



Egoism and “The Eyes of Others”: *Lord Jim*, *Miss Mole*, and the Dialogue of Literary “Brows”

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Abstract

This essay participates in recent scholarship destabilizing the binary opposition between high and middlebrow culture through a comparative study of egotism in two British novels. Rather than recovering forgotten classics such as E.H. Young’s *Miss Mole* within the categories of women’s literature or middlebrow literature, the writer examines the contribution of such novels to cultural discourses that cut across literary brows. Drawing on Wai Chee Dimock’s theory of resonance and Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism, she pairs the canonical *Lord Jim* and the insufficiently known *Miss Mole* in order to hear previously inaudible sounds in both texts and to claim their dialogic interaction. This critical approach illuminates the kinship of texts segregated by the commercial, cultural, and ideological projects of assigning brows to texts. The comparison of egotism in the two novels throws into relief both the modern anxiety that the individual might be lost amidst an indifferent and populated world and the two authors’ different responses to this anxiety. Comparison of the two novels’ treatment of egotism allows us to hear the woman’s domestic novel as a reply to the man’s adventure novel.

Key Words: Middlebrow, egoism, dialogism

One of the fundamental parts of [academia’s] responsibility is actively to study, save, and talk about the obscure, the lost, the unpopular, and the unfashionable.

--David Silbey

The protagonists in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900) and in E.H. Young’s *Miss Mole* (1930) each threaten a community by an overweening egoism that brings about a breach in the moral codes they espouse. And yet the titles of these two British novels immediately suggest their different represented realms. Highly celebrated, *Lord Jim* maintains its respected position in the literary canon by virtue of its innovative approaches to subjectivity and to narrative authority. The accomplishment of *Miss Mole* earned it the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, but the novel is little known to most readers today.¹ *Lord Jim* begins as one of Conrad’s sea yarns, drawing on traditions both of romance and of realism, and crafting a modernist, literary impressionism. Intervening in the late nineteenth-century debate about the moral costs of European imperialism, *Lord Jim* features male characters. *Miss Mole* is set in a middle-class home and concerns itself with spinsterhood, family life, and the practice of morality. It can

readily be placed within novelistic traditions of domestic realism, regional fiction, and the woman's novel.

In spite of marked differences in the two English novels, I will argue that there is much to be gained by altering the expected contexts of discussion for each novel. In this essay I will make audible the echoes and undertones that emerge through comparison of them, in order to emphasize a continuity of subjects and techniques across literary brows. By examining two novels written thirty years apart that articulate similar preoccupations about character, egoism, and morality, I also hope to shed light on the treatment of egoism in twentieth-century fiction. Comparing *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* constitutes a reading context that foregrounds the two novels' similar preoccupations and divergent literary strategies, enabling me to consider each writer's literary choices in the context of problems related to character, individualism, and egoism.

Both novels engage in an enduring English debate about the manifestation and effects of the egoistic self. The centrality of this concern emerges strikingly in *Miss Mole* when I remove it from the usual critical context in which it is discussed, the generic context of the middlebrow woman's novel, and place it in a major thematic tradition of egoism. As I develop my comparison of egoism in *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole*, I will offer a new reading of *Miss Mole* that illuminates its post-war response to egoism and to womanhood. In contrast to *Lord Jim*, in which egoism remains fatalistically at the core of the self, *Miss Mole* posits a modern, versatile self in which performativity is a key principle. Egoism allows Hannah Mole to expand her identity beyond that of a competent, discreet housekeeper. Yet, *Miss Mole* asks, since this identity is performed and not limited to private fantasy, what should be the moral limits on such egotistical self-expansion? As my analysis will demonstrate, for the post-war community truly to heal, some continuity between past and present selves must be established. Some war-time constructions of the self must be confronted, evaluated, and allowed to die.

My pairing of *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* represents a deliberate intervention in our current critical practice of segregating highbrow and middlebrow texts and treating them with different critical methodologies.² It is a claim that resituating each novel within modern debates about egoism yields meaningful interpretations of both. To place a forgotten novel in dialogue with a celebrated one is implicitly to argue for the centrality of its concerns and techniques; while to place a familiar text in a new critical context illuminates previously unimportant facets of it.

Recent scholarly attention to the material bases of modern literary movements has powerfully illuminated the period in new ways³ and has brought the study of middlebrow culture to the foreground. Scholars have demonstrated how cultural products written for and marketed to "middlebrow" readers construct and respond to middle-class taste, identity, desire, and anxieties;⁴ and they have chronicled the way in which middlebrow products arose inseparably from changes in readership, printing practices and technology, and book publishing.⁵

Some of the most interesting work on middlebrow literature has come from feminists who have identified a subcategory, the "woman's novel." Hilary Radner argues that the woman's novel both demonstrates its seriousness as art and "stubbornly rejects the status of high art":

The woman's novel says, by and large, what it means to say, refusing to reveal its secrets under the scrutiny of the analyst by displaying these last for all to see, literati and nonliterati alike. Yet the richness of its language, the subtlety of its arguments, and its undeniable intelligence and self-consciousness defy the classification of popular culture. (256)

In their respective studies, Radner and Clare Hanson persuasively demonstrate that the woman's novel, by and large excluded from academic canons, rewards sustained literary-

critical attention. Radner considers the different reading economies called for, respectively, by popular literature and academic literature and argues that the woman's novel straddles the divide between them. She valuably calls attention to the way academic practice encourages women to legitimize themselves by denying feminine experience, and identifies the dissertation novel as a subgenre of the woman's novel that resists such denial. But her identification of the genre between, even exiled from, both high and low forms reinforces the segregation of the woman's novel from the high texts privileged by academic study. Radner identifies a literary genre for the purpose of better illuminating its beleaguered position.

Following Radner, Hanson's *Hysterical Fictions* draws on Western philosophical thought and the biographies of twentieth-century female novelists to illuminate their revaluation of the feminine. Hanson argues that the woman's novel resists the Western identification of intellect with masculinity while exploring and defending the experiences of female embodiment (16). While Hanson illuminates devalued women's literature with feminist and philosophical lenses, she sees its value in its critique of dominant philosophical, mythic, and literary traditions, and like Radner, she emphasizes the qualities that distinguish the woman's novel from other novelistic forms.

While benefitting from approaches such as Hanson's and Radner's, I am primarily interested here in identifying literary traditions and methodologies that illuminate the kinship of texts segregated by the commercial, cultural, and ideological projects of assigning brows to texts. One such methodology is outlined by Wai Chee Dimock. Dimock's theory of resonance draws on recent scientific studies "about the beneficial effects of random noise on the detectability of sounds," showing how "a weak signal [may be] boosted by background noise and become [] newly and complexly audible" (1063). This notion of noise furnishes Dimock with an understanding of "all of those circumstances that complicate readers' relations to a text: circumstances that, filling their heads and ringing in their ears, make them uninnocent readers, who encroach on the text with assumptions, expectations, convictions" (1063). My comparison of egoism in *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* will constitute particular circumstances that make some features of each text resonate emphatically, while others become less audible.

Dimock's theory of resonance has several important implications for the study of middlebrow fiction. First, the endurance or "immortality" of a literary text has nothing to do with judgments that have been made about it in the past. Instead, the endurance of the text depends on individual readers activating certain of its linguistic signals: "A text can be read only insofar as readers manage to inflect it" (1066). The literary qualities of the text are likewise not fixed or static, but are those that resonate for readers past, present, and future.

Dimock's definition of the literary enables us not only to recuperate middlebrow texts, but also to establish their continuity with highbrow fiction. Adapting both Dimock's theory of resonance and Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, in this essay I pair *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* in order to hear previously inaudible sounds in both texts and to claim their dialogic interaction. Focusing on a preoccupation with egoism in both novels, my comparison will throw into relief Young's comic perspective and Conrad's tragic one; the determination of one protagonist to survive in a community through self-modification and of the other egoistically to defend himself against such modification; and the conviction of one author that in post-war England, a modern individual could survive through a kind of performative versatility of self-expansion and self-discipline; while the bleak realism of the other conceded only the isolation and the superfluity of any modern individual.

In Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, first published as a serial in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899-1900, the sea captain Charles Marlow first observes, then befriends, Jim, the youthful and romantic first mate of the *Patna*, who betrays his own and his profession's code of honor. In a

second section of the novel, set on Patusan, represented as an island close to Sumatra, Jim tries to redeem his honor and establish peace among the warring island populations. He meets with some success, but ends the novel as a tragic figure who unwittingly betrays the native peoples who had come to call him “Lord” Jim.

Readers need a more substantial introduction to *Miss Mole*. *Miss Mole* was Emily Hilda Young’s seventh novel, and when it was published in 1930, she was known as the author of *William*, whose popularity after its publication in 1925 led Jonathan Cape to reprint it four times within fourteen months.⁶ In 1935 Allen Lane selected *William* as one of its first ten cheap paperbacks. *Miss Mole* also won literary distinction, garnering the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and nominated by the French magazine *Femina* for the *prix femina anglais*, awarded to the “best work of imagination in English, published during the year by an author whose work has hitherto, in the opinion of the committee, received insufficient recognition” (“Book Awards”). In her day Young was praised for writing “satisfying” and well-made novels. To further characterize Young’s novels, reviewers often situated her in a school of writers headed by Jane Austen who applied a lightly satiric touch to “the peculiar and important sphere, quiet and limited” that she chose to represent (Marsh 172). Reviewers encouraged readers to read *Miss Mole* both for the pleasure of reading a well-made novel and to find affirmed therein the human values reflected in its protagonist and that they suspected in its author. While not using the word “middlebrow,” reviewers and critics occasionally indicated that *Miss Mole* fell desirably between two deplorable extremes, such as those of sentiment and bitterness (Lawrence 300). Indeed, one reviewer assures readers that *Miss Mole* avoids highbrow “chaos” (Tomlinson 680). Young published her first novel in 1910, was widowed during the first world war, and afterwards led a quiet and unconventional life, moving to London to live in the ground floor flat of her married lover’s Sydenham Hill residence and continuing to write and publish four more novels and two children’s books before her death in 1949.

Egoism and the Novel

Noise not only describes the process by which some sounds become more audible by my comparison, but it also evokes the strenuous nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debate about egoism. Max Stirner’s *The Ego and his Own* and Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*, both influential treatises that had been translated into English, respectively located egoism at the heart of a new philosophy of individualism or found it to be the root of social disease.⁷ In fiction, egoism often describes a character whose exercise of an excessive interest in herself or himself threatens to stifle others’ individuality. The plot of George Meredith’s *The Egoist* (1877) revolves around such an egoist, and one twentieth-century critic identified a group of contemporary novelists specializing in the representation of egoism.⁸ While *egoism* in the early twentieth century sometimes means an excessive or morbid interest in the self, *egotism* seems almost always to be used in this pejorative sense of thinking or talking too much about oneself. It is thus worth broadening a brief survey of the discourse of egoism to consider egotism. Despite or perhaps because of the influence of Nordau’s *Degeneration*, early twentieth-century commentators often emphasize that egotism should be understood as a failure of etiquette susceptible to remediation, a *faux pas* rather than a disease. For example, egotism figures in nonfiction discussions of how to balance individuality and community. Thus in 1906 British essayist A.C. Benson focuses not on the sources of egotism, finding it to be a common fault (153), but on the social situations in which it is likely to arise and on how to overcome it. And in her 1924 manifesto, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Virginia Woolf uses the governing metaphor of a code of manners to describe the changes in fiction she calls for, and suggests that the flaws in some novels (such as *Ulysses*) are best understood not as signs of cultural “decay” but as instances of egotism that arise in the absence of a “code of manners which writers and

readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship" (115). In the fiction Woolf calls for, expression born from the writer's egotism must give way to the greater maturity of a civilized dialogue between reader and writer.

Their concern about egoism in individuals brings both Conrad and Young into one of the most important debates structuring English realist novels: how to balance the claims of the individual against those of the community. Arguably, the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman* and courtship novel expressed confidence that such a balance was both achievable and desirable. The modernity, then, of both *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* arises from their renovation or subversion of nineteenth-century certainties, reflected, for example, in such traditions as the *bildungsroman* and the courtship novel.⁹ On the basis of this important similarity, the differences in the two authors' attitudes and approaches become meaningful. These differences might be distilled in the form of these principles: while the young male protagonist at the turn of the century may have the freedom to roam the globe in a quest to recover his honor, he will always be marked by his egotistical transgression of his community's ethical and professional code. But the middle-aged, single English woman of 1928 has the most fragile of holds on the economic and social capital of her community, and little ability to evade its problems. These pressures force her to modify herself and help heal the community rather than to flee from it.

Both *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* evince a number of concerns related to egoistic self-protection and self-enclosure in fantasy; both link egotism to the moral imperative of justice toward others in the community. Both novels also voice a modern anxiety about how to retain and valorize the individual amidst an indifferent and populated world. Marlow is grateful for Jim's singling him out, for that recognition enables him to keep his place "in the ranks of an insignificant multitude" (289); Hannah Mole hears in the whispering of dead leaves the warning that "like them, she would be swept into the gutter and no one would ask where she had gone" (51).

Yet as I will discuss, both novels are also wary of overweening egos that threaten a community. This wariness leads both to invoke the eyes of others as a check on egoism. In *Lord Jim* the "eyes of others" first represent the internalization of the community's expectations. The French Lieutenant, talking over Jim's case with Marlow, sees that "man is born a coward," but "habit," "necessity," and "the eyes of others" help him put aside his fear (151). In *Miss Mole* "the eyes of others" lead to the protagonist's self-modification and make possible a comic genre, but in *Lord Jim* the protagonist is tragically unable to free himself from his "exalted egoism"; it falls to Marlow to assemble "the eyes of others," and even then to assert that "it is impossible to see [Jim] clearly" (293). Critics have noticed that in *Lord Jim* the *bildungsroman* protagonist is split between Jim and Marlow;¹⁰ in light of our study of egoism, we might consider this fragmentation as an index of the *bildungsroman* character's failure to modify himself. No longer serving a moral function, the "eyes of others" come to refer to Conrad's technique. Jim does not internalize the standards of the community; he chooses instead to immerse himself in the destructive element of his dream. Conrad compensates for this stasis in his protagonist by movement around him. It is the eyes of others that move and multiply, puzzling over the fixed protagonist and enabling us to see him from many angles. Jim's egoism is thus the impetus for a significant innovation in the *bildungsroman*.

This difference between modification (in *Miss Mole*) and stasis (in *Lord Jim*) will lead me to consider dialogic techniques in each novel. The novel, Bakhtin contends, marshals a social diversity of speech types, heteroglossia, and then subjects these languages to refraction, parody, modification, or subversion. This dialogism is central to the novel's vitality. The polyphonic vitality of a novel is a measure of its linguistic, and ultimately social, strength. But Bakhtin's insights can also be applied intertextually, reminding us to hear novels in dialogue with one another and to adopt methodologies making such dialogue audible.

Both Dimock's theory of resonance and Bakhtin's dialogism point scholars toward interdisciplinary and intertextual work. Bakhtin provides a working vocabulary for my comparison of Conrad and Young, whom I place in the position of refracting and modifying each other's words. Considered as a set of intra-textual features, moreover, dialogism also returns us to a notion of the *literary* that links subject to technique, prompting us to ask how each novel makes use of dialogic modification, or, conversely, of monologic stasis. I propose this approach to the literary as an alternative to an *apriori* validation of experimental modernism.

Egoism in *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole*

The conclusion of *Lord Jim* has famously inspired a variety of interpretations, and critics are especially divided over whether readers ought to condemn Jim's decision to sacrifice himself to Doramin.¹¹ Cedric Watts, for example, finds that the conclusion of *Lord Jim* "offers a general verdict on the romantic conception of personal honour by showing that the more it resembles exalted egoism, the higher may be the price that others have to pay for it" (24). Still, it is important to note that Conrad did not consider egoism a character flaw, but an existential response to our consciousness that we are "the victims of nature" ("To R.B. Cunninghame Graham" 70). Conrad's letters to Cunninghame Greene, richly documenting his pessimistic philosophy,¹² make clear that he considered egoism an inborn drive, neither good nor evil in itself. Egoism motivates everything we do because the world beyond the self is only a "vain and fleeting appearance" (71). Akin to other forms of belief, egoism might save a human being, as Marlow puts it, from the "grim shadow of self-knowledge" that each man tries to evade (*Lord Jim* 102). The egoistic impulse not to be forgotten, to stand out, is vital, yet it is closely linked to the temptation to depart from the mariner's code of service, designating oneself a "hero," and thus to court disaster for the community. In *Lord Jim*, egoism is impossibly two-sided, both vital and disastrous. Conrad's perspective suggests that no real accommodation of egoism and society is possible, and this observation in turn explains his choice of a tragic genre.

In the first part of *Lord Jim*, Jim's egoism takes the form of faith in himself at the expense of adherence to the standards of the European seafaring community.

Although Jim is convinced that his heroic masculinity exalts him above the other members of the crew transporting 800 Muslim pilgrims across the Indian Ocean, when the Patna threatens to sink after hitting a floating wreck, Jim leaps from the ship. The egoism that accounts for this gap between self-image and action is entwined with Jim's susceptibility to romantic adventure tales. For as he looks down disdainfully on his crewmembers in the calm before the disaster, he imaginatively places himself at the center of heroic plots. Conrad's novel traces Jim's attempts after this crisis to recover his lost honor and redeem his heroic self-conception. But although in the Patusan section of the novel, when Jim finds an occasion for a second chance, he repairs many of the flaws that led to his fall in the first part, the problem presented by Jim's arrogant solitude is never resolved. Indeed, the ramifications of egoism multiply.¹³ Despite his willingness to bury himself in a remote island country in the Malay archipelago, where he tries to maintain peace between the quarrelling native populations, Jim's assumption that he is the hero of his imagination leads him to make incompatible promises to the people, with disastrous consequences. He tells his common-law wife that it is "impossible" for him ever to leave her (348), promises the native people that "everybody shall be safe" (333) when he gives free passage out of the country to Brown, a notoriously unscrupulous and violent European invader, and vows to the Bugi ruler that he is "ready to answer with his life" (333) if his word should fail. Egoism and its effects are exposed, but not resolved. Jim remains at the center of a wheel, while those who observe him are the spokes revolving around him. Jim's unresolved

egoism, his ultimate failure to integrate himself into a community, makes him the stylized subject of an elegy sung by his fellow mariners. This elegiac treatment of the *bildungsroman* hero becomes more audible when we compare *Lord Jim* to a novel like *Miss Mole*.

Before turning to egoism in *Miss Mole*, we might revisit the enterprise of juxtaposing two rather different novels published thirty years apart. I have argued for a practice of introducing unremembered classic novels into dialogue with canonical ones so that the recovery of such forgotten texts, on the one hand, expands our understanding of major literary traditions, and on the other, enables us to hear these novels differently than within such literary subcultures as women's novels or middlebrow fiction. Setting *Miss Mole* alongside *Lord Jim* enables us to see how strongly *Miss Mole* participates in the major tradition of egoism in the English novel. And yet this pairing prompts questions about the historical circumstances that can begin to account for Young's striking departure from Conrad's rich portrait of solitude and of colliding worlds.

The sweeping changes in the lives of many women in the first decades of the twentieth century help clarify Young's selection of a female egotist. The suffrage movement, women's contributions to war work, and a postwar optimism about women's capacities, fostered especially by women's magazines such as *Time and Tide* and *Good Housekeeping*, all delineate the expansion of women's previously confined lives. This expansion generated concerns about female egoism, beginning with late nineteenth-century diatribes against the New Woman.¹⁴ Still, Young's protagonist is not the New Woman but the traditionally self-suppressing housekeeper, less powerful even than a wife and mother. Hannah Mole's economic dependence, as well as the novel's postwar setting, are both pointedly established at the outset of the novel. Both are behind the despondent mood in which, early in the novel, Hannah Mole sets out to assume her new post. She constitutes "a very melancholy procession" as she follows the greengrocer's cart transporting her boxed possessions, "a detachment of an army of women like herself" (51). Hannah's personal experience of war and of the depressed postwar economy are realism's checks on the mobility of the New Woman. And yet the upward trajectory of women's lives helps us to account for the absence in *Miss Mole* of Conrad's pessimism. Egoism defeats Jim, while Hannah Mole's egotism is defeated by economic and social pressures necessitating her creation of a functioning community. Jim enjoys geographic movement and a changing circle of observers to see him from multiple angles. Hannah is often enclosed within the round of her domestic duties, and, surrounded by others both curious and indifferent, practices disguise. Flight is not possible, and self-renovation will be required. As I will argue, *Miss Mole*'s important contribution to the postwar discourse about egoism, altruism, self, and community arises from its strikingly modern exploration of performative selfhood and dialogic self-renewal. *Miss Mole*, then, is not about beginning a new life elsewhere but about release "from the cramp and confinement of personality" (Woolf, "How It Strikes a Contemporary" 238).

Like *Lord Jim*, *Miss Mole* concerns an egoistic protagonist susceptible to fantasy. At the outset of the novel, Hannah Mole accepts the post of housekeeper to the family of Robert Corder, the Nonconformist minister of the town. Her strong ego is at first a healthy defense mechanism enabling this forty-year-old spinster to thrive, particularly through her ability to adopt disguises, to perform the role of "industrious nonentity" (116) while reveling in a rich interior life of romance and satire:

. . . she was, in fact, the ideal housekeeper for Mr. Corder. She admitted that no one sitting in his dining room and mending his woven underwear at a table with a rusty little fern in the middle of a green serge cloth, could look more suitable than Hannah Mole. Who would suspect her of a sense of fun and irony, of a passionate love for beauty and the power to drag it from its hidden places? Who could imagine that Miss Mole had pictured herself, at different times, as

an explorer in strange lands, as a lady wrapped in luxury and delicate garments, as the mother of adorably naughty children and the inspiringly elusive mistress of a poet? She could turn up her long nose at these fanciful excursions, without convincing herself of their improbability. (38)

At the outset of the novel, then, the reader feels confident that Hannah Mole has the imagination, the maturity (especially in the form of her “ironic conception of herself”), and the egoism necessary to expand her experience beyond the narrow range of her duties. She vows to “judge[] herself by the shadow she chose to project for her own pleasure” and to make others accept this creation (9).

In fact, the tension in the novel revolves around an excess of egoism, which Hannah exercises, like Jim, in both her exterior and interior lives. First, Hannah balks at the tacit household policy of submission to the egoism of the widowed Robert Corder, whose family consists of two daughters, a nephew, and an absent son. Delighted that her satirical wit will have an arena for exercise, Hannah engages in both covert and not-so-covert challenges to Corder’s authority, intelligence, and judgment, amazed that his fond self-image can withstand her attacks. Hannah’s enjoyment of her antagonism to Corder reaches a crisis, however, when she catches a glimpse of herself in the same enlarging mirror of egoism. On one occasion Corder’s complacent self-deception startles Hannah “into the fear that her opinion of herself was just as fond” (147). Shortly thereafter, she admits a possible affinity with Corder: “perhaps [Corder] shared her own desire to be kind and was frustrated by the same cause, the insistent craving to be impressive” (193). The relief of finding another who, at least in her imagination, suffers as she does under the burden of his own personality, paves the way for Hannah to make a “concession”:

And as there was not room for two such people [with an insistent craving to be impressive] in the same house and one must make way for the other, it was Hannah, who flattered herself on her superior sight, who must stand aside while he went blindly on. (193-94)

Of course, in Young’s humorous construction, Hannah makes little sacrifice of her egoism in this decision to retreat from the stage. After all, Hannah authors the script in which she is provided a new, altruistic role: she will present herself to him “as the person who understood” (193) his disappointments. Nevertheless, Hannah’s gesture of conciliation depends on the recognition, necessary for the existence of community, of an other who is like oneself. This perception of an unflattering image of oneself in an other is the first step in Hannah’s journey to exchange self-absorbed fantasy for sobering self-confrontation.

The second arena of Hannah’s egoism tests the limits of her versatile, performative approach to selfhood. When a new minister, one Mr. Pilgrim, arrives in town, Hannah is devastated to recognize the same man who chastised her ten years earlier, in the cottage on her own farm, for living with a man, a rehabilitating World War I soldier. Now, when Pilgrim tries to pin the sin on Hannah, she quickly invents an alter-ego, a cousin “Hilda” who can serve as a scapegoat for Pilgrim’s censure. But Pilgrim stands his ground. And Corder’s daughter Ethel, who wants to marry Mr. Pilgrim, needs to know whether he is a man of honor and truth. Hannah’s self-protection, then, turns out to be incompatible with justice toward others in the community. When this becomes clear, though it will undoubtedly mean her dismissal from her position, Hannah admits that Hilda is a fiction. Up until this point in the novel, the middle-aged single woman’s cultivation of disguises functioned for Hannah as a mechanism of survival in a community unwilling to embrace women’s potential for greater responsibility and freedom. At this turning point in *Miss Mole*, Young signals that Hannah’s indulgence in fictional selves will not be a long-term solution to her self-renovation within the postwar community.

Having examined Conrad's and Young's narrations of problematic egoism, we may now consider their different resolutions of it. Jim's activities on Patusan benefit from little dialogue with others. His conviction of his superiority ostracizes him from the community of Western mariners. Even though Marlow concurs with Jewel that Jim is "strong, true, wise, brave" (278), Marlow insists that "from all the multitudes that peopled the vastness of that unknown there would come, . . . neither a call nor a sign for him" (277-78). Yet his belonging to that sphere—he is always "one of us"—means that he never reliably integrates himself into the community of racial others he chooses for his redemption. Counterintuitively, Jim's efforts to release himself from egoism as he integrates himself into a new community lead only to a confirmation of that self-enclosure. For example, he loves Patusan with a "fierce egoism" because he sees it as the instrument of his restored self-confidence (226). And the greater Jim's success as a "benevolent" invader, the more isolated he is from "his people," for they endow him with a mythical status. Jim's suspension between two communities leads to the failure of dialogic modification, a monologism that Bakhtin associates with the centripetal language of authority. Jim's construction of himself at the center of heroic plots and his subsequent exclusion from two worlds can be contrasted to Hannah's Mole's perception of herself as marginal and her subsequent inclusion in communities, for she forms no fewer than five discrete bonds of kinship, caretaking, friendship, and love: from the outset of the novel, when she claims association with a prosperous cousin in order to secure a job, to the conclusion, when she recognizes and accepts a relationship of romantic love.

Both *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* invoke "the eyes of others" as an antidote to egoism. Conrad's well-known impressionist method is a commitment to multiple points of view. Ironically, though, this impressionist vision is reserved for Conrad's narrator, Marlow. Thus although *Lord Jim* repeatedly emphasizes Conrad's impressionist credo that only the perceiving subject makes a character exist,¹⁵ and although Jim is seen by multiple others, the "eyes of others" do not save him from his final mistakes of egoism.

In contrast, *Miss Mole* invokes the eyes of others first to indicate *Miss Mole's* necessarily double vision and her defensive posture: to retain her position as housekeeper, she must keep in sight others' view of her; to preserve her integrity, she must uphold her own view. Later, the eyes of others make possible Hannah's first steps toward modification. This modification brings us to a set of key literary features in E.H. Young's novels: dialogism. The plot structure—Hannah first encloses herself in her own moral and fictional structures, then opens these up for modification—is echoed on a small scale by Young's use of a range of dialogic exchanges.¹⁶

This dialogism suggests not only Young's skillful practice of the novel as Bakhtin conceives it, but her faith in the ability of the modern woman both to renovate herself and to retain her integrity. When Hannah relinquishes "Hilda," she admits the rights and claims of others, and doing away with this *doppelgänger* can thus be understood as a release from egoism. It also initiates the process by which the bared secret of Hannah's interlude with a lover, ten years before the action of the novel begins, forces her to see it with the eyes of others. She can readily dismiss the authoritarian ministers' view that, as an unmarried woman with a lover, she was "bad," but she can less readily dismiss the view of a new suitor, who confronts the former lover still occupying the cottage owned by Hannah, and sees him for the scoundrel and squatter that he is. Hannah had imbued the soldier's and her own deeds with heroic glamor, but this intrusion of a less flattering interpretation of her former lover allows that glamor to die. This relinquishment of a second fantasy—that Hannah had protected her past because it was a beautiful treasure—frees Hannah to see herself anew, to see that she loves and is loved by the new suitor. As this new vision emerges, it will enable Hannah to jettison her persuasion that

she must survive through a series of disguises that match others' diverse expectations of demure spinster, surrogate mother, or humorless, strait-laced housekeeper.

Two dialogues between Hannah and the new lover, Samuel Blenkinsop, illustrate the complex set of responses that comprise the contrasting stages of resistance to and engagement in self-modification. These responses include blindness, shame, outraged indignity, self-mockery, and mutual laughter. The first dialogue is a comic double entendre; in the second, a dialogue of mutual enlightenment, each character confronts and discards a false view. In the double entendre exchange, Hannah thinks that Mr. Blenkinsop has fallen in love with one Mrs. Ridding and that he would like to extricate her from her marriage. Mr. Blenkinsop refers to himself in the third person and voices a veiled admission of love for Hannah and ambivalence about a contemplated dramatic change in his life:

"But there'll have to be a rescue, of another kind, sooner or later," he said, and Hannah told herself that he had come to the party to talk to her about Mrs. Ridding.

"I'm afraid to offer to help," she said, "in case I do the wrong thing again, but if I can, I will."

"The ridiculous part of it," he confided, "is that I believe he'd be just as happy without her." [Blenkinsop: I would be just as happy without Hannah Mole. Hannah: Mr. Ridding would be just as happy without Mrs. Ridding.]

"Well, that's a comfort, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I think it makes it worse."

"You're the best judge of that, Mr. Blenkinsop, but I should call it an extenuating circumstance."

"These people simply suck the strength out of their relations—like vampires," Mr. Blenkinsop said, becoming fanciful under emotion. "I believe he'd be better if he had a thorough change." [Blenkinsop refers to a recent, suffocating family gathering. Hannah presumes he refers to Mr. Ridding.]

"Of wives?" Hannah asked flippantly.

"I shouldn't care to offer anybody the position," he said bitterly. (204)

In a double entendre, true dialogism is suppressed, as another's words are modified by misunderstanding. In this instance, the words and ideas that Hannah and Blenkinsop fear, hope to conceal, or are otherwise obsessed by, each in their distinct ways, are the ones each of them "hears" in the speech of the interlocutor. Each participant not only "hears" these words, but may respond to and act on them without the other ever saying them.

Young's use of double entendre serves as a comic foil to the final scene between Hannah and her unrecognized suitor. In this second scene, Hannah first resists and then accepts the "exposure" of her secret. The declaration of love between Blenkinsop and Hannah turns on two different understandings of "exposure," a turn that enables us to see efficiently dialogic modification at work. Hannah has been fearing the exposure to daylight of her memory, a "beautiful treasure" that she has kept from the prying eyes of others (126), and she has feared that such exposure will mean its distortion by those eyes as "sin." Blenkinsop, however, wants to expose the disreputable character of the former lover. This second dialogue includes anger, laughter, and mutual enlightenment. The final moment of clarification is Blenkinsop's "unmistakable accents" of desire for Hannah (287), accents that undo the early misunderstanding of the double entendre.

The resonance of “the eyes of others” enables us to see a significant contrast in *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole*. Laid alongside *Lord Jim*, *Miss Mole* takes “others” more seriously. They are engaged human beings with claims and points of view, and they force movement and modification in the protagonist. E.H. Young’s model for a novel is fundamentally dialogic, while *Lord Jim* adopts tragedy to signal the end of one kind of character—the egoist who cannot be modified—and (as others have observed) the beginning of another, Marlow, who sees rather than acts. Jim’s egoism makes him an archaic character. When the story is told about him, he is already in the past, and Marlow’s portrait of Jim tells of his tragic demise, forgotten by the seafaring community from which he originally intended to shine forth through his heroism, and recuperated only through the multiple perspectives incorporated in Marlow’s narrative. Thus for Conrad egoism is the basis of a tragic genre, of death for an individual and of the community basing its ethics on such a character, while for Young it is the basis of comedy, capable of stimulating members of a community to modify themselves.

What might we conclude from Conrad’s and Young’s different treatments of an egoistic character? Scholars such as J.H. Stape have seen Conrad’s purpose as a revision of romance and adventure novels; might we see *Miss Mole* as an equally meaningful intervention in the literature of egoism? Heard in resonant dialogue, the two novels make audible the acute problems presented by egoistic characters, prone to fantasies that romanticize their own prosaic situations and forced to reconcile these fantasies somehow with the expectations of their communities. But when we “listen to” *Miss Mole* against the background noise of *Lord Jim*, Young’s choice of a “drab,” middle-aged spinster in a very English community sounds like a provocative response to Conrad’s choice of an exotic setting and a youthful protagonist—“one of us”—who has already secured the opportunity to break from the worn-out conventions of his father’s generation. The juxtaposition of *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* makes us hear E.H. Young entering the charged, elastic environment that characterizes the discourse of egoism.¹⁷ In this dialogic context, Young insists that most of “us” need to meet the expectations of family and community within the context of domesticity, and some of us are women. Writing about *Lord Jim* as a contemporary of Young, Elizabeth Drew admired the dimensions of *Lord Jim* to which Young dialogically responds: “Perhaps it is because Conrad loves best to tell of those lives which are most remote from ordinary social contacts, by reason of race or personality, chance or choice, that men play so much larger a part than women in his novels” (234). In this context, Drew finds understandable the notorious scarcity and flatness of Conrad’s female characters. In contrast, Young has chosen to tell of lives that are central to “ordinary social contacts.”

Perhaps most importantly, the comparison of *Miss Mole* and *Lord Jim* emphasizes the degree to which *Miss Mole* is participating strenuously in a literary tradition. I underscore this point in part because, as I have argued, recent treatments of the now forgotten novels tend to theorize them as works of middlebrow fiction, a designation that, while it has valuably brought to light the degree to which successful texts responded to and shaped readers’ interests, tastes, and anxieties, has often neglected to give such novels sustained literary-critical attention.

I want to use my comparison of *Lord Jim* and *Miss Mole* not to reaffirm the place of one novel in the ranks of modernist texts and of the other within the multitudes of the middlebrow, but to point toward an approach to literary tradition that acknowledges, following Wai Chi Dimock, that the meaning and value of literary texts arise in particular reading contexts rather than in any qualities inherent in the texts. As well, I want to promote the dialogic pairing of texts across brows, a reading context that encourages us to hear the intertextual resonance of ideas and the distinctive techniques that constitute the literary qualities of each text.

¹ Nonetheless, Young's novels have enjoyed recent scholarly attention, including scholarly articles by Stella Deen (2001, 2002, 2003); Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti (2001); Kathy Mezei (2007); and a monograph by Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei (2006).

² Some valuable exceptions include examinations of the interdependence of high and low forms, such as Di Battista and McDiarmid's *High and Low Moderns* and Scholes's *Paradox of Modernism*, and studies integrating high, middle, and low texts through topical or thematic approaches, including those by Baldick, Cavaliero, Caserio, and Trotter. Additional important work to deconstruct the binary opposition of high and low culture has been undertaken within the context of the Space Between Society and the Modernist Studies Association.

³ For studies focusing on modernism, see Rainey, Wexler, Ardis, and Collier.

⁴ For examples, see Beauman, Grover, and Humble.

⁵ Janice Radway's *A Feeling for Books* offers a fascinating and detailed study of how these factors shaped the American Book-of-the-Month Club.

⁶ Records of Jonathan Cape, University of Reading

⁷ *The Ego and His Own* was first translated into English in 1907. Between 1900 and 1929, writes Michael Levenson, forty-nine editions of the work appeared (65-66).

⁸ Gerald Gould, "The Egoism Specialists" in *The English Novel of To-Day*

⁹ For an excellent brief overview of *Lord Jim*'s relation to the *bildungsroman*, see Stape.

¹⁰ See Katz, McCracken, and Stape.

¹¹ For a concise survey of critics' differences on this point, see Stape 76.

¹² Conrad's skepticism is documented in Meyers 166; Graham 206, and less specifically, in Wiley. It is more extensively discussed by John Saveson, who links Jim's egoism to Conrad's interest in the theories of English psychologist James Sully. Saveson finds that Marlow uses "egoism" specifically to describe Jim as an "intuitional and Kantian moralist" (463), who, once isolated from society, allows his ethics to be dictated by his "romantic and ideal aspiration" to "exceed commonplace morality" (464).

¹³ Following from the initial egoistic gap between Jim's imagination and reality, Jim is isolated from others "of his kind" (e.g. 243); and through the comments of the European seafaring community, Conrad considers the modern human struggle to remain known in a world indifferent to our actions. Jim's egoistic isolation strongly colors his relationship to Jewel, making unthinkable a happy resolution to the courtship plot (e.g. 351); it informs his quasi-mythical status on Patusan; and it bears directly on his ill-judged pact with Brown and on the preoccupation in the novel more generally with questions of racial prestige and "benevolent" imperialism.

¹⁴ On the supposed unbounded egoism of the new woman, see Pykett, chapter 3 and Katz, chapter 2.

¹⁵ For example, Marlow remarks to his auditors, "[Jim] existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you" (208).

¹⁶ The dialogic techniques in *Miss Mole* include the narrator adopting and parodying the words of a character and the antagonistic domestic verbal contests of Hannah Mole and Robert Corder, in which each is forced to modify herself.

¹⁷ I refer to Bakhtin's account of the dialogic orientation of discourse, in which any utterance about an object or theme enters an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme.

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