapter will focus on the link between gender and genre as it plays out in two key spaces structured by the conflict between woman as symbol and women as subjects: Ottoline Morrell’s Garsington Manor and the bohemian Paris of Ford and Rhys. Morrell, as a self-styled patron of the arts, was instrumental in bringing together some of the most remarkable writers and thinkers of her generation; yet she was also the subject of blistering romans à clef written by men willing to sell her out for considerable social and economic profit. Jean Rhys’s tragic novels focused on disturbingly masochistic images of women surrendering to abuse by men; yet she skillfully deploys the conventions of the roman à clef precisely to avoid the devastation of her own heroines by profitably seeking revenge on her own patron and supporter, Ford Madox Ford. Both of these women continue to remain lodged between their historical identities (one as a patron and the other as an author) and their fictional images (as literary “lionhunter” and perpetual victim). These ambiguities, furthermore, are themselves signs of a doubling that extends through both genre and gender to become a constitutive element of modernism’s engagement with the mass marketplace.

Buying In, Selling Out: Ottoline Morrell
“I cannot describe Garsington,” Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary after visiting the country estate of Lady Ottoline Morrell in June 1923, though this did nothing to stop her from drawing a deft if devastating portrait of the place: “Thirty seven people to tea; a bunch of young men no bigger than asparagus; walking to & fro, round and round; compliments, attentions, & then this slippery mud—which is what interests me at the moment. A loathing overcomes me of human beings—their insincerity. Their vanity—A wearisome & rather defiling talk with Ott[oline Morrell] last night is the foundation of this complaint—and then the blend in one’s own mind of suavity and sweetness with contempt & bitterness. Her egotism is so great.” Morrell is a larger-than-life figure from the early twentieth century, a woman who penned only a few chapters of a memoir but whose name and image intersect with a dazzling array of artists, thinkers, and writers. Half-sister to the Duke of Portland, she was wealthy, eccentric, and deeply connected to the worlds of art and aristocracy. She and her husband were ardent pacifists and effective political activists who turned Garsington Manor into a haven for conscientious objectors during the First World War, providing them with relatively easy national service work (and often studio space as well) on the estate’s farms. The group of men and women drawn into her orbit arguably exceeded the luminosity even of Bloomsbury. They included Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, W. B. Yeats, Mark Gertler, Siegfried Sassoon, John Middleton Murry, and Katherine Mansfield, as well as those who moved on the edges like Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell, Maynard Keynes, and the Sitwell siblings. With the knowledge and presumably consent of her husband, Morrell carried on extensive love affairs with the bohemian painter Augustus John and the renowned philosopher Bertrand Russell. Her correspondence, housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin, runs to some thirty-four boxes and contains intimate letters from nearly every significant writer and artist of note during her life. Philip Morrell, her husband, was a regular Liberal candidate for Parliament, and Ottoline occasionally joined him on the hustings, despite the objections of her conservative family.
Garsington Manor, in short, should have survived in our cultural histories as an “institution of modernism” every bit as potent as Bloomsbury, Shakespeare and Company, or Gertrude Stein’s apartment at 27 Rue de Fleurus. Indeed, Woolf’s deeply ambivalent relationship with Morrell grew, in part, out of a competition between Bloomsbury and Garsington to become the center of British intellectual and aesthetic life after the war. What sets Morrell apart, however, is that the men and women who entered her coterie turned on her with startling regularity, selling out their friend and patron by retailing portraits of life at Garsington to a public eager for scandal and gossip. Painters, including Augustus John, Duncan Grant, and Simon Bussy, created striking yet often cruel portraits of her that they then featured prominently in exhibitions. Grant, for example, abandoned his typically warm Impressionist style of the period (evident, for example, in his portrait of Ka Cox) and instead fashioned a shocking caricature in a 1913 canvas suffused with a sickly green and black palette. He even attached a block of wood, collage style, to the already outsize chin, drawing further attention to it. While some later critics have tried to rehabilitate this piece as somewhat sympathetic, Morrell herself was clearly unhappy with its portrayal of her and refused to purchase it even for the modest fee Grant proposed. That same green color, furthermore, was picked up later by Simon Bussy, who after a visit to Garsington in 1918 produced a woodcut on which he based a later portrait. Bussy was a close friend of Grant’s, and his own portrait not only draws out the green background, but heightens the impression of a caricature by eliminating any sense of depth and matching a nose of now impossible dimensions to Morrell’s chin.
Had these portraits circulated privately among the closed social circles of London’s elite, they would remain mean-spirited curiosities akin to Woolf’s often cruel letters and diary entries. As portraits, however, they hung in public galleries and have long played a role in shaping popular perceptions of Morrell and Garsington. This became particularly apparent when Augustus John featured his portrait of Morrell at a major exhibition in 1920. This image too is a merciless rendering of her former patron and lover; as Michael Holroyd notes, its “eyes are rolled sideways in their sockets like those of a runaway horse and her mouth bared in a soundless scream.” Morrell dreaded the exhibition, and the press expressed a bemused sense of shock at the presumed outrage it represented. In a flippant interview with The Weekly Dispatch, John said that he had not wanted to be cruel “but it was the aspect he had been unfortunate enough to get.” Morrell herself saved a clipping from Everyman describing the portrait: “That curiously Elizabethan ‘Lady Ottoline Morrell’ is even more unpleasantly snake-like and snarling. It may puzzle one to imagine why society women should like to see themselves painted like this, even by Mr. John.” An even more sympathetic reviewer for The Star writes (in another clipping Morrell saved): “I have seen some of these women in the flesh, and can assure them—with whatever sympathy they deserve—that they are not so bad as they are painted. Lady Ottoline Morrell is something finer than this grotesque travesty of aristocratic, almost imbecile hauteur.” These are cruel images, made all the more so by the fact that Morrell had energetically promoted and supported the painters who created them. The images thus also contain—in addition to their artistic merits—an air of deliberate public revenge. The fact that the newspaper reviewers seemed to recoil from them and even reassured their readers that Morrell was not, in fact, a monster, suggests an excess of cruelty in these works that had nothing to do with formal experimentation.
These paintings, in fact, helped to produce and sustain the image of Morrell herself as a so-called “lionhunter”—a wealthy society hostess who gathered great figures around her in a naked bid to display her own social power. Such women have long been dismissed as inconsequential and (as Woolf writes of Morrell) egotistical figures who offer the pleasures of social engagement but also threaten to transform art and artists alike into social capital. Recent attempts to theorize the often gendered work of modernist cultural production have revealed the vital roles that women editors and publishers played in creating, marketing, and sustaining modernism. The lionhunters, however, continue to function as they did for the modernists themselves: easy targets for satire embodying a crass commercialism to which the artists themselves may be drawn but from which they must shelter their genius. Lois Cucullu argues that modernism stakes its own “expert” authority on the “conversion of the Victorian domestic sphere into an aesthetic sphere,” thus accruing to itself “responsibility for ensuring the quality of everyday life.” The writers and artists who participated in this appropriation became “cultural capitalists who used the marketplace to advance aesthetic innovations that carry with them new narratives of consciousness and identity.” Cucullu thus constructs a contest for authority between the Victorian matron and the modern artist, the latter using an evolving discourse of professionalism to accrue new kinds of power and authority. Such an account, however, neglects the lionhunters and their salons as sites where social power, professional authority, and the self-conscious commodification of the aesthetic sphere intersect in tantalizing and often contradictory ways. In these spaces the modernist producers often felt themselves to be fungible objects just as deliberately gathered and displayed (at lavish parties, on invitation cards, etc.) as an old painting or an antique chair. The lionhunters thus effectively focalize the intersection between art and the market while also putting intense pressure on the very concept of a professionalism that falters precisely to the degree the aesthetic sphere loses its claim to a self-regulating autonomy.
Lodged at the interface of art and commerce, the lionhunter has become an abject figure for the social and economic utility of aesthetics—an identification further heightened by a distinctly gendered discourse linking these women (as Cucullu implicitly does) either to an archaic Victorianism or to a profit-driven modernity. Such abjection, however, makes it difficult to explain why modernist writers themselves so insistently returned to these women, inserting often only lightly veiled images of them in their works. Morrell herself, perhaps the most accomplished and well-connected of lionhunters, appears in at least ten romans à clef in the 1920s, including D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (as Hermione Roddice); Aldous Huxley’s *Crome Yellow* (as Priscilla Wimbush), *Those Barren Leaves* (as Mrs. Aldwinkle) and *Point Counter Point* (as Mrs. Bidlake); Gilbert Cannan’s *Pugs and Peacocks* (as Lady Rusholme); Walter Turner’s *The Aesthetes* (as Lady Virginia Caraway); and Osbert Sitwell’s *Triple Fugue* (as Lady Septugesima Goodley). She and her husband Philip may also have served as models for Clarissa and Richard Dalloway in Woolf’s 1925 novel. Like those portraits by Grant, Bussy, and John, furthermore, these are almost all brutal satires that either pillory Morrell for her vanity or transform her into a grotesque threat to the nascent aesthetic consciousness of young—typically male—artists. As deliberate acts of revenge, these books appear to shatter any kind of pretense of aesthetic autonomy. After all, rather than professional productions staked on a romantic claim to creativity, they are instead deliberate bids for social and economic capital. Their authors sell out Morrell, turning on her with painful regularity to declare their independence from the world of cultural values she is made to represent while simultaneously capitalizing on the market for gossip about England’s wealthy, aristocratic families. By exploiting the roman à clef’s anarchic skepticism, however, these same writers conjure modernism’s most potent and persistent myth of radical autonomy—that alchemical formulation Pierre Bourdieu calls “interested disinterestedness.” The genre’s “conditional fictionality,” in other words, grants the author a plausible deniability so that when Morrell does protest that she has been treated unfairly in a work of fiction, the charge can be turned back upon her as further proof of the very egotism and “interestedness” the book satirizes.
Morrell’s correspondence is, in fact, filled with these kind of devious exchanges. Here, for example, is Virginia’s Woolf’s response to a letter from Philip Morrell claiming that he recognized himself in the character of Richard Dalloway:

One thing interests me very much—that you should think yourself the dullest man in the book. I wonder what extraordinary complex this springs from? ... There were originals for some of the people in Mrs. Dalloway: but (p.133) very far away—people I last saw 20 years ago & even then did not know well. These are the people I like to write about. But I’m so much interested by this revelation of what you think I think of you that perhaps one of these days I shall be tempted to break my rules and try to do you. But no—I couldn’t.27

Woolf cleverly turns the allegation that she has written a roman à clef back upon Morrell himself, suggesting that his own insensitivity as a reader—and presumably his own vanity as well—are far more revealing than anything in the novel.
This not-so-subtle tone of condescension is equally evident in a 1921 letter from Huxley to Morrell following the publication of *Crome Yellow*. Like Woolf, he too concedes that the book has some vague historical referents, but that it is otherwise entirely fictional: “I cannot understand how anyone could suppose that this little marionette performance of mine was the picture of a real milieu:—it so obviously isn’t.... My mistake ... was to have borrowed the stage setting from Garsington. I am sorry; but it never for a moment occurred to me that anyone would have so little in imagination—or perhaps so much—as to read into a comedy of ideas a portrait of the life of the place in which it is laid.” Like Woolf, he turns the charge that the book is a roman à clef back upon Morrell, indelicately suggesting that she, her friends, and even the book’s reviewers lack the proper “imagination” to understand that the text is entirely fiction. He then concludes by adopting the persona of a world-weary novelist desperate to withdraw into the very sort of autonomous space Garsington itself might have represented: “This incident is to me another proof of something I said in the book: we are all parallel straight lines determined only to meet at infinity. Real understanding is an impossibility. I write something which seems to me immediately and obviously comprehensible for what it is. You, running on your parallel, read into it meanings I never so much as dreamt of. Others, in their parallels, find other meanings and contemptuous portraits of people unknown to them. What is one to do or say?” The obfuscation here is remarkable, though by no means unique, and that final rhetorical question suggests that the beleaguered writer can only resign himself to the vulgarity of a mass reading public so desperate for scandal that they would transform his “comedy” into a roman à clef. Morrell herself, however, is placed in a delicate situation: by insisting on the book’s rather obvious references to her she would group herself with this mass public and thus be forced to acknowledge that Garsington had failed as a kind of haven for modern art. To “do or say” anything about the novel—by writing a letter to the reviewers or bringing a suit for libel—would be to acknowledge that she surrounded herself with “marionettes” and lived in the absurd world of Crome itself. Faced with such an impossible choice, Morrell remained silent.
Crome Yellow has now become a relatively obscure novel, in part because some of its comedy depends upon a reader’s ability to recognize it as an exposé of real people and their petty squabbles.\textsuperscript{30} Huxley, in his letter to Morrell, wrote that he found the experience of having even been suspected of writing a roman à clef so troubling that “Next time I write a puppet comedy of ideas I shall lay the scene a thousand mile away from England. That will, I hope, make impossible misunderstandings such as this.”\textsuperscript{31} He was, in a way, as good as his word, and his next novel, Those Barren Leaves, is set on the Italian coast, albeit on an expensive estate owned by a wealthy, aging Englishwoman named Lillian Aldwinkle who surrounds herself with artists, poets, and novelists. Like Morrell’s Garsington, the “palace of Vezza” is an imposing if entirely artificial invention. Imagining herself a true heiress to the Italian Renaissance, Mrs. Aldwinkle seeks, as the narrative satirically notes, to make the otherwise obscure mansion “re-become what it had never been.”\textsuperscript{32} This fantastic attempt at patronage, however, is shot through with an avaricious desire to transform not only the arts but all of Italy itself into a commodity: “With the palace Mrs. Aldwinkle has purchased vast domains unmentioned in the contract. She had bought, to begin with, the Cybo Malaspina [the aristocratic family who once owned the house] and their history…. The whole peninsula and everything it contained were her property and her secret. She had bought its arts, its music, its melodious language, its literature, its wine and cooking, the beauty of its women and the virility of its Fascists” (19). Fully reified and thus cut off from both its own history and even its surrounding landscape, the house is shot through with intersecting flows of social, economic, and cultural capital. For Huxley, it also becomes the ideal site to challenge the news/novel divide in an effort to secure his own autonomy.

Mrs. Aldwinkle is a clear narrative double for Morrell, who is consequently portrayed in this text as neither patron nor friend, but as a self-deluded woman who surrounds herself in the “Saloon of the Ancestors” with the busts and portraits of the ducal family who once owned the house (21). Imagining herself to be both their spiritual and even real heir; she dreams of impossible and entirely anachronistic gatherings that once drew Galileo, Boccaccio, Dante, and Aquinas to the same house. Huxley, furthermore, does very little to conceal the actual figure behind his ostensibly fictional portrait and
invites his readers to share in the gossipy dissection of a prominent social figure. Francis Chelifer, the apparent narrative double for Huxley himself, alludes directly to Morrell’s celebrity: “I have begun to talk of Mrs. Aldwinkle and you do not know who Mrs. Aldwinkle is. Nor did I for that matter…. I knew no more, then, than her name; who does not? Mrs. Aldwinkle the salonnière, the hostess, the giver of literary parties, and agape (p.135) of lions—is she not classical? A household word? A familiar quotation? Of course” (72). As a “lionhunter;” she represents the naked commodification of aesthetic culture, and she gathers around herself an absurd congeries of sycophants who mouth platitudes about art while constantly jockeying for money and fame. Indeed, her oldest friend in the text, Mr. Cardan, is a master of witty conversation who has accomplished nothing and freely shares his theory of the “parasite.”33 Traveling from great house to great house, he has few resources of his own and thus spends a good deal of the book attempting to marry a mentally ill woman to secure the modest fortune she has inherited. His plans, however, fail when she eats a piece of rotten fish and dies an excruciating death. The house is further stocked by equally absurd characters, including a Labour MP trying desperately to radicalize a bored aristocrat; Mrs. Aldwinkle’s niece, who is constantly being instructed by her aunt to fall in love and then break off the affairs; a best-selling woman novelist who pursues an affair with another guest so that she can transform it into material for a new book; and finally Chelifer himself, a modest poet who has happily taken a job as editor of the Rabbit Fancier’s Gazette. Far from an intellectual hothouse or inspiring salon, in other words, the palace of Vezza is a “marionette performance” like Crome Yellow in which all the characters—lightly concealed behind with the roman à clef’s “conditional fictionality”—try to turn their access to Mrs. Aldwinkle’s famed coterie to their own social and economic advantage.
Like much of Huxley's early work, the satire in this novel is by turns gentle and biting, yet it is significantly leavened by long sections of drawing-room dialogue that do little to advance the plot or add psychological depth to the characters. The text's assault on Mrs. Aldwinkle, however, is unrelenting, and Huxley seems to take a sadistic pleasure in exposing her inanity while at the same time gesturing constantly to Morrell herself. Embodying the genre’s obsessive interest in the finest and thus most revealing details, the character manically attempts to root out and then exhibit the most intimate details of her friends’ lives. “Perpetually haunted by the fear that she was missing something,” Mrs. Aldwinkle “didn’t want her guests to lead independent existences out of her sight” (17). This desire, furthermore, remains unsated even at the book’s end when, as the palace empties, she feels abandoned and depressed: “Mournfully she looked back over her life. Everybody, everything had always slipped away from her. She had always missed all the really important, exciting things; they had invariably happened, somehow, just round the corner, out of her sight.... Why had Cardan brought that horrible imbecile creature to die in front of her like that?” (286) This callous and solipsistic meditation on life and death suggests, on the one hand, that Mrs. Aldwinkle’s acquisition of the palace of Vezzia was itself a failure because she ultimately could not purchase the friendship and allegiance she desires. As her guests leave, therefore, she confronts the emptiness of her salon and its crass connection to the brutal pursuit of capital, here gruesomely symbolized by the death of Mr. Cardan’s would-be bride. On the other hand, this final image of the abandoned Mrs. Aldwinkle also reminds the knowing reader of Morrell’s own sense of betrayal, symbolized not simply by the departure of the artists she once sheltered but by their campaigns against her in print and paint.
The Coterie as Commodity

The text actually alludes regularly to those portraits by John and others. When Mrs. Aldwinkle first appears, she is, we are told, “an impressionist; it was the effect at a distance, the grand theatrical flourish that interested her” (16). This, in addition to the fact that she is described as a kind of collage, “built up of sections from different people,” alludes to the Grant painting, a gesture heightened by the fact that she is constantly clad in green. Furthermore, we later discover that she imagines herself in these same terms: “She saw herself ... looking like one of those wonderfully romantic figures who, in the paintings of Augustus John, stands poised in a meditative and passionate ecstasy against a cosmic background. She saw herself—a John down even to her flame-coloured tunic and emerald-green parasol. And at her feet, like Shelley, like Leander washed up on the sands of Abydos, lay the young poet, pale, naked and dead” (150). The “poet” here is Chelifer, who had been struck accidentally by Mrs. Aldwinkle’s boat while he was swimming in the bay. The scene Huxley draws clearly alludes not only to that infamous John portrait of Morrell (which cast her as anything but a romantic figure) but to the clear threat so self-obsessed a lionhunter presents to the casually brutalized artist.
In *Those Barren Leaves*, Huxley manipulates the roman à clef’s generic codes to critique not only Morrell herself, but the full commodification of aesthetic culture and the consequent collapse of literary patronage as an ideal. The book actually contains two meta-fictional surrogates for Huxley himself: Mary Thirplow, the best-selling novelist, and Francis Chelifer, the poet resigned to editing a magazine on rabbit care. Throughout the course of the novel, these two characters are pitted against one another as satiric embodiments of high and mass culture facing off across the “great divide.” Like Mrs. Aldwinkle, Miss Thirplow treats the palace of Vezzia as a marketplace for symbolic capital where she trades on her fame while seeking out material for her latest book—itself a roman à clef. Her identity is highly theatrical and throughout the text she constantly changes her appearance, manner, and beliefs to suit any given situation and thus effect the kind of artificial intimacy that lets her pry into the secrets of others. Early on, for example, she appears as a worldly and sophisticated writer, entirely at home amidst the splendor of the Italian villa. When the handsome yet jaded Calamy appears, however, she begins a sudden and comic transformation into a meek woman writer utterly unconcerned with social advancement or professional success. Here she is during their first encounter, frantically stripping off her ornate jewelry while decrying the vanity of the very salon they both inhabit: “The inanity of the lion hunters. The roaring of the lions!” It was unnecessary to do anything with her hands now; she had dropped them into her lap and took the opportunity to rid herself of the scarab and brilliants. And like the conjurer who makes patter to divert attention from the workings of his trick, she leaned forward and began to talk very rapidly and earnestly…. “What rot the lions do roar! I suppose it’s awfully innocent of me; but I always imagined that celebrated people must be more interesting than other people. They’re not!” (12–13). As this entirely affected performance continues, Miss Thirplow desperately stashes her rings and bracelets in the couch cushions while insisting on her own “genuineness” and expressing a fear “of losing my obscurity” (13). She laments both the absurdity of celebrity and expresses a profound relief that Calamy himself is so modest rather than “one of those people in the Sketch” (14).
This absurd critique of celebrity culture, however, is itself merely a ruse designed to entangle Calamy in an affair that might form the core of her next book. As their romance grows, she constantly experiments with her own personality in order to evoke varying reactions from her lover. These she records in a “secret note-book” from which she draws the plot and dialogue of her novels. This is, of course, a clear meta-fictional reference to *Those Barren Leaves*, itself the product of just such secret jottings that Huxley could often be seen taking down in Garsington’s drawing room. Even this diary, furthermore, is itself only a partial and not entirely honest record of her thoughts, since she “was always apprehensive that someone might find her secret note-book and read it” (217). As the author of a roman à clef, she is well aware of the power and profit of privacy, and is thus concerned that her most intimate thoughts might be transformed into profitable commodities. Even when her affair with Calamy is passionately consummated, her thoughts turn immediately to the rewards she can reap from the experience: “[She] couldn’t help reflecting that there was, in all this, the stuff of a very deep digression in one of her novels. ‘This thoughtful young writer …’ would be quoted from the reviewers on the dust-cover of her next book” (283, ellipsis in original). When the affair finally concludes near the end of the novel, so too does Miss Thirplow’s draft of her next best-seller: “She shut the book and put the cap on her fountain pen, feeling that she had done a good evening’s work. Calamy was now safely laid down in pickle, waiting to be consumed whenever she should be short of fictional provisions” (293). The lady novelist here is as brutally satirized as the lion-hunting Miss Aldwinkle. (p.138) Huxley condemns both women for their close connection to a mass-mediated marketplace in which authenticity and art succumb to the naked manipulation of economic and symbolic capital.

These satiric portraits explicitly link women as the creators and brokers of modern aesthetic culture to a degraded marketplace, making them simultaneously the cause and symptom of a more general cultural decline. Miss Thirplow is deceptive and emotionally manipulative, while Miss Aldwinkle presides over a mock salon that barely conceals its endless pursuit of personal profit behind a snobbish façade of passion and “genuineness.” Posed against these forces is Francis Chelifer, who seemingly represents the last redoubt of an
autonomous highbrow art. He first appears in a section of the text entitled “Fragments from the Autobiography of Francis Chelifer,” itself a counterpart to the suspect notebooks of Miss Thirplow. An aesthete and poet, he is resigned to the presumed decadence of a modern commercial culture that does not permit the “mental luxuries” afforded earlier writers (89). As editor of the *Rabbit Fancier’s Gazette*, he is, in fact, lodged at the very core of an insipid, profit-driven media culture in which even amateur rabbit breeders command a wider readership than lovers of poetry. Sitting in his Fleet Street office writing these “fragments,” he accedes to a dreary modernity: “An inveterate smell of printer’s ink haunts the air. From the basement comes up the thudding and clanking of the presses; they are turning out the weekly two hundred thousand copies of the ‘Woman’s Fiction Budget.’ We are at the heart, here, of our human universe. Come, then, let us frankly admit that we are citizens of this mean city, make the worst of it resolutely and not try to escape” (78). The connection between women and mass culture is again made clear, and Chelifer is entirely resigned to what Leah Price calls the “banalization of literacy.” He explicitly rejects the artificial autonomy promised by Miss Aldwinkle, ignoring her occasional invitations, and instead dedicates his “allegiance” to the proprietress of his seedy London boarding house: “Ah, those evenings at Lady Giblet’s—I never miss a single one if I can help it. The vulgarity, ignorance and stupidity of the hostess, the incredible second-rateness of her mangy lions—these are surely unique…. And the conversations one hears within those marble halls—nowhere, surely, are pretensions separated from justifying facts by a vaster gulf. Nowhere can you hear the ignorant, the illogical, the incapable of thought talking so glibly about things of which they have not the slightest understanding” (73). Posed explicitly (if satirically) against the palace of Vezzia, the boarding house reveals the impossibly empty pretensions of Miss Aldwinkle’s salon while simultaneously insulating Chelifer himself from even the illusion of a genuinely autonomous aesthetic space. The best, it seems, a modern poet can do is “make the worst” of things by seeking the security of ironic detachment.
This strategy collapses, however, when Chelifer takes a vacation to Italy and is nearly killed by Miss Aldwinkle’s boat. Pulled from the sea, he finds himself trapped in the very salon he sought to avoid. “You’re exactly the sort of person I want,” his hostess tells him when he recovers, transforming him almost immediately into a kind of commodity like her villa (140). For Chelifer, the house becomes a prison and he is almost literally forced to write poetry under Miss Aldwinkle’s supervision, all the while feeling that “there is no escape” (137). Unlike Miss Thirplow, who engages in a barely disguised economic exchange—in which she swaps her artistic aura for inside knowledge about her patron—Chelifer preserves an intense anxiety about his position. Lacking the ironic distance afforded by his embrace of London’s mass-mediated modernity, he finds himself at once seduced and terrified by the promise of patronage. Seeking to become his muse as well as his lover, Mrs. Aldwinkle sets up a writing desk for him in a romantic grotto where he falls under her acquisitive gaze: “every ten minutes or so she would come tip-toeing into his retreat, smiling, as she imagined, like a sybil, her finger on her lips, to lay beside his permanently virgin sheet of paper a bunch of late-flowering roses” (153). This caricature of Morrell is, of course, every bit as brutal as the portraits by John and Bussy, the attempt at patronage rendered an absurd farce: “Mrs. Aldwinkle had tried to take possession of Chelifer; she had tried to make him as much her property as the view, or Italian art. He became at once the best living poet; but it followed as a corollary that she was his only interpreter” (150). As the narrative progresses, her advances become increasingly aggressive and the woman herself more ridiculous as all the alleged sins of the marketplace are heaped upon her.
At the diegetic level, Huxley’s novel is exactly the same kind of wooden “marionette” theatre he constructs in *Crome Yellow*, albeit significantly lengthened by the sometimes pithy and sometimes dull philosophical abstractions most of the characters are made to parrot. Filled with dyspeptic satire, it pits two models of authorship against one another: the best-selling woman writer and the male poet resigned to obscurity and failure within a profit-driven modernity. Both are themselves critiqued throughout the book, deployed as part of an even more punishing attack on the patron who forces cultural producers into such absurd positions. What seems initially to be an idealistic refuge from the marketplace is instead its very apotheosis, as patronage of the arts gives way to the lionhunter’s ruthless pursuit of symbolic capital. Chelifer’s cool irony thus comes to provide the only apparent relief, allowing him to write his poetry to the rhythm of the printing presses turning out the *Woman’s Fiction Budget*. Aesthetic autonomy resides, the text seems to claim, precisely in the ability to elude art’s social and economic capitalization.

*(p.140)* This would be the case, at any rate, if *Those Barren Leaves* wasn’t itself a roman à clef. This book’s real interest, after all, lies less in its dull plan and wooden characters than in its manipulation of genre to disrupt its own facile critique of the cultural marketplace. When read explicitly as a roman à clef, the entire logic of the narrative is disrupted, since Huxley himself seems to resemble not Francis Chelifer but Mary Thirplow. His “marionette theatre” then becomes a clear attempt to trade profitably on his own access to one of England’s most exclusive salons. Like the best-selling novelist he skewers in the narrative, he too has laid his own friends “down in pickle.”
On the one hand, it is possible to treat this as simple hypocrisy, though it becomes difficult to understand why Huxley so ferociously attacks the very patron who helped him launch his career. Morrell herself certainly felt maligned by the book and brought her friendship and correspondence with its author to an abrupt close. On the other hand, by attending to Huxley’s manipulation of the roman à clef, we can see his own agonistic attempt to resolve the deep contradictions of modern authorship. Caught between the demands of art and the demands of profit, he chooses both: writing a novel lamenting the commercialization of aesthetics while simultaneously capitalizing on his access to Morrell to assure the book’s scandalous success. By incorporating the figure of his own patron and even a meta-fictional portrait of himself, however, he insists on the complete interdependence of mass and elite culture. Patronage offers no refuge from the mass market because it is merely one segment of that very marketplace that effectively mystifies itself in the language of highbrow art and elite consumption. Everyone in Those Barren Leaves is perpetually selling one another out and there finally is no refuge from the marketplace—no idealized realm like the palace of Vezza or the headquarters of the Rabbit Fancier’s Gazette where the arts are somehow purified of their inevitable connection to commerce. Even irony itself proves a facile self-delusion. As a roman à clef, the text does more than simply satirize a lionhunter or redeem the autonomous figure of the male modernist; instead, it also implicates Huxley, his reader, and his critics in a tangled web of capital exchanges. To succeed as a coterie writer, Huxley realizes, is not to escape the marketplace, but to be confined to only one narrow segment of it.

D. H. Lawrence: “Secondary Creativity”
In Huxley’s romans à clef, Ottoline Morrell symbolizes less the marketplace itself—which pervades the entire diegetic and extra-diegetic world of the text—than the author’s own seemingly contradictory relationship to its order and values. She thus bears a terrible burden, becoming the abject figure for the failure of aesthetic autonomy. This is true of almost every textual representation of Morrell and is nowhere more painfully evident than in D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*. Like *Ulysses*, its difficulties in the literary marketplace were legion, and were initially complicated by the fact that Lawrence broke the story of the Brangwen sisters into two lengthy texts. The first, of these, *The Rainbow*, appeared in 1915 but was almost immediately suppressed for obscenity. Lawrence completed work on the sequel late in 1916, preparing two typescripts that were circulated among publishers and close friends. The paper rationing and generally depressed book markets of the First World War, however, made it impossible to place the text and it languished over the next three years. Martin Secker, who eventually published the book in England, no doubt expressed the views of many publishers when he wrote to his silent partner, the wildly successful novelist Compton Mackenzie, “I feel instinctively that anything to do with D. H. is rather dangerous” and “I am not prepared to invest £1500 in a *cause célèbre* to entertain the world of letters.” Secker may also have been aware that the book risked not only the threat of legal action for obscenity—though it would eventually pass the censor without difficulty—but also the potentially even more financially damaging risk of a libel suit from Morrell, who is cruelly figured in the text as Hermione Roddice. Secker and other publishers were no doubt right to be wary about the text; despite Lawrence’s sometimes excessive defense of the book’s imaginative autonomy, it draws heavily on his experiences both at the edge of bohemian London and in Morrell’s salon at Garsington.
Lawrence first met Morrell in January 1915 and quickly became an intimate member of the inner circle, developing a passionate relationship with the woman he ecstatically addressed in a letter as “the priestess, the medium, the prophetess” who had become more than a mere “salon lady or lionhunter.” She (temporarily) embodied for him an almost sacred ideal of cultural autonomy far removed from the crass sensualism and commercialism of bohemian London: “It is rather splendid that you are a great lady. Don’t abrogate one jot or tittle of your high birth: it is too valuable in this commercial-minded, mean world: and it does stand as well for what you really are.” Lawrence, in other words, had fully vested himself in the stark oppositions governing the traditional conception of modernism as an aesthetic deliberately opposed to the alleged vulgarities of the marketplace. Following the suppression of The Rainbow, of course, he may have had little option but to embrace this conception of patronage, and it was compounded by his own desire to establish a utopian community “like the Boccaccio place where they told all the Decamerone.” Like many others, Lawrence and his wife Frieda stayed at Garsington, joining the various other pacifists and protestors who were offered shelter and support during the war. There he received the Morrells’ strong support and Ottoline’s husband twice raised questions about the prosecution of The Rainbow in the House of Commons. Lawrence also continued working during this time on the book that would eventually become Women in Love.
Garsington during this period was an exciting and vibrant place, packed with artists and intellectuals who shared an aversion to what seemed the pointless violence and destruction taking place across the Channel. There was, furthermore, a clear consciousness of place, a shared knowledge that Morrell had managed to assemble a salon where new and important work was being done. Partly in jest, Dora Carrington proposed in 1916 the creation of a newspaper entitled *The Garsington Chronicle* where those living on the estate could publish essays, poems, and pictures without fear of the censor. She drew up a fanciful prospectus, noting that anything libelous would be happily accepted and published anonymously.\(^{41}\) There is clear reference in this plan to Lawrence’s own trouble with official suppression and also an awareness that Garsington might be providing not only shelter from the world of politics but also source material for novels, poems, and plays. Indeed, at almost the same moment that Carrington urges the creation of an in-house gossip sheet, another of Morrell’s guests, the painter Dorothy Brett, writes to insist on the preservation of her privacy: “*Please don’t* show my letters to you to anyone. I should only be laughed at, because what is serious between two people is nearly always ridiculous to outsiders and although you and I understand each other and one’s relations to each other, outsiders don’t.”\(^{42}\) The consciousness of Garsington as a place, in other words, meant also a clear awareness of its value as a cultural commodity that could be retailed not only in the proposed *Garsington Chronicle*, but in the wider literary marketplace as well. Siegfried Sassoon, a guest at the estate while on leave in 1916, later wrote of his own sense that the house had become a piece of fungible capital and that Morrell “had yet to learn that the writers and artists whom she befriended were capable of proving ungrateful.”\(^{43}\) In that same year, in fact, the first of the Garsington romans à clef appeared: Gilbert Cannan’s *Mendel*, in which Morrell is well disguised but nevertheless visible as Mary Tutness. The intimacy of the salon had been breached, and there was an immediate rush to profit from insider knowledge. Even Brett herself, who had urged Morrell to protect her privacy, boasted just after the publication of *Mendel* that she had “bought some more paper and a darling tab book to write my Garsington memoirs in!!”\(^{44}\)
In Huxley’s romans à clef we have already seen how the modernist salon could be transformed into just a segment of the marketplace it presumes to escape. If anything, Huxley may have underestimated the powerful flows of social, cultural, \( \text{(p.143)} \) and economic capital moving through Garsington. With each new portrait and roman à clef, Morrell seemed to grow ever more absurd, her own striking idiosyncrasies nakedly marketed as open secrets to a scandal-hungry public. Lawrence’s portrait in *Women in Love*, however, is far more brutal than most, in part because he rejects Huxley’s satire and instead renders Morrell as the aggressive and even murderous Hermione Roddice, who is made to bear all the sins of a decadent world. She first appears in the book as a celebrity spectacle glimpsed at a wedding by the Brangwen sisters. The text, in fact, traces a fascinating narrative line as we are invited first to behold Hermione’s greatness then critique it, as if we were watching a parade of modern celebrities strut down the red carpet. Thus she “came along, with her head held up, balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feather, natural and grey. She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blanched face lifted up, not to see the world.”\(^45\) A carefully detailed description of Hermione’s clothes and appearance follows, framed in free indirect discourse so that although the narrative is related from a third-person perspective, we seem actually to be hovering within the consciousness of the sisters themselves as they observe this woman parade before them. The roman à clef’s distinctive aesthetic of detail then moves seamlessly from spectacle to mounting disgust: “She was impressive, in her lovely pale-yellow and brownish-rose, yet macabre, something repulsive. People were silent when she passed, impressed, roused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced” (62). This passage powerfully enacts the roman à clef’s anachric ambiguity, layering fiction and fact as we too are invited to jeer at the portrait of this larger-than-life woman even as we wonder about its accuracy.
This same ambiguity, furthermore, emerges within her own consciousness as the narrative takes an unusual and somewhat disorienting plunge into Hermione’s subjective experience of the event. She is, on the one hand, aware that “no one could put her down, no one could make mock of her, because she stood among the first, and those that were against her were below her, either in rank, or in wealth, or in high association of thought and progress and understanding” (63). Here, at any rate, the external appearance matches the internal experience of the event; Hermione genuinely does seem to be an almost idealized figure of autonomy completely cut off from the crass snobbery and admiration of the crowd. On the other hand, Lawrence simultaneously suggests that, like the fascinated observers, she too experiences a macabre repulsion at herself that she can neither describe nor understand: “Even walking up the path to the church, confident as she was that in every respect her appearance was complete and perfect, according to the first standards, yet she suffered a torture, under her confidence and pride, feeling herself (p.144) exposed to wounds and to mockery and to despite. She always felt vulnerable, vulnerable, there was always a secret chink in her armour. She did not know herself what it was. It was a lack of robust self” (63). Hermione’s problem appears to be her celebrity, her overinvestment in a public and marketable persona that has effectively mutilated some more authentic sense of self. In buying, as it were, her own public image, she has destroyed the otherwise authentic self her autonomy appears to shelter. She is then brutally exposed to the reader as little more than an empty carapace concealing “a deficiency of being within her” (64).
The text’s critique of Hermione as the representative of a fully and dangerously commodified world is further heightened by its equally aggressive (re)construction of Garsington as Breadalby. Like Huxley’s palace of Vezza, the house is transparently recognizable as the Morrells’ country estate; in the initial typescript a scene is even set beneath “an enormous, beautifully balanced ilex tree.” This was a signature feature at Garsington (Huxley’s own arboreal title, for example, also alludes to it) and Lawrence only struck it from the typescript at a relatively late date, likely in an attempt to guard against the threatened libel suit. Initially, the estate emerges as an idealized locale. The Brangwen sisters are delighted by an invitation Hermione issues to them and, again, in the free indirect discourse of the novel, both they and the narrator imagine “a magic circle drawn about the place, shutting out the present, enclosing the delightful, precious past, trees and deer and silence, like a dream” (139). This romantic image, however, is under constant pressure, as we gradually become aware that it too is riven by the very anxieties it otherwise appears to exclude. Birkin engages, for example, in an increasingly aggressive critique of the place where the talk has become “powerful and destructive” (146). Thus, when one of the guests, Joshua Malleson, interjects the clichéd observation that “knowledge is, of course, liberty,” Birkin waspishly responds, “in compressed tabloids,” emphasizing the mass-mediated nature of the platitude. Gudrun then imagines the distinguished sociologist as “a flat bottle, containing tabloids of compressed liberty” (141–42). Transformed from an intellectual giant into a bottle of patent medicine, he and Breadalby as a whole stand exposed—like Hermione at the wedding—as captives to their own allegedly inauthentic public image.
This lengthy chapter brings the book’s critique of coterie culture to an appallingly violent climax when we are later plunged into Hermione’s consciousness, watching her attain a “consummation of voluptuous ecstasy” as she bashes Birkin over the head with an ornamental paperweight (163). Aside from nearly killing him, the event proves epiphanic for Birkin, who is “shattered ... like a flask that is smashed to atoms” (164). Freed at last from the same carapace that he earlier (p.145) claimed surrounded Hermione, he finds a new sense of identity and staggers from the house into the “perfect cool loneliness, so lovely fresh and unexplored” of the countryside (165). Cut loose from Hermione and the anxieties about cultural capital she embodies, he can now begin to pursue the narrative of regeneration that consumes the rest of the book. Although even Birkin seems to confess the rightness of Hermione’s actions in striking him and thus essentially renewing his sense of self, as readers we are nevertheless horrified by the image of this woman so thwarted and self-obsessed that she seeks to murder her lover. Throughout Women in Love, she is a deadly serious threat to the artist’s potential freedom, offering him a false sense of autonomy made all the more treacherous by the self-delusions of those who believe they have escaped the deadening force of bourgeois art, society, and culture. As a celebrity lionhunter, in fact, she concentrates all of these forces in a single empty yet profoundly aggressive being who wants to make the world over in the image of her own hollowness.
Unlike *Crome Yellow*, *Those Barren Leaves*, and the raft of other Garsington novels published in the 1920s, *Women in Love* does not resort to satire. It maintains instead a resolute seriousness in both its portrait of Morrell and its condemnation of her world. Huxley’s deployment of the roman à clef as a “marionette theatre” may have been profoundly hurtful to his patron, but it nevertheless transformed her into an essentially comic figure—one among many, including even the author himself. Thus, the intersection of mass and elite marketplaces in these novels becomes a symptomatic element of their larger satirical aims. Like the modestly historicizing critique of the romance generated by the roman à clef in the eighteenth century, here the genre’s structural ambiguity allows Huxley to fold himself, his friends, and his book into a broadly comic analysis of the cultural marketplace. One can laugh at the portrait of Morrell with the same corrosive laughter Huxley invites us to direct at his narrative alter egos as well as at our own hypocritical ability to savor the pleasures of the roman à clef. Lawrence’s seriousness, however, which we now also largely associate with his stature as a canonical modernist writer, leads him to reject the interplay between diegetic and extra-diegetic narratives that Huxley deliberately courts. Insisting that we take Birkin’s flight from Hermione seriously and that we thus allow for the possibility of a genuine romantic utopia, he seeks to distance the text from its historical antecedents and thus suppresses its extra-diegetic pleasures. Thus, rather than a roman à clef derived from Lawrence’s own experiences, *Women in Love* suppresses its “conditional fictionality” in order to seek the imprimatur of an autonomous novel—a work of art that in both form and content offers a (hypocritical) alternative to the artificial worlds of Breadalby and Garsington.
In a slim 1927 Garsington roman à clef entitled *The Aesthetes*, W. J. Turner articulates a similar anxiety about autonomy and consumption. This now obscure text makes little effort to conceal its infectious ambiguities, and its cover features a delicate line drawing by John Mavrogordato of faceless yet well-dressed figures gathered in an elegant drawing room. Its cover, like its elliptical title, promises a taste of scandal, the blank faces openly hinting that these are real portraits that have been decorously masked. An ilex tree is even faintly visible through the window in the background, offering an even more pointed allusion to Morrell’s own coterie—at least for those with the knowledge to decipher the image (figure 6.1). The book’s
narrative unfolds as a dialogue about art and society, recounting an evening debate at “Wrexham,” the cipher for Garsington. “Art,” the narrator notes, “has taken the place of politics as the favorite topic at week-end parties at country houses,” and he promises not to neglect the details of the conversation he is about to relate since “irrelevant details are the sauce of the argument.” Such minutiae, of course, are essential to the roman à clef’s aesthetics of detail, since, for those in the know, they reveal recognizable portraits of the Garsington and Bloomsbury circles, including Huxley, Lawrence, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Desmond McCarthy, and others.

The party sets out to ask, “What is Lady Caraway?” (38). This question immediately declares the book’s status as a roman à clef by introducing the fictional double of Morrell as an absent center around which various figures weave their gossipy responses. One character, emphasizing Caraway’s notoriety, insists that the party needs to puncture their hostess’s public persona: “She is known only to tourists or sight-seers. They look at her and go away—and write books about her” (49). Like Hermione at the wedding in *Women in Love*, the text intimates that the authentic Caraway has never been seen and may have disappeared entirely beneath the “chalky mask” of her make-up and reputation (47). She has become, another character insists, an “unknown reality,” a stereotyped “freak,” a “psychological sport,” and even “a work of art” (47–48, 41–42). In the tradition of the roman à clef, the text is both playful and ambiguous, lamenting the fact that the real Lady Caraway has been lost while simultaneously emphasizing its own complicity in transforming her into a publicly circulated image suitable for both this sort of intimate gossip and for the mass consumption of “tourists” who might read a book like *The Aesthetes*. 
Morrell was understandably furious when the book appeared, particularly since Turner initially sought to dedicate it to her. Objecting strenuously, Morrell pointed out that such a dedication “might put the idea [that the book is a roman à clef] into people’s heads.” 49 Like Huxley, Turner offered up the somewhat feeble defense that he had not actually written a roman à clef, but a “Platonic dialogue” and that he had “taken great pains to make clear that its central figure and its dialogue are necessarily fantastic creations.” 50 In what became a familiar pattern in the often anguished correspondence following the publication of such texts, he attempted to stake out the moral and aesthetic high ground by assuring Morrell that she could not be so poor a reader as to see an image of herself in the text: “I think I have taken such pains to make my central idea clear that only a poor intelligence could misunderstand it. However we know that such exist and as it is impossible to make one’s work absolutely fool-proof we could help to escape misunderstanding [by dedicating it to her].” 51 This ruse, however, did little to placate Morrell. Her (p.148) correspondence with Turner ended immediately on the book’s publication, and a decade later she wrote angrily to accuse W. B. Yeats of betraying her when he mentioned the book in an introduction to a collection of poetry. A flurried exchange of letters ensued in which Yeats tried desperately to defend himself, but he ultimately failed as this friendship too suddenly cooled.
The Aesthetes is, in fact, the last of the Garsington romans à clef and its focus extends well beyond Morrell, who by 1927 was already vanishing into the myth of wartime Garsington. Like Huxley and Lawrence, Turner also tackles what he considers the essentially derivative, even “conditional,” nature of the modern novel. The conversation thus turns to Lady Caraway only after one of the characters laments the failure of the romantic aesthetic that depends on endless innovation as a way of escaping the constraints of a stultifying modernity: “Anyone can provide one sensation by bankrupting himself in a single go and, naturally, the more there is to him the bigger the sensation. But I can’t burn my house down every night, and the romantics soon find this out and treat us to sham bonfires, stage flares which deceive nobody of intelligence” (37). This is a stinging critique of the strand of modernism derived from Pound’s command to “Make it new,” so that innovation for its own sake becomes a charade, a stereotyped performance staged for public consumption rather than a genuine form of art.

As a roman à clef, of course, The Aesthetes is founded on this conception of “conditional” art, depending on what it freely acknowledges to be an alternative mode of artistic creativity that no longer insists on a rigid distinction between factual history and romantic fiction: “Things are always what we make them. We may look upon Lady Caraway in various ways and the question is can we make a work of art of her? For this purpose we shall not be creative in the sense the artist is creative, we shall be creative in that secondary sense in which the aesthete, the appreciator, or discoverer of the work of art is creative” (42). In an otherwise forgettable book, this is a remarkable critique of modernism’s presumption of autonomy. Turner insists instead on what he calls a “secondary” creativity that derives from the artist’s ability to mix fact and fiction in a new kind of narrative alchemy. Rather than “sham bonfires” of ecstatic invention, such a practice instead allows for actual people and events to be reprocessed through an art interested in the autonomy of neither Victorian realism nor Eliotic impersonality.
Rather than treating the roman à clef as a degraded genre laden with gossip and scandal, Turner offers it instead as the potentially rich alternative to a romanticism that had become staid, dull, and conventional. This concept of secondary creativity, furthermore, is not unique to Turner since it pervades *Women in Love* as well, generating a subtle but nevertheless powerful counter-narrative to Birkin’s [p.149] romantic utopianism. Shortly before Hermione strikes her lover in the head, after all, she finds him in his room copying a “Chinese drawing of geese” (144). She is briefly fascinated by this and first insists on the painting’s value as a piece of cultural capital, telling Birkin that “The Chinese ambassador gave it me” (144). When he remains unimpressed and absorbed in his work, she resorts instead to the same kind of romantic idealism Turner critiques, asking—in a moment clearly framed to expose her vacuousness—why he is merely copying a piece of art instead of creating “something original” (145). He then passionately defends the same kind of “secondary creativity” Turner would later extol: “One gets more out of China, copying this picture, than reading all the books.... I know what centres they live from—what they perceive and feel—the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud—the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose’s blood, entering the blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery” (145). While clearly articulated in the familiar tropes of romantic intensity that characterize his later flight into the woods, this passage nevertheless insists simultaneously on the value of the copy for regenerating these lost experiences. Reproduction rather than pure invention grants Birkin this special knowledge and the text insists on this secondary creativity as a powerful corrective to the reified “originality” Hermione desires. The tools and techniques of the roman à clef, which consist precisely of the “copying” of original people into sometimes transformative aesthetic figures, are defended in the text at the very moment that Lawrence himself is deploying them in his own imaginative appropriation of Ottoline Morrell. Just as Turner insists that such an art should be connected more to discovery than to invention, so too readers who recognize the portrait of Lawrence’s own patron glimpse an alternative to Birkin’s endlessly frustrated attempts to escape bourgeois modernity through a vacuous romantic modernism.
Despite his productive experimentation with the roman à clef as an alternative to modernist impersonality, however, Lawrence diligently resisted any attempt to root *Women in Love* in the events of his own life. Some of this defensiveness clearly arose from the fear that those he attacked would seek recourse in a libel court. In his correspondence with Catherine Carswell, Lawrence clearly expresses this anxiety: “Do you think it would really hurt her [Morrell]—the Hermione?” he asks. “You see, it really isn’t her at all—only suggested by her. It is probable she will think Hermione has nothing to do with her.” Morrell, who received a copy of the typescript shortly after Lawrence posted this letter, was indeed so devastated she began to take steps to suppress the book through a libel suit. His initial concern about his patron then quickly gave way to aggression and rage, as he wrote (p.150) to S. S. Koteliansky that “the Ott is really too disgusting with her threats of legal proceedings etc.” Like Huxley, Woolf, and Turner, he refused to concede that he constructed a portrait of Morrell and instead wrapped himself in a hypocritical mantle of the very aesthetic autonomy *Women in Love* revealingly critiques, attacking her in starkly gendered terms as a vain and ignorant woman. Ironically, he even accused her of deliberately transforming the text into a roman à clef, since she “would like the thing to appear, for self-advertisement—and her sheep-faced fool of a husband would like to denounce it, for further self-advertisement.”

Such vitriol is not at all uncommon in Lawrence’s letters. During this period he heaped scorn on Morrell, in particular, whom he often blamed for derailing the text; but at the same time he appears to have made subtle but significant changes to the typescript in order to strengthen his defense in a potential legal action. Not only is the famous Garsington ilex tree changed, but so too is Hermione’s physical appearance altered, her distinctive “red brown” hair replaced by “heavy fair hair.”

This is, furthermore, the same kind of change Lawrence made to two other characters in the book also drawn directly from his life: Halliday and the Pussum. As Lawrence himself admitted, these two figures from London’s bohemia were based on real people (Philip Heseltine and Minnie Channing) and both won damages of £60 as well as the suppression of the first English edition after threatening Lawrence’s publisher with a lawsuit of their own. Thus, even as Lawrence raged against the Morrells and others who claimed to recognize themselves, he nevertheless implicitly acknowledged the legal risks he had run by making such subtle yet telling changes to the beleaguered manuscript.
As the vehemence of his letters suggests, however, there was more at stake here for Lawrence than just defending himself against a possible action for defamation. Even his presumably confidential notes to friends adamantly deny that he has simply reworked his own relationship with Morrell in the book and thus drawn extensively on his own time at Garsington. The reasons for this emerge from the roman à clef’s taint as an inferior or secondary genre too closely linked to the presumably degraded values of the marketplace. Lawrence, after all, found himself in an awkward situation as he sought to find a publisher and thus a commercial market for a book that otherwise vehemently condemns the commercialization of culture. Writers like Turner and Huxley also struggled with this apparent hypocrisy, but the corrosive power of satire enfolds both them and the reader within its critique, suggesting effectively that there may be no alternative to art’s commodification. That is, they could teasingly employ the roman à clef precisely because neither of them clung to the romantic conception of the novel as a redoubt of disinterested aesthetic autonomy. In fact, they skillfully deployed the roman à clef to launch (p.151) potent critiques of the novel as well as attempts to preserve it and other forms of art in an idealized sphere splendidly isolated from the marketplace. Thus rather than indulging in the “sham bonfires” of a romanticism that they acknowledge is merely a segment of a highly specialized market, they instead openly pursued a “secondary creativity” that did not set them in radical—and artificial—opposition to commodity culture. Indeed, this can help explain why subsequent critics never quite managed to include a writer like Huxley in the modernist canon. The apparently derivative nature of his texts simply couldn’t be squared with the impulse to “make it new.”
Lawrence, however, rejected satire’s self-inoculating comforts and instead tried to carve out an autonomous space for art. As a result, his works—though not as structurally innovative as, say, *Ulysses*—nevertheless partake of the same impulse to embrace the romance of invention and could thus be more easily accommodated to modernism’s founding myths. This lands him, however, in a troubling paradox since he deploys the “secondary creativity” of the roman à clef in *Women in Love* even as he rails against it. Thus, in a letter to Kot written after Morrell threatened to sue, Lawrence asks, “Why did I give myself away to them—the Otts and Murries etc!” He saw himself, in other words, as a cultural commodity, a reified object that had been brought into the crucible of Garsington and consequently subsumed by the covert flows of social, cultural, and economic capital coursing through it. Though Birkin in *Women in Love* condemns Breadalby as a prison, it is, in fact, a starkly gendered marketplace, and Lawrence felt himself sullied there by the same forces he strove idealistically to critique.

Morrell’s own friends and confidants were well aware of the contradictory position in which Lawrence suddenly found himself as he finished *Women in Love*. Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Brett both urged their friend and patron to use this knowledge in defending herself against Lawrence’s portrait. In January 1917 Brett wrote urging Morrell to follow Mansfield’s advice: “I think Katherine on the whole right. She knows Lawrence through and through—and her idea is that ridicule kills more quickly than anything else with him. To say ‘Well your [sic] a bit behind the times, Gilbert got his out first and everyone’s a bit tired of that kind of stuff etc.’” Morrell is urged here, in effect, to treat *Women in Love* like a roman à clef in the lighthearted mode of Gilbert Canan’s *Pugs and Peacocks*, thereby dismissing not only the serious content of the novel but also implicitly suggesting that Lawrence himself is merely seeking to trade economically on his relationship with Morrell and Garsington. “Anything else,” Mansfield wrote, “will only make him feel like Christ whipping out the money changers.” By insisting on Lawrence’s “secondary creativity,” Brett suggests that Morrell could turn *(p.152)* the brutal figure of Hermione against its creator, implying that is was actually he who greedily transformed Garsington’s promise of autonomy into an already outmoded commodity.
We have no idea if Morrell really attempted such a rebuttal, though there is little evidence of it in her correspondence. Lawrence, meanwhile, did mount a powerful defense against precisely this kind of allegation. Shortly after Ottoline and her husband approached his agent in February 1917 and warned him that they might take a libel action against the book, its author responded with what would become an increasingly refined aesthetic defense of its form. “Really,” Lawrence writes, “the world has gone completely dotty! Hermione is not much more like Ottoline Morrell than Queen Victoria, the house they [the Morrells] claim as theirs is a Georgian home in Derbyshire I know very well—etc. Ottoline flatters herself.— There is a hint of her in the character of Hermione: but so is there a hint of a million women if it comes to that.”

This is clearly the disingenuous argument of an author eager to avoid a libel case, and he defends his work here as pure fiction, insisting that the characters (if not the physical setting) are drawn entirely from his imagination. Only at the end does he allow for the obvious fact that he has indeed drawn on Morrell, but in doing so he links this to a larger aesthetic and philosophical claim about the universalism of a certain kind of woman. Lawrence had, in fact, developed a similar, albeit much more nuanced, argument in a now famous letter to Edward Garnett: “You mustn’t look in my novel for the stable old ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we’ve been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically-unchanged element.”

Here he effectively develops a preemptive defense against the charge of secondary creativity by insisting that he has developed a new concept of ego and character rooted in some deeper, universal concept of self. Thus, as Lawrence constructs his various characters, we should all to some extent recognize bits and piece of ourselves in this deep subjective structure. Such an argument, of course, has proven to be one of modernism’s most effective defenses, and this passage has long been used essentially to regulate the reception and circulation of Lawrence’s text by focusing our attention solely on the diegesis itself—and dismissing the book’s plain manipulation of the roman à clef. *Women in Love* may indeed gesture to the world off the page, but it claims to do so in a philosophical rather than satirical mode. Thus, Lawrence could claim that it potentially libels all of its readers, like those
million of women he links to Hermione, and is therefore actionable by none of them. His aesthetic, in other words, manipulates the roman à clef in order to transform real women into abstract symbols, evacuating them of historical specificity while at the same time isolating his book from the charges of mere imitation or appropriation.

The authors of almost all of the Garsington romans à clef engaged in similar kinds of disingenuous strategies, publicly asserting the entirely fictional nature of texts whose principal charm and value lies precisely in their manipulation of the genre’s anarchic skepticism. Like Turner’s rather too blatant request to dedicate *The Aesthetes* to Morrell, the various denials issued by these writers typically served only to emphasize all the more coyly their often satiric portraiture. This, in turn, explains again why these delightful books have now become so obscure: one of their primary pleasures consists in their topical references to personalities and places that have been masked by the passage of time. As we have seen, Huxley’s books, in particular, offer a sharp and corrosive critique of literary modernism and its institutions; but it is available only when we read them as romans à clef—as deliberate attempts to challenge the novel’s claim to imaginative autonomy. To recover this critique, however, we have to access a densely woven web of extra-diegetic connections. Without these tendrils stretching delicately between fact and fiction, the works seem somewhat flat, uninspired, or merely frivolous. Michael Dirda, in his introduction to the 2001 Dalkey Press edition of *Crome Yellow*, awkwardly acknowledges this, insisting on the quality of the book and mentioning, as if in passing, that its characters may have been derived from real figures. After carefully cataloging their sources, however, he then dismissively asks, “Who cares?” before describing the text’s vivid and memorable personalities. His rhetorical question is a clear and anxiously dismissive attempt to isolate *Crome Yellow* from its generic identity as a roman à clef, to cut it off from its extra-diegetic connections in order to revive it as a novel. While the book is no doubt a delightful read, however, Dirda—like many other critics—effectively suppresses its most striking and innovative elements since they seem to be the product of a merely secondary creativity.
By insisting so ardently that readers ignore *Women in Love*’s secondary creativity, Lawrence managed far more successfully than the other Garsington writers to focus his readers’ attention almost entirely on the diegesis. This finally proved the most effective response to the strategies suggested by Mansfield and Brett, since the book has been canonized and thus preserved precisely as a novel and not a roman à clef. Rather than a portrait of Morrell, Hermione has indeed become one of a million women, a textual representation of some larger ego who is finally assessed and condemned on the text’s own terms. When we insist on deciphering the roman à clef’s function in *Women in Love*, however, a more ambiguous and perhaps even more troubling view of the text emerges. In glimpsing the figure (p.154) of Morrell behind Hermione, we see her less as an abstract symbol of feminine aggression and more as a point of agonized condensation for Lawrence’s own troubled relationship to the literary marketplace. Brutally condemned in the book as an acquisitive lionhunter, this woman becomes—as Alice Jardin argues more generally—a symbol of the sort of cultural commodification that Lawrence figures as a threat to his romantic aspirations and aesthetic autonomy. As we have seen in the image of Birkin copying those Chinese geese, his anxieties about the failure of this ideal are subtly figured in the text itself, but they snap into sharp focus only when we realize that Lawrence himself was also copying what he saw. Like Huxley and the others, he too experimented with the roman à clef as a way of resisting and indeed transforming the news/novel divide, but he finally suppressed this most striking element of his work to secure its publication. That is, Lawrence gained the modernist “imprimatur” in a way that Huxley, for example, did not, because he managed to preserve that “interested disinterestedness” Bourdieu argues is so essential to the creation of a market for elite cultural goods. Indeed, *Women in Love* is a novel—and thus a work of what might be called primary creativity—only to the degree that it obscures its innovative experimentation with the roman à clef.
Like Joyce and Lewis, of course, Lawrence may have been initially forced into this position because the laws governing the field of cultural production made it nearly impossible to acknowledge openly the derivative nature of his work. Even Turner, who managed to articulate a defense of secondary creativity, nevertheless relied upon the roman à clef’s “conditional fictionality” to afford himself some limited protection. In reading works like *Women in Love, Those Barren Leaves*, or any of the other Garsington-inspired books as pure fiction, however, we participate in one of modernism’s most powerful and pervasive myths about its own imaginative supremacy. When the extra-diegetic tendrils of these works are suppressed, they participate in the gender tropism Jardine, Friedman, and Felski describe in which “WOMAN” becomes an abject symbol of commodity culture. Thus Hermione, Amy Caraway, and Mrs. Aldwinkle remain effectively hollow, aggressive, and finally sadistic symbols of an allegedly rapacious modernity threatening a literary creativity and autonomy encoded entirely as male. They become, in short, abject lionhunters: wealthy, powerful, and influential women who symbolically concentrate the encroachment of commodity culture on a presumably autonomous male aesthetic sphere.
By recovering the extra-diegetic dimensions of these texts, however, we gain an alternative vision of modernist cultural production as directly and critically engaged with the cultural marketplace. At one level, in acknowledging the figure (p. 155) of Morrell behind her various textual personas, we see the Garsington novelists deliberately exploiting the roman à clef’s scandalous potential so they can market their access to Britain’s cultural and aristocratic elites. A close reading of these texts, however, reveals another level of critical self-consciousness connecting the roman à clef to modernism’s larger critique of the realist novel and its institutions. That is, rather than the “tissue of personalities” Henry James dismissed, the genre gives writers like Lawrence and Huxley an opportunity to explore the limits of romantic autonomy and develop an aesthetic of “secondary creativity” of the sort Turner describes. The various literary portraits of Morrell certainly harmed the woman who so ardently supported the men who created them, and even Lawrence in 1928 acknowledged that “the so-called portraits of Ottoline can’t possibly be Ottoline—no one knows that better than an artist.” As the object of their sometimes stinging if lightly veiled and vehemently denied critique, she becomes less a stereotypical lionhunter than a complicated figure for a new mode of literary experimentation that could not be adequately accommodated by the emergent narratives of modernist autonomy. She became for them a symbolic and, eventually, an economic commodity, one they eagerly traded in the literary marketplace; but she also stubbornly signified the failure of their own conquest of autonomy and the potentially derivative nature of their creativity. “We hurt you too much,” Brett wrote to Morrell in 1917 after the Garsington novels and paintings began to appear. In recovering the roman à clef’s operations, we can simultaneously see the ways in which Morrell herself hurt writers like Huxley and Lawrence into a critical knowledge of modernism’s contradictions and limits. More than a mere lionhunter, she instead became the catalyst for crucial narrative innovations that have been suppressed or misrecognized in our own insistence on the novel’s aesthetic supremacy.

Gender, Genre, Power: Jean Rhys
For the writers gathered around Ottoline Morrell at Garsington Manor, their patron became a dense site of symbolic entanglement. The satiric and even deranged images they created of her were, in part, attempts to negotiate their own anxieties about the nature of aesthetic creativity within a highly segmented literary marketplace in which the coterie functioned merely as one profit center among others. Their depiction of Morrell, furthermore, has proven so durable precisely because she was not a writer or an artist herself, despite a somewhat desultory attempt to craft a set of memoirs; she has remained largely a symbol deployed by male writers (p.156) eager to heap on her the perceived sins of their own inevitable commodification. Seen in this light, Morrell becomes a tragic figure, her fortune and her prestige finally insufficient proof against the male artist’s ability to appropriate and exploit the symbolic resonance of her gender as a woman and thus transform her from a patron into a lionhunter.
This close link between women and the marketplace, of course, pervades modernist aesthetic production from Joyce’s *Ulysses* to Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. For women writers themselves, however, cultural commodification and the utopian promise of aesthetic autonomy often had a sharply different resonance. The struggle simply to access the public sphere often meant that they had far less anxiety than their male counterparts about the allegedly corrosive effects of the marketplace and precious little nostalgia for an autonomous sphere often resembling the hermetic drawing rooms many of them sought to escape. Even Virginia Woolf, who so eloquently and powerfully articulated the need for women writers to have a room of their own, failed adequately to address the simultaneous need for women to participate in the marketplace in order to gain a public voice and claim to financial independence. The owner and operator of the Hogarth Press, as well as a novelist who made careful note of the profits reaped by both her serious and her lighter fiction, she clearly engaged with the marketplace as a site of empowerment and autonomy.\(^64\) And yet, in *Three Guineas*, written near the end of her career and in the midst of crises both personal and political, she oddly begins to articulate a disgust with the market and a plea for isolation of the sort Birkin defends in *Women in Love*. She urges women “not to commit adultery of the brain” by merely writing “for the sake of money.”\(^65\) “Money,” “advertisement,” and “publicity” she continues, are “adulterers” and drawing unexpectedly on the discourse of chastity she asks women writers “not to allow your private face to be published, or details of your private life; not to avail yourself, in short, of any of the forms of brain prostitution which are so insidiously suggested by the pimps and panderers of the brain-selling trade.”\(^66\) This becomes, of course, part of Woolf’s larger defense of the “Outsider”: an attempt to construct both a real and imaginative space not entirely unlike Morrell’s Garsington or her own Bloomsbury where art can be quarantined from the apparently abusive powers of commodity culture.
Such an attempt to link the body and mind of the woman artist through the metaphor of prostitution is troubling, in part, because it ignores what Christine Froula has described as Woolf’s successful excavation of “modernism’s hidden brothels.” Focusing on George Duckworth’s sexual abuse of Woolf, Froula eloquently uncovers how the novelist and her sister successfully “vivisected” the “socioeconomic marriage system” and trained “an analytic gaze on the project of freedom that engendered many of modernism’s experiments and reforms.” These women, who found themselves sexually exploited and unable to access the liberties available to their male friends, pursued a heroic personal and aesthetic quest to recover the autonomy of their bodies while nevertheless insisting on the unjust nature of the system that subjected them to Duckworth’s abuse. As Froula furthermore notes, Woolf herself readily deployed the roman à clef in early fictional sketches like “Memoirs of a Novelist” and “Phyllis and Rosamond,” both short pieces that cannily exploit the genre’s skepticism about fact and fiction and thereby allow their author “to soar over the concealing walls of the private house into public speech.” As “public speech,” of course, these sketches are strictly delimited because their “speech” is deliberately ambiguous, their charges of sexual abuse and exploitation cloaked behind the roman à clef’s double-registers.
Many other women writers in the period found themselves in a position similar to Woolf’s: subject to sexual and abuse and manipulation, uncertain about how to access the public sphere with the same freedom and confidence as the men around them, and yet eager to claim a room of their own. Lacking the considerable cultural resources Woolf commanded, their challenge, as Deborah Parsons describes it, was “not so much to enter but to survive in the urban environment” where they too found themselves subject to the “hidden brothels” Froula analyzes. No figure is more emblematic of the way this gendered modernity is configured within modernism’s countercultural metropolis than Jean Rhys, whose four novels set in Paris and London during the 1920s and 30s describe an often terrifying struggle to survive on the fringes of a male bohemia where women were mistresses and models to be traded and abandoned. Rhys’s work powerfully acknowledges what Froula productively describes as the “gender of free speech” within coteries that otherwise venerated personal liberation and experimentation. Exploiting the conventions of the roman à clef, Rhys offers a critically veiled critique of elite modernist culture that exposes its gendered conception of liberation while simultaneously appropriating the power of the marketplace to access the means of cultural production.
By focusing explicitly on Rhys’s strategic manipulation of the roman à clef, we can understand not only the most daring innovations of a book like *Quartet*, but the sociohistorical reasons for its brief notoriety and subsequent descent into obscurity. Typically read as an odd yet haunting account of a woman’s masochistic surrender to a bizarre love affair and her consequent destruction, the work has become comfortably canonized as a powerful feminist critique of a still brutally patriarchal Parisian bohemia. The key required to open its hidden subtext—namely that the brutal H. J. Heidler is really Rhys’s onetime lover and mentor Ford Madox Ford—was available to a number of its initial readers who reveled in (p. 158) watching the most sordid details of private life become public property. Recovering this key thus alters our most basic assumptions about the work, particularly that it is primarily a record of one woman’s intense suffering and brutalization. When reframed as a roman à clef, it becomes something quite different: an empowering act of public vengeance in which the novel’s masochistic protagonist becomes a tool for its sadistic author who pillories Ford’s bohemian pretensions, bourgeois morality, and infantile sexuality.
In 1966 Jean Rhys emerged from more than three decades of poverty and obscurity to publish *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel that won an array of literary awards while prompting many critics to group her among the best living novelists. Shortly thereafter her publishers, Andre Deutsch in London and W. W. Norton in the United States, sought to capitalize on Rhys’s fame by republishing the four novels she had written in the 1920s and ’30s, as well as an expanded edition of her first collection of short stories. Greeted by an emerging generation of feminist scholars who sought to enlarge the modernist canon beyond the “men of 1914,” Rhys immediately became something of a countercultural icon: a bold, original, woman writer from the romanticized bohemian Left Bank of early twentieth-century Paris. The fact that by the 1950s she had been entirely forgotten and was living on the fringes of the welfare state in rented rooms and off-season holiday cottages only helped burnish her image as an unfairly neglected artist. Unlike the sophisticated Virginia Woolf, Rhys did not have access to the kind of cultural and social networks that helped preserve the former’s reputation and eventually facilitated her entry into the canon. Indeed, but for the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is likely that Rhys’s books would have remained among what Raymond Williams called “the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century.” She now, however, holds an important place in modernism’s literary history, a position consolidated by the publication of her letters, the production of a number of biographies, the adaptation of several of her works for film and radio, and—most telling of all—the creation of a considerable critical apparatus for scholars, students, and fans of her work, including a journal entitled the *Jean Rhys Review*. She is a constitutive site for the New Modernist Studies—a writer whose critical assimilation has helped redraw modernism’s boundaries.
The reviewers and scholars who evaluated her republished novels in the 1960s and 70s may have been breaking with the canons inspired by the New Criticism, but they did not abandon its critical insistence that authorial intention be strictly separated from the textual artifact. Such a critical procedure, however, distorts seriously both the cultural utility of Rhys’s texts as well as some of their most stunning formal innovations. Like Joyce, Lawrence, Lewis and so many others, she too (p.159) drew explicitly on the roman à clef’s infectious and anarchic powers to upset the institutions of the novel. Marya Zelli from *Quartet* and Sasha Jensen from *Good Morning Midnight* can easily be read as only lightly fictionalized images of Rhys’s own increasingly desperate and depressing life in Paris. *Quartet*, in particular, was initially published, circulated, and reviewed as a roman à clef detailing the disastrous love affair linking Stella Bowen, Ford Madox Ford, Jean Lenglet, and Rhys. The reviewers who helped reawaken interest in the early novels, however, steadfastly ignored these contexts, carefully eliding them in order to craft Rhys in the image of a “properly” autonomous modernist artist.
Shirley Hazzard in the 1971 *New York Times Book Review*, for example, makes no direct reference to the real events or people behind the events in the novel, alluding to them instead only cryptically: “This is the English-speaking Montparnasse of Ford Madox Ford and Hemingway; and a perfectly dreadful little corner of a foreign field it is.”\(^7^3\) *Quartet*, of course, records not just the Paris of Ford and Hemingway, but the real lives and loves of the two men themselves—the former as the brutal and misogynistic H. J. Heidler and the latter as the impoverished but sympathetic Cairn. Writing in the Sunday *Times* of London, Vernon Scannell similarly elides any direct mention of *Quartet* as a roman à clef, noting elliptically that while “Jean Rhys’s style … may owe something to Ford Madox Ford, whom she knew in Paris in the Twenties, [it] is wonderfully appropriate, limpid yet astringent, mixing easily the formal and the colloquial.”\(^7^4\) Ford’s name again appears here, but as a friend and inspiration rather than the target of the novel’s considerable rage. Indeed, the only reviews accompanying the 1969/71 release of *Quartet* that allude to the novel’s “conditional fictionality” are those in the *Financial Times*, which notes Rhys’s “Colette-like style,” and in the *Guardian*, where the unsigned article rates Rhys “higher than Colette.”\(^7^5\) These two references to the popular author of several romans à clef describing the scandalous life of a young French woman, allude only obliquely to the fact that while *Quartet* may indeed engage in high modernist experiments in point of view and narrative technique, it is also a vicious and scandalous roman à clef that indict both Ford and Bowen as hateful sexual predators.
Even the increasingly rich body of Rhys scholarship generated since the late 1960s has generally avoided a direct engagement with *Quartet* as a roman à clef. In his foundational work, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*, Thomas F. Staley argues that the novel “developed out of an intensely private world—a world whose sources of inspiration were neither literary nor intellectual.” He references Ford’s role in Rhys’s life, but when it comes to the text itself, he contends that she works in the modernist mode of impersonality, even if the novel itself fails “to achieve complete aesthetic detachment.” The traces of the roman à clef, in other words, are not acknowledged as part of a deliberate and self-conscious aesthetic strategy, but instead cast as a first novel’s minor defects. Even less formalist critics than Staley brush aside the overtly biographical nature of the novel, as Veronica Gregg does when she states that while “the affair with Ford gave Rhys material for her fiction,” it would nevertheless be “a mistake to reduce narrative experiment to an autobiographical fallacy.” Gregg seems oblivious to the fact that this autobiographical mode may be the source of Rhys’s most striking and innovative experiments in the social utility of genre. Other critics, of course, have acknowledged a much more direct link between Rhys’s life and her works, as Nancy R. Harrison does in *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women’s Text*. Using the awkward device of square brackets to construe a theory of what she calls “[auto]biography,” Harrison suggests that Rhys “steps, not down, but away from the centrist position of authority, effectively bracketing out her ‘self,’ the autobiographical ‘I,’ to share the writing of her text with her readers.” This approach labors doggedly to imbricate life and art, to make the personal political, but it accomplishes this only by ignoring the fact that Rhys was, in fact, writing not a nebulously defined “[auto]biography,” but a roman à clef. Paul Delany, in the explicitly titled “Jean Rhys and Ford Madox Ford: What Really Happened?” begins by stating that he intends to settle the facts of the case, but then quickly swerves aside by acknowledging “the extreme and inescapable textuality of the affair.” Taking cover behind the canons of professionalism, he claims that “the literary critic … is not concerned with the truth of an account, but how well it is told.” Once again, literary autonomy, the intentional fallacy, and narrative impersonality are implicitly invoked so that *Quartet* can be preserved as a highbrow modernist masterpiece turned forever inward on itself.
For Rhys herself, however, as well as for the critics and readers who first encountered this book in 1927, *Quartet* was anything but the kind of cold masterpiece scholars would later describe. The text is a roman à clef of the best sort, recounting her affair with Ford Madox Ford, her struggles with Ford’s partner at the time, Stella Bowen, and the fallout of these events in her own marriage to Jean Lenglet, who was in prison for fraud. The names are changed, of course, but only lightly: Ford the literary editor who prided himself on discovering new talent, becomes a vicious and lascivious art dealer named Heidler (a vague but distinct echo of Ford’s real last name, Hueffer). Bowen becomes Lois Heidler; Jean becomes Stephan; and Rhys becomes Marya. The story related in the book follows the events of its author’s life closely, so much so that she later confessed to her biographer that she could no longer distinguish between the two. The “key” to unlocking the identities of these characters was thus left in relatively plain sight—particularly for the many Parisian expatriates who witnessed the affair—and became all the more obvious as first Ford, in *When the Wicked Man*, then Bowen, in *Drawn from Life*, and even Lenglet, in *Sous les verrous* (later translated and redacted by Rhys under the title *Barred*), wrote their own memoirs (Bowen) and romans à clef (Ford and Lenglet) about the affair.
More pressing, however, than the specific details of who slept with whom and who treated whom most brutally, is the way in which Rhys’s work was framed and marketed explicitly as a scandalous roman à clef—one designed less to win praise as an elite work of autonomous art than to titillate readers with the sordid details of an affair among Parisian bohemians. For Rhys, this was both an aesthetic and commercial strategy; when her first story, “Vivienne,” appeared in Ford’s transatlantic review, she composed a note saying that it had been drawn from a larger work entitled Suzy Tells. Such a title clearly promises something in the vein of Colette—a lightly disguised autobiography that teasingly reveals the decadent scandals of Left-Bank life. When Ford actually published the piece, however, he altered this perhaps too obvious allusion to the roman à clef’s infectiousness, retitling it Triple Sec; and he also convinced the young author to publish the work not under her own name—Ella Lenglet—but under the pseudonym by which we now know her: Jean Rhys. Ford, in short, helped Rhys to conceal the keys to this roman à clef a bit more effectively and in so doing, to invest herself more fully in the “interested disinterestedness” constituting the field of modernist literary production.84
Early readers and reviewers, however, could not be so easily put off the scent of scandal, and though Triple Sec was never published, Rhys’s works of the 1920s and 30s—The Left Bank and Other Stories, Quartet, Voyage in the Dark, and After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie—were all greeted as autobiographical romans à clef. The jacket copy for the 1931 After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie noted that the author “has lived in several European capitals, has given English lessons, and worked spasmodically as a mannequin, a sculptor’s model and a nursery governess.”

These details describe almost exactly the lives of the various protagonists in Rhys’s novels, a fact sourly noted by a reviewer in the 1931 Boston Transcript who concluded that “her own biography, judging by what the publishers tell us ... is far more interesting than her heroine’s story.” The jacket cover of her first novel, released originally as Postures in Britain and then retitled Quartet when it was published in the United States, further insists that the book is a roman à clef, coyly informing its readers that the author is writing under a “nom du plume”—presumably to prevent anyone from guessing the real identity of the characters in the book. Like those legal disclaimers designed to guard against libel suits, this hint that the writer’s (p.162) name has been deliberately concealed only further compounds the reader’s sense that something scandalous has been hidden in the pages of the novel and must be rooted out with even greater vigor.

Gretchen Mount in the 1929 Detroit Free Press called the book “an outstanding example of the sort of thing which has been of late issuing from a group of Americans who live in the Montparnasse quarter of Paris, write for Transition, and spend their time loafing around Sylvia Beach’s book shop.” The reviewer for the New York Herald Tribune is even more precise, calling Quartet a chronicle of “that curious corner of Paris where the spurious rubs shoulders with the real.” Offering here a telling description of the roman à clef’s provocative skepticism, this review openly acknowledges the ways in which most bohemian art can be used as a social tool or even a weapon. By rubbing together “the spurious” and the real, Rhys self-consciously puts her book to work: as a moral tale, an act of revenge, an ethnography of Parisian bohemia, and a potentially profitable tell-all autobiography.
Rhys, in other words, knew exactly what she was doing, and proved herself an even more canny self-marketer than Ford, exploiting what one of her characters in the story “La Grosse Fifi” describes as the English desire to seek out immorality and then be horrified by it: “How rum some people are!” she writes. “They ask to be shocked and long to be shocked and hope to be shocked, but if you really shock them ... how shocked they are!”

Quartet exploits the profitability of shock by explicitly critiquing Ford’s own “brand” of autonomous and impersonal modernism. The romantic image of the Left-Bank bohemian struggling with his or her art in lonely isolation becomes merely a hollow pose, one duplicitously struck to conceal an otherwise very bourgeois pursuit of social and cultural capital. In the text, when Heidler first seduces Marya, she resists his advances, surrendering to them only after he assures her that her own morality is painfully outdated, that she is “too virtuous.” Later, Lois further reassures Marya that anything so conventional as monogamy or marriage is merely a Victorian artifact and that she is making too much trouble about the unusual affair: “It’s fatal making a fuss,” Lois tell Marya, “We’re making a great fuss about nothing at all, aren’t we? Drama is catching, I find” (81, 82). This distinct—and here obviously stereotyped—adherence to bohemian sensuality is almost immediately given the lie, however, as the erotic entanglements grow increasingly explosive.
The Heidlers, in fact, worry a great deal about what the other residents of Montparnasse think of their relationship, and are at great pains to conceal the fact that the unconventional affair is taking an enormous emotional toll on all of them. The pose is so convincing that it initially even deceives Marya herself. Sharing a railway carriage with the couple, she is “haggard, tortured by jealousy, burnt up (p.163) by longing” (98). Looking at Lois and H. J., however, “it seemed ... she had hypnotized herself into thinking, as they did, that her mind was part of their minds and that she understood why they both so often said in exactly the same tone of puzzled bewilderment: ‘I don’t see what you’re making such a fuss about.’ ... And then they wanted to be excessively modern, and then they’d think: ‘After all, we’re in Paris’” (97–98). Ironically, it is Marya—the destitute ex-showgirl with the imprisoned husband—who cannot seem to be bohemian enough, her own moral qualms about the affair consistently dismissed as unfashionably out of date. The affair’s gradual dissolution, however, quickly exposes the cynicism of the Heidlers’ performance as Marya is moved to a hotel where she is provided with a small allowance and expected to make herself sexually available for H. J.’s afternoon visits. Lois nevertheless frets about the fragility of her own expatriate reputation, asking Marya anxiously, “You are not going to talk to anybody in Paris about this, are you?” (107). In the book’s diegesis, Marya plays along, keeping her mouth shut, accepting her ignominious position as Heidler’s mistress, and preserving the secret revelation that H. J. himself “looks exactly like a picture of Queen Victoria” (114).
Marya’s continued, abject silence throughout the text—even as she is later sent away, then beaten and abandoned by her husband—has led critics to see her as an icon of women’s suffering, a case-study in masochism, and even a colonized writer “lacking authentic selfhood in European terms.”92 Such readings, however, require us to treat the book exclusively as a novel, ignoring its attempted extension into the public sphere and consequent social utility for Rhys herself. Marya does indeed suffer at the hands of Heidler, remaining trapped by his order to keep up appearances, but the text itself willfully and powerfully violates this self-serving edict. To the extent that readers recognize Ford in Heidler, *Quartet* becomes instead an act of aggression, a public confession of all the hidden sins that Heidler and Ford both wanted to conceal. Marya, that is, becomes abject only when the text is insulated from any kind of biographical reading and treated instead as an autonomous work of art—precisely the kind of work that both Heidler and Ford admired as the quintessential product of Parisian modernism. As *Quartet* itself reveals, however, such autonomy can all too easily be counterfeited, since it passes through the same messy interface between fact and fiction as the roman à clef. Rhys uses the book’s experiment with the social power of genre to expose a very public contest for cultural and social authority in which the line between public and private as well as that between real people and fictional characters becomes increasingly blurred.
As *Quartet* begins to draw to a close, it increasingly foregrounds its own generic structure. Sent to Cannes by Heidler and provided with only a small allowance, Marya writes a letter to him expressing her love and begging for money to escape. (p.164) This letter is interpolated into the text in a direct gesture to the roman à clef’s eighteenth-century origins. Indeed, it comes to serve as a figure for the novel itself, since immediately after posting it Marya realizes that “he’s given her [Lois Heidler] my letter to read, of course. It’s like being stripped and laughed at” (161). The revelation that her private writing has become an entertaining and publicly circulated document prompts her to begin plotting a profitable means of escape. Realizing that “nobody owes a fair deal to a prostitute” (161), she plans “to be clever and cunning or she wouldn’t get any money at all” (177). In the textual diegesis, her plans to blackmail Heidler collapse, as she first suffers the humiliation of knowing that Lois has seen her letter and then is finally left battered and unconscious by her husband.
The roman à clef’s distinctive social life, however, moderates this otherwise bleak ending as we realize that Rhys has, in fact, quite cunningly gotten money out of Ford. Exposed in *Quartet* as a brutal and abusive misogynist whose bohemian ideals are merely a hypocritical pose, Ford now stands before the public eye as Marya feared she would, “stripped and laughed at.” The book successfully extracts its own social and economic capital from him—not through the blackmail that Marya planned, but through its publication. The initial reviews of the text greeted it precisely in this vein, and Ford himself felt it necessary to reply in 1932 with his own retelling of the same events in *When the Wicked Man*, which he prefaced with a warning: “I publish this novel in England only with reluctance and under the action of a force majeure as to whose incidence I cannot be explicit.”93 The incident he refers to, of course, is the publication of *Quartet*, and he responded in the only way he could without admitting its potential truth: with a roman à clef of his own. In so carefully adopting the form for her own purposes, Rhys preserves the genre’s playful confusion of the fictional and the biographical. Ford was unlikely to respond in public, with a libel action for example, because Rhys could all too easily withdraw into the very aesthetic autonomy her mentor so ardently defended by claiming the whole text was merely a fictional invention. In the world of expatriate Paris and beyond, however, the book became a powerful indictment of Ford’s misogyny, snobbery, and hypocrisy. *Quartet*, furthermore, struck not only at Ford but at the entire pretense of bohemian modernism, exposing the fraudulent myth of the romantic artist and the autonomous literary text. Staley argues that “Rhys wrote precisely of what it was like to be down and out in both Paris and London[,] her fiction was not a literature of social engagement.”94 This critical commonplace can be true, however, only to the extent that we treat *Quartet* as the kind of elite cultural production it deliberately critiqued rather than as a roman à clef.
Rhys’s book found its way into our canons through a willed blindness to its illicit generic codes, as well-meaning critics still steeped in New Critical reading practices transformed it from a scandalous tell-all account of Ford’s womanizing and hypocrisy into a record of masochistic self-immolation. An unsigned review of the book in the Emporia Kansas Gazette accepts the book on precisely these terms, producing a reading that has now become generally accepted (if not so colorfully described) by recent commentators: “Quartet … starts on a high note and plunges downward for 228 pages, hitting the bottom on the last page with a dull thud…. You will read it at one sitting and then you will put cigarette ashes in the grand piano, the cat in the goldfish bowl, and your own illusions about the sweetness of life in an unmarked grave…. Original? Yes. Vivid? To brutality. Well done? Beautifully.” The review then concludes with a more stubborn question: “But why was it written?” The answer, of course, is that Rhys wrote the book to exact exquisite revenge for the very suffering and betrayals it describes. This is a simple enough answer, but its implications are far-reaching. Reading Quartet deliberately and unapologetically as a roman à clef radically reframes our understanding of the book by shifting our critical pleasures and attention away from the unredeemed tragedy of the text’s diegesis to its success as an innovative and largely successful act of social and economic revenge.
Were *Quartet* unique in this regard it would remain at most a curiosity, but as I have argued throughout *The Art of Scandal*, the extra-diegetic perspectives so essential to the reception and circulation of the roman à clef provide a potent yet largely unexamined point of contact between gender, genre, and power in the early twentieth century. By reading the works of male writers like Huxley and Lawrence through this interpretive lens, we discover not only a familiar anxiety about aesthetic autonomy, but a simultaneous desire to access the economic rewards of the literary marketplace by trading on their connection to an elite coterie. Exploiting the ambiguities of the roman à clef, texts like *Those Barren Leaves* and *Women in Love* attempt to claim financial rewards while simultaneously directing the blame for their “secondary creativity” and their ultimately failed bid for autonomy on the abject figure of the lionhunter. Morrell’s various “fictional” ciphers symbolically condense a commodity culture brutally damned and satirized at the diegetic level of the text. The real woman not only disappears into her textual representation, but the open secret of her lightly veiled identity provides the writers themselves with the profits of the very marketplace they otherwise critique.
Rhys too exploits the genre’s doubled registers, but she does so strategically in order to reveal the ways women writers struggled to access a public sphere in which free speech was starkly delimited by gender. Within the diegesis of *Quartet*, this means that women remain essentially silenced and disempowered, their bid for sexual and personal liberation within the city cast as a masochistic failure. By reading this text as a roman à clef, however, we see the ways Rhys not only sells out Ford and his circle to a reading public eager for such narratives, but simultaneously insists that modernism itself is a vital segment of the cultural marketplace rather than a point of resistance to it. At the intersection of gender and genre, the roman à clef thus provided a powerful and engaging experimental forum in which male and female writers alike sought creatively to negotiate art’s renunciation of its own autonomy—that transformative cultural movement Horkheimer and Adorno contend is so distinctive of the modern culture industry. It is here, in short, in the elite coteries and rough bohemias of the early twentieth century, that the legal and aesthetic constraints governing the boundary between fact and fiction begin to fray, becoming entangled in a mass-mediated cultural marketplace that trades in the open secrets and hidden pleasures of the roman à clef.

Notes:

(1) Hugh Ross Williamson, “Honest at a Discount,” *The Bookman* (June 1931), 144.

(2) Ibid.

(3) In Somerset Maugham’s preface to *Cakes and Ale* (New York: Penguin, 1948), he disingenuously writes: “I am told that two or three writers thought themselves aimed at in the character of Alroy Kear. They were under a misapprehension. This character was a composite portrait: I took the appearance from one writer, the obsession with good society from another, the heartiness from a third, the pride in athletic prowess from a fourth, and a great deal from myself” (7). Maugham confesses here that he has copied from life, but nevertheless tries to preserve a claim to autonomy by asserting that in mixing real portraits he has produced something fundamentally new.

(5) Williamson, 144.


(8) This well-known image graphically represents the connections between various writers analyzed in her anthology by drawing a line between each name that was cross-referenced elsewhere in the book. The resulting “tangled intricacy” of connections makes visible the ways in which we too often simplify modernism and its sites of production. See Bonnie Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 10.


(11) Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), explores the ways in which women were reconfigured as consumers at the end of the nineteenth century, becoming in the process a metaphoric “vehicle for expressing ambivalent responses to the social and economic transformations of commodity capitalism” (88).


(14) Ibid.
Richard Shone, The Art of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell, and Duncan Grant (Princeton University Press, 1999) implicitly compares these works to the roman à clef’s ambiguities, noting that Grant yoked together “unexpected elements and allusions … to vivify objective transcription.” As a result he walked a tenuous “tightrope stretched between fact and fantasy” (14). Shone includes a reproduction of this portrait, now held in a private collection.

With typical honesty, Woolf confides her hypocrisy to her diary in 1923: “What puts me on edge is that I’m writing like this here, & spoke so differently to Ott. I’m over peevish in private, partly in order to assert myself. I am a great deal interested suddenly in my book. I want to bring in the despicableness of people like Ott: I want to give the slipperiness of the soul” (Diary, 2:244).


Everyman, December 3, 1920, HRHRC, Box 35.3.

The Star, December 3, 1920, HRHRC, Box 35.3.

Aware of this, Morrell refused to purchase the portrait by John as well. In February 1921 he wrote to her gently inquiring about her interest in the piece: “I still have your portrait. People don’t often buy other people’s portraits. It’s rather a cruel presentment as you know and yet I like it.” This is followed by two lines crossed out in red crayon: “I think I had priced it at L500 at the show but you can have it for much less. Would L200 be too much?” (Morrell Papers, HRHRC, box 11, folder 2). She nevertheless bought another portrait and hung it prominently to help deflect the sense of scandal, prompting John himself to remark that “whatever she may have lacked, it wasn’t courage” (Holroyd, 278).

The OED defines a “lionhunter” as “one who is given to lionizing celebrities.” The term dates to the middle of the nineteenth century and is perhaps most famously deployed by Charles Dickens, who named a celebrity-obsessed character in The Pickwick Papers “Mrs. Leo Hunter.”


(25) Ibid., 33.

(26) Bourdieu argues that “the literary and artistic world is so ordered that those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness” (*Field*, 40). In laying claim to a radical aesthetic autonomy and pursuing art for its own supposed ends and internal rewards, the artist tries deliberately to lose the game of economic success by displaying his or her indifference to it. Profits, prizes, and authority (or rather economic, cultural, and social capital) must be not simply ignored or refused, but vehemently condemned.

(27) Virginia Woolf, *Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three*, Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautman, eds. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), 195. Ironically enough, Woolf was at this very moment composing *Orlando*, her most deliberate roman à clef, which experiments brilliantly with the destabilized boundary between fact and fiction.


(29) Ibid.

(30) The book, like most of Huxley’s work, nevertheless remains in print and still has a significant audience beyond the academy. It has recently been reissued as a Dover paperback (2004) and appeared under the Dalkey Archive imprint in 2001 with an introduction by Michael Dirda.


(33) . Cardan describes parasites this way: “They’re quiet, they’re gentle, they’re rather pathetic. They appeal to the protective maternal instincts. They generally have some charming talent—never appreciated by the gross world, but recognised by the patron, vastly to his credit of course (that flattery’s most delicate). They never offend like the buffoon; they don’t obtrude themselves, but gaze with doglike eyes; they can render themselves, when their presence would be tiresome, practically non-existent. The protection of them satisfies the love of dominion and the altruistic parental instinct that prompts us to befriend the weak” (29).

(34) . Huxley uses a similar conceit in *Crome Yellow* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive, 2001), where a Huxley-like character discovers that a young woman has been meticulously recording the people and events around her at a great country estate. The discovery effectively shatters his own aesthetic pretensions and, perhaps not accidentally, refers to Defoe’s own manipulation of the roman à clef in *Robinson Crusoe*: “It seemed, somehow, impossible that other people should be in their way as elaborate and complete as he in his…. The red notebook was one of those discoveries, a footprint in the sand. It put beyond a doubt the fact that the outer world really existed” (121).


(37) . Cited in Farmer et al., xliii.
The Coterie as Commodity


(40) . Lawrence, Letters, June 20, 1915, 2:359.

(41) . The prospectus is in an ALS by Dora Carrington dated October 27, 1916, HRHRC, Morrell Collection, Folder 4.1.

(42) . Dorothy Brett, ALS, December 14, 1916, HRHRC, Morrell Collection, Folder 4.1, HRHRC, Morrell Collection, Folder 3.3.


(44) . Dorothy Brett, ALS, February 10, 1917, HRHRC, Morrell Collection, Folder 4.1, HRHRC, Morrell Collection, Folder 3.5.


(46) . The ilex tree appears in the autograph copy held in the Lawrence collection at the HRHRC, Folder 25.2, notebook, 24. In the published edition, it becomes a much less distinctive “cedar tree.”

(47) . Three years later a similar conceit was used as cover art for a book of gossip columns, And the Greeks, written by Charles Graves (the brother of Robert Graves) for The Daily Mail. It features a collection of people seated around a card table whose faces have all apparently been erased—their identities presumably obscured so that Graves can dish all the more deliciously about their lives and habits.


(49) . Cited in Darroch, 251.

(50) . W. J. Turner, ALS, April 23, 1927, Morrell Collection, HRHRC, Folder 35.3.
(51) Ibid.

(52) Lawrence, *Letters*, 3:44.


(54) Lawrence, *Letters*, 3:220. This passage appears in a letter to Cynthia Asquith (the famous “Dodo”) seeking her patronage to support a private edition of the book. Lawrence continues to remain concerned about libel because, as we have seen, although such private editions might provide protection against obscenity charges they provided no such refuge from the civil tort of defamation.

(55) Lawrence, typescript draft of *Women in Love*, HRHRC, Folder 25.2, notebook, 11.

(56) For a detailed description of this incident, as well as the subsequent textual changes to the hair and eye color of Halliday and the Pussum, see Farmer, xlix.


(58) Dorothy Brett, ALS, January 15, 1917, Morrell Collection, HRHRC, Folder 3.5.

(59) In an undated letter to Morrell, Katherine Mansfield wrote, “I am sure there is only one way to answer him…. It is to laugh at him—to make fun of him—to make him realise he has made a fool of himself” (ALS, n.d., Morrell Collection, HRHRC, Folder 14.4).


(63) Cited in Darroch, 268.
(64) Following the publication of *Orlando*, for example, Woolf’s diaries carefully record the substantial fees she could command for articles and reviews while savoring the fact that she had “become two inches & a half higher in the public view” (*Diaries*, 3:201). For a lengthy discussion of Woolf’s ambivalence about her success and her manipulation of the roman à clef in *Orlando*, see chapter 4 of my “Am I a Snob?”: *Modernism and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).


(66) Ibid., 94.


(68) Ibid., 572, 577.

(69) Ibid., 567.


(71) *Wide Sargasso Sea* won the prestigious W. H. Smith Award in 1966, was subsequently dramatized and broadcast, was translated into a number of languages, and has since become a crucial text in postcolonial studies. See Carol Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990), 525–67.


(77) Ibid., 35.


(81) Ibid., 16.


(83) Ford Madox Ford, *When the Wicked Man* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932); Stella Bowen, *Drawn from Life* (London: Virago, 1984); Edouard de Nève (Jean Lenglet), *Sous les verrous* (Paris: Librarie Stock, 1933); Jean Lenglet, *Barred* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1932). The title of Rhys’s novel may have proved more prescient than she thought, for the quartet grew to include not only the four original parties to the affair, but the four texts that its disastrous consequences spawned. Among these, only Bowen’s is not a roman à clef; it is instead a memoir that publicly named Rhys and Ford, portraying both of them in a very poor light. Ford’s 1932 *When the Wicked Man* went quickly out of print and has long been condemned by critics as a feeble effort—largely, I suspect, because it is too obviously a salvo lobbed back at Rhys. Lenglet’s *Sous les verrous* was later translated into English and redacted (in a somewhat self-serving way) by Rhys, appearing as *Barred* in 1932 under the pseudonym Edward de Nève.
(84) As the editor of *transatlantic review*, Ford was a major broker of cultural capital who played an essential role in helping to market literary modernism as an anticommercial commodity. Altering Rhys’s name revealed both his canny understanding of this market as well as his ability to commute the presumably degraded roman à clef into a properly sanctified work of art. For a detailed study of Ford’s complicated relationship to the marketplace and his attempt to carve out a profitable site of relative aesthetic autonomy within it, see Mark Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2000).

(85) Jean Rhys Collection, University of Tulsa, box 1, folder 5.

(86) *Boston Transcript*, Jean Rhys Collection, University of Tulsa, box 1, folder 5.

(87) Jean Rhys Collection, University of Tulsa, box 3, folder 13.


Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

(92) Gregg, 11.


(94) Staley, 84.

(95) *Emporia Kansas Gazette*, Rhys Collection, University of Tulsa, box 3, folder 13.