Imagining Justice | INTRODUCTION

Modernity is not a concept philosophical or otherwise
but a narrative category.
—Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*

Let us define "ethical intention" as
aiming at the "good life" with and for others,
in just institutions.
—Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*

Justice is always a revision of justice
and the expectation of a better justice.
—Emmanuel Levinas, "Uniqueness," *Entre Nous*

In his first novel, *Untouchable* (1928), the celebrated Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand follows a day in the life of an untouchable boy named Bakha, whose travails in a small village raise complex questions about the ethical and political dimensions of modernity in late-colonial India. One of the first novels to feature the outcaste as hero, *Untouchable* documents the conflicts between Bakha's obligations as a sweeper and his rising ethical awareness, which grows over the course of the novel and infuses its subjective, highly focalized narration. The novel is stunning in its depiction of the corporeality of Bakha's existence, incorporating the sounds and smells of the village streets and the tactility of untouchable life. At the same time, it invites us to glimpse the complexity of Bakha's naïve perspective and the challenge it poses to received ideas about caste, class, and colonialism in early-twentieth-century India.

But in the novel's final pages, politics enters more directly, bringing the ethical dimension of Bakha's daily life into contact with global issues of colonialism and development while challenging the assumptions we as readers have made about the narrative's sphere of activity. Bakha stumbles into a crowd waiting for Gandhi to address a political meeting, and the narrative steps out of its narrow, focalized perspective to deliver Gandhi's speech and several reactions to it, almost verbatim. Bakha listens to Gandhi speak about the problem of

untouchability, which he lives day in and day out, thrilled by the fact that the Mahatma "will talk about us,"[1] and he imagines himself rising onto the platform and sharing his woes with Gandhi. When Gandhi tells a story about a sweeper he has known, Bakha seems almost to enter the center of political life, identifying with that sweeper and taking part in his influence on such a powerful man. Yet the Mahatma's speech confuses him.

> "If there are any Untouchables here," he heard the Mahatma say, "they should realize that they are cleaning Hindu society." (He felt like shouting to say that he, an Untouchable, was there, but he did not know what the Mahatma meant by "cleaning Hindu society.") He gave ear to the words ... "In order to emancipate themselves they have to purify themselves." ... But, now the Mahatma is blaming us, Bakha felt. "That is not fair!"
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> (148)

This passage echoes Bakha's discomfort during an earlier conversation with a missionary whose evocation of original sin also seemed to be blaming him for his condition ("everyone thinks us at fault" [133]). He feels conflicted about how to reconcile his gratitude for Gandhi's sympathy and his own clear sense, supported by all we have witnessed during this day-in-the-life narrative, that he is not at fault for his situation and cannot possibly "emancipate himself," as it seems Gandhi is asking him to do. In sorting through this conflict, he employs the language of ethics ("that is not fair!") and raises the question of Gandhi's focus on individual virtue as a first step toward political resistance, even as he thrills at Gandhi's ethical egalitarianism, his willingness to stand next to an untouchable on the platform, and his commitment to justice for those like Bakha.[2]

Immediately following Gandhi, however, a poet in the crowd offers another approach to the problem of untouchability and to India's status in the world, one that embraces the potential of modern technology and uses the language of political rights rather than ethical responsibilities. Gandhi is wrong to shut India off from the world and from the machine age, he argues. Not only will modern technology help alleviate India's poverty, it will also help liberate the untouchables from the labor that taints them, thus granting them political rights in civil society.

> When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it—the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.
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> (155)

For the poet, engaging with modernity carries with it potential access to a rational system of political rights, obviating the need for the broad discussion of virtue and personal responsibility proposed by Gandhi and generating a more recognizably political version of justice. For his part, Bakha, who has overheard this speech in the crowd, wonders at the miracle of the machine that can clear away dung and at the potential to improve his status without the ethical stigma of blame. He is attracted both to the strange power of the Mahatma, who has been willing to stand side by side with the untouchables, and by the promise of the flush toilet, which might mean political liberation from the age-old enslavement of sweeping. "Torn between his enthusiasm for Gandhi and the difficulties in his own awkward, naïve self" (157), Bakha dreams of a way to access both ethical and political forms of liberation, to revel in the Mahatma's wondrous recognition of the untouchables, even while dreaming that someday he will be able to find the miraculous machine that will grant him freedom.

Dropped into the end of Bakha's story, these episodes are often decried as failures of narrative continuity; surely they represent lacunae of sorts, moments when reported speech about public political issues seems to disrupt the progress of an otherwise personal narration. Yet we can also read them as important events of textual modernism, where gaps in narrative consistency can signal moments of alternate logic and where defamiliarization works on several levels at once, linking Bakha's naïve confusion in the crowd to the disruptive power of Indian politics and to the libratory potential of machine-age technology. They insinuate a complex narrative dynamic into the novel, one that unsettles its own temporal structure as the text swings from the static moment of the represented speech back to the progress of Bakha's day, even while gesturing toward the possible future of Indian modernity. Gandhi tells a story about an untouchable friend from his past, adding another layer of temporal disruption and embedded narration into the novel, which propels Bakha not only into Gandhi's orbit but also, when he identifies with the protagonist of Gandhi's story, into the center of a broader conversation about the place of

tradition in the future of Indian modernity. The episode of the speech thus disrupts, supplants, and rewrites the action of *Untouchable*, inscribing into the level of the text a key problematic of modernity, which we might describe as an encounter with "a substantive range of socio-historical phenomena [including] capitalism, bureaucracy, [and] technological development," as well as the accompanying "experiences of temporality and historical consciousness"[3]—or what Foucault calls an attitude toward time. At the same time, this day-in-the-life narrative is also infused with the temporal twists and uneven development of economic and political modernization.[4] As we reach the end of the novel, sinking back into Bakha's point of view, the sweeper's role has been transformed from naïve to perspicacious and from a position irrevocably bound to the past to one that pivots toward an uncertain future. His ethical perspective has intersected the most pressing matters of modernity and political justice for India even as, at the end of the narrative, he turns toward his family, his village, and the day-to-day challenge of his own untouchable status.

In this way, *Untouchable* brings to the fore the intertwined problems of untouchability and modernity while demonstrating the role of narrative in linking ethics and politics. The situation of Bakha, our naïve hero, is from the beginning of the novel one that entails him in ethical encounters, raises questions about his obligations to others (and of others toward him), and discloses the narrative dimension of the ethical problem of untouchability, even as it prompts us as readers to respond to that problem. E. M. Forster's classic preface to the novel puts the claim succinctly: "The sweeper is worse off than a slave,"[5] but over the course of his day that slave is nonetheless plagued by concern about his duty to do his job as sweeper and about his obligations to his father, his sister, and his neighbors. A key event in the novel concerns Bakha's attempt to help an injured high-caste boy whose mother reviles the sweeper's touch more than she cares about her son's welfare and berates Bakha for having picked up her stricken child and brought him to her. "What had he done to deserve such treatment?" Bakha asks himself, in outrage, pointing out his ethical obligation: "He loved the child . . . it was impossible not to pick him up" (116). This statement becomes an ethical pivot in the narrative, drawing a stark contrast between Bakha's thoughtful but naive perspective and the callousness of the townspeople, who feel no obligation, ethical or otherwise, toward an untouchable.

From this moment on, "untouchability" in this novel stands for not only ethical responsibility and its primordial obligations but also for its motivating position in the narrative of (a) modern Indian life. When, in the scene that follows, the missionary tells Bakha "we are all sinners" (130) or Gandhi asks the untouchables to purify themselves, the text highlights the disjunction between the public discourse surrounding the problem of untouchabilty and Bakha's ethical subjectivity, which throws the future into doubt. We might say that the untouchable boy represents the very principle of ethical obligation to an other—or, as Simon Critchley puts it (reading Derrida), the "infinite responsibility of unconditional hospitality"—and marks this obligation as a structuring principle of narrative, both fictional and national-historical.[6] The dilemma the novel seems to address, then, in both its content and its form, is how to place the ethical potential of the sweeper boy at the center of the story of untouchability and build from it new narratives of justice for India.

This episode also clearly foregrounds the political problem that arises from the complex temporalities of modernity in late-colonial India, where matters of independence and nation building gesture toward both the power of India's pre-British, agricultural past and also the new social models made possible by commerce, modernity, and the machine. Gandhi's political program of Swadeshi (self-reliance) is linked to the past and can seem in many ways antimodern. It encouraged Indians to throw off their colonial status by refusing to play their assigned role as consumers of British goods and by turning to previous modes of production and technologies, such as the traditional spinning wheel, that would help them become independent of British commodity capitalism and its commercial technology. At the same time, the legacy of Swadeshi, as scholars from Sumit Sarkar to Dipesh Chakrabarty have made clear, is not wholly antimodern.[7] If Ashis Nandy calls Gandhi's position "critical traditionalism," Chakrabarty will argue that the examination of the self (and its virtues) within an inexorably public realm, which accompanies the program of Swadeshi in India, creates a new version of subjectivity we might call the "Gandhian modern."[8] Bakha's dilemma—how to access a Gandhian modern subjectivity without relinquishing the liberating elements of technology and commerce or the access they might provide to political freedoms—represents the often-paradoxical dimensions of political modernity in late-colonial India.

In this way, *Untouchable* also brings to the fore one of the central arguments of this book: that narrative can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between ethics and politics, connecting ethical attitudes and responsibilities—ideas about what we ought to be and do—to

active creation of political relationships and just conduct—what is right and possible within the power structures and discourses of our social life and institutions.[9] In narrative we put ethics into play and begin to imagine justice, acting to generate and respond to the social relationships and obligations that shape the future of our common world.[10] The ethical demands of alterity infuse the narrative situation and the process by which we attempt to respond to it even as the narrative itself takes place as an ethical event between writers and readers that responds to, intervenes in, and changes its rhetorical and social situation. As Derek Attridge puts it, "The distinctiveness of the ethical in literature . . . is that it occurs as an *event* in the process of reading, not a theme to be registered, a thesis to be grasped, or an imperative to be followed or ignored."[11] Problems of chronology, emplotment, voice, and structures of address all extend the question of how we narrate our ethical responsibility to others and foreground not only the "ethical consequences" of narration but also the "reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader" and the actions that arise from them.[12] Yet if we consider how narratives come into being, take up the matter of who narrates and from what location, or examine the rhetorical exigence within which a narrative is situated, we immediately verge on worldly questions of history and politics.[13]

Our political being-in-common and the structures of justice to which it gives rise develop out of our understanding of our responsibilities and obligations to ourselves and others within both the moral and social realms, and they emerge in the ways that we account for ourselves to others in narration. Hannah Arendt makes clear that this act of narration, which goes on between and among people, constitutes a "web of human relations" in which political action takes place.[14] As a genre or mode, narrative arises in conjunction with particular rhetorical situations or exigences that call forth its action in the world.[15] At the same time, by reordering, recasting, and reconfiguring events, characters, and stories, narrative functions as the site of innovation and re-creation of the world, the intersection of the aesthetic and epistemological in the creation of new "facts" or ways of viewing them, the construction of a new narrative world as an object of knowledge and sensation, and the work of language and the imagination to figure and transform this world.[16] "Such a position . . . does not imply that the universe is merely the product of our interpretations," to quote Kenneth Burke, but rather emphasizes the inescapable situatedness of the narrative text, whose "'discoveries' are nothing other than revisions made necessary by the nature of the world itself."[17] In arguing this point, I do not claim that imaginative narratives always intervene directly in the public sphere (though they may) or inevitably carry real-world political power. Rather, I recognize, along with Gayatri Spivak, that in order to have such power, the event of narration, which takes place "as an indeterminate sharing between writers and readers," would need a public arena and an audience predisposed to attend to it.[18] Yet, like Dipesh Chakrabarty, I want to "contemplate narrative . . . as a form of political intervention."[19] Our imaginative narratives, whether in the form of memoir, reportage, fiction, or essay, create what Paul Ricoeur calls a realm of "as if," where the world can be both described and redescribed[20] and where new possible worlds make ethical and political claims upon our understanding of this one.[21] When the imaginative re-creation of the world takes place within the narrative web of human situations and relationships, narrative engages with politics and the possibilities of future justice.

Further, as I will argue, whether written in the metropolitan centers of Europe, the long-marginalized spaces of late-colonial India, Civil War Spain, or the proletarian neighborhoods of the American Midwest, modernism brings to the fore narrative's role in helping us imagine justice. Modernism, I will claim, stands for a dynamic set of relationships, practices, problematics, and cultural engagements with modernity rather than a static canon of works, a given set of formal devices, or a specific range of beliefs. As Susan Stanford Friedman has argued, it escapes nominal definition, even as a plurality, and exceeds our efforts to describe it through its difference from what came before or after.[22] Even where modernism seems to exhibit certain formal preoccupations, such as textual defamiliarization, refusal of strict verisimilitude, or play with the vagaries of space and time, it is clear that these are neither necessary nor ubiquitous conditions but rather signs or symptoms of a particular attitude toward a specific literary horizon of expectations. Nor can we pretend that such a list of preoccupations stands in for the practices, relationships, or problematics that motivate the great variety of modernisms as they emerge worldwide.

Rather, I would argue, modernist narrative might best be seen as a constellation of rhetorical actions, attitudes, or aesthetic occasions, motivated by the particular and varied situations of economic, social, and cultural modernity worldwide and shaped by the ethical and political demands of those situations.[23] Its rhetorical activity exists in constant and perpetual relationship to the complex, various, and often vexing demands of the social practices, political discourses, and

historical circumstances of modernity and the challenges they pose to systems of representation—even as its forms and attitudes sometimes hide this fact. Further, the aesthetic dimensions of modernist narrative enlist the play of imagination in creating possible worlds that emerge from, correct, revise, and re-create these social and political situations and do so through their "vigorous and persistent attempts to multiply and disturb modes of representation."[24] The very term "modernity" seems to inaugurate an aesthetic attitude of contingency that privileges the present, like Baudelaire's perpetual search for the "transitory, fleeting beauty of our present life." [25] Yet its investment in the "new" also gestures toward the possibility of a (political) future, even while remaining suspicious of historical teleologies, thereby opening a potential sphere of activity for even the most experimental or disruptive modernist texts.[26]

Emerging in a multiplicity of languages, locations, cultures, and social temporalities, as Spivak, Arjun Appardurai, and Chakrabarty remind us, modernism's local situations and commitments modulate the possible global meanings of modernism and modernity even as they remind us of the political challenges to which they respond. To be sure, when we move beyond the European centers that are the source for most common Euro-American definitions of modernism, we will find a wider range of formal preoccupations as well as a broader set of attitudes toward modernity than those we are used to recognizing. Many of the texts I will take up in this book, for example, test the boundaries between reportage and fiction or between memoir and bildungsroman as a means of rewriting the experience of reality under the pressure of economic and social modernization. They often foreground folkways and the marks of the vernacular as part of their encounter with the public discourses of modernity, and they experiment with narrative modes like *skaz* (or the sketch) as a means of unsettling the linear temporalities and narrative expectations of representative prose fiction. They sometimes begin from an intimate, embodied sensibility, which may exist in contact and concert with cosmopolitan attitudes toward ethics and justice, thus creating a fiction both intimate and global.

In other words, in ways often more dramatic than in the canonical modernisms of metropolitan Europe and the United States, the texts I will explore over the course of this book destabilize the division between partisanship and aesthetics—indeed, often challenging the distinction between these two terms, using narrative experimentation as a force of social activity and grounding their formal resistance to consensus-based realism in their oppositional political engagement. In this way, as I will argue, reading modernism transnationally shifts our perspective on the forms and commitments of modernism, asking us to recognize the rhetorical action its forms undertake and the continuum of political engagement that undergirds its worldwide emergence. In particular, this book will look to explicitly political writing in several global locations in an effort to challenge the distinction usually drawn between politically engaged writing and self-consciously aesthetic or experimental modernism; to resist the segregation of so-called thirties or overtly political writing from what was once called "high" modernism; and to emphasize situated political commitment as a narrative concern central to the many varieties of transnational modernism.

Scholars of postcolonialism have described how the "links between writings in different parts of the Empire, and at different times in the colonized or ex-colonized world" bring into play the problematics of empire in varied locations.[27] In a similar way, this book argues that the specific ethical and political imperatives of worldwide modernisms link works to one another, forming nodes of interconnection that, in turn, help to extend and illuminate modernism's political commitments and its varied roles in imagining justice around the globe. We have long taught ourselves to see the formal lines of influence that tie modernist texts to one another, linking Joyce or Proust to Woolf and (more recently) Ocampo, much as the gossamer webs link characters across London in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Jahan Ramazani has reminded us that modernist writers rarely fit neatly into national paradigms, and he argues for an alternate literary history in which "transnational creolization, hybridization, and interculturation become almost as basic to our understanding of modernism as they are of the postcolonial."[28] But rarely do we recognize that the social and political situations of modernism create alternative global lines of contact and association, which are equally important, unusual, and complex, such as the links between Joyce and Anand that I will explore in chapter 2. Frederic Jameson argues that modernism "must be seen as a project that re-emerges over and over again with the various national situations as a specific and unique national-literary task or imperative, whose cross cultural kinship with its neighbors is not always evident."[29] This book seeks to make that kinship visible, even when lines of direct influence or formal affinity are absent. Transnationalism, in my use of the term, becomes not just an adjective describing a particular cosmopolitan attitude among a specific set of texts or authors (though it is that,

too)—it describes a web of social and textual interrelationships linking modernisms worldwide as well as an optic through which to see these links.

In this way my use of the term "transnational" bears some affinities with Ramazani's "transnational poetics" even as it also hopes to extend the term beyond the specific travels, influences, or allegiances of writers and their texts, focusing instead on the ethical, social, and political domains in which texts arise and circulate.[30] Ramazani argues convincingly that, "modernists translated their frequent geographic displacement and transcultural alienation into a poetics of bricolage and translocation, dissonance and defamiliarization."[31] Yet if Mulk Raj Anand devises *Untouchable* somewhere in the hybrid spaces between London, England, and Sabarmati, India, it is not this fact that creates his work as transnational. Rather, Anand's very literary practice, in which the category of "untouchability" becomes the nexus not only of narrative and linguistic innovation but also of deep engagement with the specific social, historical, and political problematics of Indian modernity, links his novel to modernisms engaged with similar problematics elsewhere. In this sense he participates in the spaces of "exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur . . . without necessary mediation by the center" that Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih attibute to "minor Transnationalism."[32] The interconnection of narrative experimentation with commitment to the representations of subaltern experience that we see in Anand's work, as much as his use of irony, defamiliarization, or internal points of view, ties Anand to Joyce and, in more oblique ways, to Woolf and the other modernists I consider in this book. Indeed, Anand foregrounds this connection in his *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, remembering that it was in recognizing, during the General Strike of 1926, the similarities between London's workers and India's downtrodden that he became able to imagine a politically committed modernism for India.[33] In other words, the text need not be explicitly preoccupied with themes of dislocation, hybridity, or transculturation, nor the author an exile or itinerant, for a narrative to function transnationally. Even when resolutely local in its concerns or national in its literary ambitions, a narrative may also illuminate and engage the many nodes of interconnection, both literary and political, that interlink modernisms worldwide.

I also employ the term "transnational" as a critical optic that shares the oppositional valence of the prefix "trans-" in such words as "transgress" and "transform." In addition to simply meaning "across, over, and beyond," the prefix "trans-" can imply "on the other side of," representing not only a crossing of boundaries but also a challenge to the normative dimension of the original entity or space. Most prominently, the prefix has this valence in contemporary transgender and transsexual theory, where, as scholars like Judith Halberstam and Susan Stryker employ it, "trans-" has come to stand not only for gender or sexual identities that have crossed from one side of a binary field to the other but also for "anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates and makes visible" the links we assume to exist between a sexual body and the social roles it is expected to play. Transgender studies thus engages with the ethical and moral dimensions of the fact that "people experience and express their gender in fundamentally different ways" and concerns itself with combating the political "injustices and violence that often attend the perception of gender nonnormativity."[34] In a similar way, the "trans-" dimension of the transnational critical optic I employ in this book seeks to denaturalize the connection between modernist narrative and its Euro-metropolitan contexts as, more generally, between the nation-state and literary forms; to raise the ethical dimensions of texts that operate both within and across national horizons of expectation; and to highlight the political implications of this nonnormative movement on both local and global levels. This book thus seeks not simply to accommodate modernism's less-explored Spanish, Indian, or Caribbean versions, or to illuminate the sometimes oblique or effaced lines of contact between and among them, but also to mark their importance to a reconceived transnational model of modernism and a revised critical practice. By examining the forms, attitudes, and commitments of a variety of transnational modernist narratives, whether memoir, reportage, fiction, or essay, I hope to discover the extraordinary engagement with matters of public justice that infuses global literary modernism and the nodes of contact and interconnection that generate its commitments.

From Ethics to Politics

Contemporary critics rarely mention ethics and politics in the same breath. Levinas is notoriously reticent on matters of politics while contemporary democratic theorists from John Rawls to Amartya Sen avoid bringing ethics into the conversations about modern, liberal notions of justice.[35] Yet the connection between ethics and politics extends back to Aristotle, who defined ethics as "knowledge of the

Good" and politics as a corollary of ethics: "instances of morally fine and just conduct" and the social systems that encourage them.[36] For Aristotle, ethics seems to be preliminary to politics, concerned as it is with the development of virtues among individuals, while justice becomes the exercise of virtue "in relation to somebody else," and political justice in particular "obtains between those who share a life for the satisfaction of their needs as persons free and equal"—in other words, as citizens.[37]

Philosophers have made many attempts since Aristotle to calibrate the relationship between ethics and politics and the status of justice between them, which often hinges on epistemology and the matter of experience in the world. Hume, for example, begins by arguing for a clear distinction between morality, which arises from "passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts" and comes to us by way of our "impressions or sentiments," and matters of material fact that can be "discovered by the understanding" or experienced directly.[38] The importance of morality is not diminished by this fact/value split; for Hume, impressions, sentiments, and passions are crucial to the way that we apprehend and make sense of the world. However, Hume objects to accounts that attempt to derive the matter of "ought," or ethics, from propositions about matters of fact (3.1.1 469), and this objection has become something like a law (called Hume's Guillotine) for philosophy: there can be no ethical conclusions that arise from premises of fact—no "ought" follows from any discussion of what "is."[39] Hume considers justice to be an artificial "social virtue," an aspect of morality that develops from human experience of the world and that primarily concerns conduct among individuals in society. Since it is governed by the principle of "utility" rather than some innate moral quality, justice depends "on the particular state and condition, in which men are placed," with its merit being its "usefulness to the public." Justice, therefore, may be seen in Hume to connect what "is" to what "ought to be" in society, belonging both to the realm of morals and to the domain of politics, war, and peace.[40]

Kant clearly distinguishes ethics from politics, defining ethics as "the totality of unconditionally mandatory laws according to which we ought to act" and politics as "the art of using [the] mechanism [of nature] for ruling men," seen primarily through deeds and actions.[41] Since ethics responds to universal or a priori principles while politics concerns practical rules based on "mere experience," only laws that move beyond experience to accord with universal principles may be termed ethical. Yet Kant argues for the compatibility of ethics and politics and the integration of theory with practice. It would "be absurd" to propose a theory of ethics without supposing that it is possible to act among men in the sphere of politics in accord with our ethical duty.[42] Rather, we might hope for a moral politician, bound by the demands of the categorical imperative and the universal law of right and able to bring those principles to bear on his response to experiences in the world.[43] Further, Kant will claim in "On Perpetual Peace" that "true politics can never take a step without rendering homage to morality. . . . All politics must bend its knee before the right."[44] The goal in politics, then, must be to develop actions that accord with the principles of ethical duty and instantiate what we might call justice. Clearly, for Kant, ethics takes priority over politics and determines the very possibility of justice, which in turn guides our experiences of the world.

Many theorists since Kant, however, separate ethics from politics more definitively, arguing, on the one hand, that ethics need not concern itself with the practical power relations of politics and, on the other, that political justice should not be bound by a normative morality. For example, the early-twentieth-century Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore, whose system of aesthetics was deeply influential in Bloomsbury, developed an analytical metaethics concerned primarily with understanding the nature of ethical statements and judgments. His *Principia Ethica* distinguishes the matter of ethics from that of politics (and from other metaphysical questions) by claiming that ethics is a science concerned with the question of defining the "good" and distinguished from inquiry into the more complex notion of "good conduct."[45] Moore calls the "good" a "simple" notion that cannot be further broken down or explained; "just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to anyone who does not know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is."[46] It is a particular sort of fact in the world that cannot be proven with reference to scientific principles and has no necessary connection to motivations, actions, or individual virtues. Thus Moore and other analytic philosophers who followed him would argue that their reflections on the status of moral reasoning or the nature of the good have few immediate consequences for our practical understanding of conduct in society or for politics.

In a different way, the contemporary ethical theory of Emmanuel Levinas notoriously avoids describing the relationship between ethics and politics and clearly "favors" ethics over politics.[47] For Levinas, ethical responsibility for an other predates the individual's consciousness of self and freedom. Rather than explore the ontology

of being or its conduct in the world, Levinas argues that the "first and final question" is not "how being justifies itself" but how it responds to a preexisting ethical responsibility to another.[48] In other words, for Levinas ethics "does not supplement a preceding existential base; the very mode of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility."[49] His writing insists upon the other as "infinitely foreign"—the responsibility one feels in the face of the other must arise from beyond the call of the known. This is the radical challenge that Levinas's thought poses to philosophy—the refusal not just of a primary ontology, preceding ethics, but of a philosophy where the other is understood with reference to what is the same. It inheres in the very definition Levinas gives to ethics: "A calling into question of the same . . . brought about by the presence of the other."[50] Politics does not intercede at this level and must be considered secondary.[51]

On the other side of the question, for contemporary liberal political theorists such as John Rawls—whose *Theory of Justice* has been immensely influential over the past forty years—politics is also a second-order formation, but one entered into by self-complete and primarily self-interested individuals. An individualized ethics serves as the background for politics and as a means of generating a political conception of justice concerned with individual rights and freedoms.[52] Rawls's important 1985 essay "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," argues that "a political conception of justice is, of course, a moral conception, it is a moral conception worked out for a specific kind of subject, namely for political, social and economic institutions." Because Rawls's liberalism presumes deep pluralism on matters of religion and morality within the private sphere, he argues that "no general moral conception can provide a publicly recognized basis for a conception of justice in a modern democratic state."[53] Justice concerns the "assignment of rights and duties" and the regulation of "social and economic advantages" within the social structure that is set up in order to provide equality of opportunity and citizenship to individuals.[54]

Yet Rawls's model of justice depends on the assumption that rational self-interest will lead toward broad consensus around the mutually advantageous principle of fairness in the public sphere. He argues that despite the fact that people may harbor different notions of the good, which may raise competing demands, they will nonetheless recognize that "to pursue their own different conceptions of the good they need the same . . . basic rights, liberties and opportunities." He also claims that from an original, position-blind standpoint, these citizens will agree that all goods be distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution benefits the least advantaged.[55] As Amartya Sen points out, Rawls's notion of the principle of fairness seems to ignore the fact that a number of ethical choices about how and when to apply the distributive principle are central to its implementation. I would add that it is grounded on assumptions about the commensurability of persons that have deep ethical implications.[56] Rawlsian liberalism remains a resolutely political system, based on a contractual notion of justice that separates itself from the matter of ethical subjectivity and that sidesteps important questions about the status of individuals and their differential positioning that affects the matter of fairness among them.

This critical disjunction between ethics and politics makes a rapprochement not only more difficult but also, I would argue, more crucial.[57] It is this rapprochement that we can see nascent in *Untouchable* and that will be the subject of this book.[58] If ethics along either analytical or Levinasian lines steps away from the pragmatic, political situation of subject-citizens, it nonetheless carries implications for the conceptions of justice and the political structures that arise from that situation. As several contemporary feminists have pointed out, there are many reasons to regard the intimate, ethical domain as also important for the political development of matters of justice, community, and citizenship.[59] The citizen's extension of care to a neighbor, the child's response to a filial demand, even the lover's welcoming gesture toward her partner can raise matters of ethical awareness that carry with them not only the kinds of concerns of self and other, responsibility and obligation, that Levinas assigns to ethics but also implications for the surrounding relationships that undergird our notions of political community. This is what Derrida alludes to in his work on the reciprocity of the guest and host; each is caught up in a relationship of ethical responsibility, made no less complex or politically demanding (or perhaps more so) for being outside the existing domain of public laws or institutions.[60]

Indeed, we might argue that the Levinasian ethical subject, preengaged by the experience of the call of the other, opens the way toward a social notion of subjectivity that has clear implications for the matter of justice defined as the exercise of virtue "in relation to somebody else."[61] Jean-Luc Nancy elaborates just such a vision, arguing for a "between us as first philosophy" that might be seen as a parallel to Levinas's "ethics as first philosophy" within the political domain. Rather than presuppose some sort of original social antagonism, or a

responsibility to an other who remains outside the self, Nancy posits plurality as a primary condition of being, or "being singular plural."[62] In a challenge to the "virile subject"—that is, the contained punctual self at the core of most conceptions of individual rights within Western political theory (Rawls included), Nancy describes a self that coexists with those around it in a primordial situation of being-with that Nancy calls community and that marks the beginning of justice.[63] As a consequence, for Nancy justice must always be cognizant of the ethical obligations between and among individuals and is dependent on the political communities they form. It cannot be separated out as belonging either to ethics or politics. Kelly Oliver makes a similar claim, arguing that if we understand the subject to be eminently social rather than isolated or punctual, then human relationships become the core of both ethical and judicial decision making.[64]

Thus, I would claim, the ways we describe our political being-in-common, or community[65] and the rights and privileges we grant within it grow inexorably out of our understanding of our responsibilities and obligations to ourselves and others within a moral realm even as they respond to the situations, experiences, actions, and forms of our being among others in the world.[66] Our commitment to fairness or justice begins with our attitudes toward being among others and our understanding of the ethical demands of plurality. Anthony Appiah reminds us that "the ethical task each of us has—our life making—is inevitably bound up with the ethical life of others."[67] Ethics as an attitude or activity within the sphere of community, rather than a set of common principles or a normative domain, becomes essential to the ordering of our lives together, and to the "ensemble of human relations in their real, social structure" that we might call politics.[68]

But when it privileges the practical sphere of publicly recognized, legal conceptions of justice, contemporary political theory often avoids grappling with the ethical assumptions about identity, community, and citizenship that lie at its core.[69] Clearly, the conception of the free and equal citizen at the heart of liberal thought grows out of assumptions about individuality, the moral commensurability of persons, and the secondary nature of the political contract that carry implications for the definition of justice. But the assumption of sameness or commensurability as the basis for equality can be deeply problematic for women and others marginalized by the construction of the citizen in the Western political tradition[70] while the problem of who counts as a member with standing within any political community raises questions, in the context of a globalizing world, that challenge liberal assumptions about the distribution of goods and benefits within the bounded polity of a nation-state.[71]

This problem has been of particular concern to feminists, who point out that in the past women's experiences have rarely figured into the ethical scenarios of philosophers (Levinas included) or into the construction of the universal citizen-subject of Western thought. Hegel's reading of *Antigone* is a case in point here, as Irigaray makes clear, for Antigone serves Hegel not only as the "the other of reason, ethics, and knowledge" but also, in both her commitment to family and her marginalization, as a measure of the incompatibility of the activity of caring with public ethics or justice.[72] For Hegel, Antigone's actions represent the woman's "intuitive awareness of what is ethical" but do not pass "over into the consciousness of universality" that is required for participation in the realm of law and justice.[73] Clearly, as David Harvey puts it, "like space, time and nature, 'justice' is . . . socially constituted" and "expressive of social relations and contested configurations of power."[74] There cannot be a position-blind, universal position, except as an experiment in thought, nor can we assume that justice flows without regard to the variable positions of its subjects or sweeps them into a common body of consensus.

The challenge for current theory, liberal or otherwise, is to understand the moral and political implications of what Charles Taylor calls our "modern social imaginaries," which organize "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[75] These social imaginaries provide the grounds for our construction of communities, as well as our understanding of our situation in the world, among others. Rather than being simply normative or constitutive of a common morality, social imaginaries should be understood, I would argue, as spheres of moral activity and attitudes toward justice that guide our actions in the world and generate rhetorical situations and narrative exigence. At the same time, the notions of being-in-common or community at the heart of any social imaginary carry implications for regimes of justice and of power, as well as for the constitution of publicly recognized structures of political society. The possibility of a radical democratic politics understood as based on contingent identities and dispersed antagonisms and allegiances depends upon just such a model of the social imaginary, one that understands community as primordial and inescapable but not derived from a single universalized experience,

predicated on normative unity, or dependent on a singular consensus for its model of justice.[76]

Further, I would argue, imagination and the aesthetic lie at the heart of this socially constitutive activity. The imaginary domain takes us beyond the given, beyond the situation of our political being-in-common and its demands,[77] and toward a realm of "as if" that can move towards greater freedom and justice.[78] This is not simply a matter of creating an imaginative realm parallel or analogous to the political, without connection to the world or transformative potential. The philosopher Hans Vaihinger points out that fictive activity undergirds many of our most important insights "in all branches of thought,"[79] helping the scientist or the philosopher construct knowledge about the world by way of arguments and scenarios. The fictionalizing process of positing an "as if" thus becomes a means of making claims about the world rather than some sort of escape from it. Similarly, I'd argue, the social imaginary can be the place where the demands of the world become configured, contested, and reconfigured and where new situations, relationships, and attitudes are created, tested, and put into play. We can approach this notion from a number of different directions—from Drucilla Cornell's assertion that only in the "as if" space of the imaginary domain can we demand a reorientation of the public construction of justice; from Alan Badiou's insistence that only when we think beyond specific social and political circumstances can we hope to "invent a new way of being and acting in the situation;" from Nancy Fraser's focus on the imagination as crucial to the process of realigning political space beyond the borders of the nation-state in a globalizing world; or simply from Jacques Rancière's definition of politics as a "cluster of perceptions and practices that shape [our] common world."[80] "Imagination" as the overarching name for these perceptions, practices, and expectations can carry the power to revise and reconfigure the world.

And narrative is at the heart of this constitutive process of imagination.[81] In narrative we open the reciprocal process of accounting for ourselves to others by asking and answering the question "who are you?" which unites teller and listener in a mutual relationship of responsibility, though not necessarily in similarity, normativity, or consensus.[82] As we read, we are invited to respond to the challenge of each narrative and to its singularity in a way that acknowledges not only its otherness and its claims on us but also how the narrative asks us to understand it as acting in the world and its implications for how we imagine structures of social and political responsibility.[83] Chantal Mouffe has argued that within a democracy the variety of discourses of justice will emerge as articulated "nodal points" around which we attempt to fix our social relations, however provisionally.[84] Narratives, I'd argue, can operate as just such nodal points, generating models of association and accountability that order our social and political relationships in connection with surrounding (and perhaps competing) discourses and in response to the demands of historical and political situations. The encounter between reader and text thus becomes a politically situated one, where the reader is responsible not only to the narration proper, or to its narrator, but also to the rhetorical demands of the time/space[85] of its creation and the political imperatives that set the reading in action, which are invariably social. In other words, through narration the social imaginary moves irrevocably beyond the bounds of the individual ethical encounter to play an active role in the imaginative construction of a common justice within the political domain.

Narrative Action

This kind of situated understanding of narration relies upon the connection between word and deed, which gives rise to action and, according to Hannah Arendt, becomes the basis of both ethics and politics.[86] As a process rather than a substantive thing, action (or acting) expresses the intersubjective identity of people who always exist in the realm of company or politics.[87] These relationships inform our process of ethical judgment: "We judge and tell right from wrong by having present in our mind some incident and some person . . . that have become examples . . . our decisions about right and wrong will depend upon our choice of company, of those with whom we wish to spend our lives." From this notion of profound intersubjectivity Arendt develops what she calls "enlarged thinking" or the "enlarged mentality," a mentality that acknowledges the perspectives and voices of those around us and is derived from the web of stories in which we are situated.[88] It is this mentality that creates our profound *sensus communis*, or "common sense," and that begins the movement toward politics.

But Arendt closely links enlarged thinking and action to speech, discourse, stories, and narrative. Acting and speaking become paired activities that present human identity through the creation of stories. We can think of these stories as human life stories; as she puts it,

"Every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story." Human history is made out of a myriad of these stories, which are generated through human utterance and action. But they may also become part of the aesthetic realm of narrative. "It is because of this already existing web of human relationships . . . in which action alone is real, that it 'produces' stories with or without intention. . . . These stories may then be recorded in documents and monuments, they may be visible in use objects or art works, they may be told and retold and worked into all kinds of material."[89] Thus, for Arendt action and the process of creating stories, including those stories found in artworks, are not only irretrievably linked but also crucial for the human sphere of politics.

These human stories, I would add, also have the constitutive power to generate an ethical relation within the web of human interaction. The self that is produced in and through life stories and narration—what Adriana Cavarero calls the "narratable self"—exists always in relation to others, in response to their questioning gaze and our attempts to account for ourselves to others in narrative. As Cavarero puts it, "One always appears to someone. One cannot appear if there is no one else there." Or, in the context of narration, it is clear that one always tells one's story to an audience, real or imagined, which is irrevocably other from oneself yet crucial to the possibility of the story. "The altruistic ethics of relation does not support empathy, identifications, or confusions. . . . No matter how much you are similar and consonant, says this ethic, your story is never my story."[90] At the same time, each story intersects with other stories, and we can see that Arendt's web of relationships can also be described as a web of stories, each contingent on the others, none self-complete, all in irrevocable ethical relationship to one another.

But as soon as we are situated within a plurality—that community or company whose perspectives or stories we consider when we reason or judge, or that web of stories that surrounds the narratable self—we are in the realm of politics. As Arendt makes clear, "I am only with my own self or the self of another when I am thinking, whereas I am in the company of the many when I start to act. Power for human beings . . . can only reside in one of the many forms of plurality."[91] We can describe the transition from ethics to politics in this way: We begin to reason morally by entering into company with others, expanding the realm of our thinking from the self or other to the several. We judge by imagining the positions of others, interacting with them, as in a community. We act by disclosing ourselves to others in speech and narration—"in sheer human togetherness"—and we act *politically* when we imagine that human togetherness to be a polity, however ephemeral.[92] The transition to politics and action from ethics is thus one of degree rather than of kind, moving from the one to the several and finally into the realm of a potential polity. Arendt's theory helps us understand that in order to exert power in the world, or to move from ethics to politics, one would not only strive toward being otherwise, as Levinas suggests, or, following Nancy, acknowledge the primacy of being-with, but one would also seek to create in the world a version of ethical company or community. Thus Kant's *sensus communis*—the "sense that fits us into a community with others, makes us members of it, and enables us to communicate things"[93]—becomes a call to political action, a call to create communities, however provisional, where we can communicate our ethical positions and where they matter.

But we can also take Arendt's notion of the interconnection of action and story further into the realm of the imagination, which exists in tandem with action in the world.[94] On the one hand, we might say that imaginative narrative provides a laboratory of action where we "try out" our ability to act.[95] On the other hand, as I have claimed, it may be understood as a form of action whose power is predicated on its very distinction from life and the impossibility of a one-to-one referentiality or direct mimesis. It is just this sort of active power that modernism explores and expands and that flows directly from its narrative experimentation. According to Paul Ricoeur, fiction has "a double valence with respect to reference: it is directed elsewhere, even nowhere; but because it designated the nonplace in relation to all reality, it can directly sight this reality . . . this new reference-effect is nothing but the power of fiction to *redescribe* reality."[96] In other words, by creating an imaginative version of characters, relationships, stories, and events within the realm of human affairs, the narrative text becomes a laboratory for action in the world, committed not to mirroring reality but to redescribing and reworking it.[97]

Thus, along with Arendt, Cavarero, and Ricoeur, I will argue that imaginative prose narrative offers a place where selves can account for their being among others in the world and where the process of acting in the world may be recorded, instantiated, and reimagined. If the stories people tell are the ways that they create and communicate their being in the world, then narrating becomes a crucial form of activity, one that expresses subjectivity as it unfolds over time, among and to others, in the human sphere or social imaginary, and in active response to rhetorical and social exigence. In the guise of a

"laboratory," or the realm of "as if," narrative can provide the space for the exercise of ethical and imaginative freedom and, by virtue of its social situatedness, can also anticipate or rework relationships in the world.

Because of its position "at the crossroads" of theories of rhetoric, action, ethics, and politics, narrative becomes the place where matters of responsibility and ethical encounter intersect with the imaginative refiguring of the world.[98] The narrative text, like any example of a genre or mode, acts in response to "situational 'demands'" and presents a recognizable fusion of motive and narrative "action."[99] The singularity of the literary text puts in play a set of actions, readings, and relationships conditioned in many ways by regimes of conduct and power. Yet if we understand the singularity of the text as exceeding "pre-existing determinations" or moving beyond "the possibilities pre-programmed by a culture's norms," then the actions and relationships invited by the text also have the potential to exceed predetermined expectations of conduct or ideologies and to generate alternate patterns of political community and justice.[100]

To return to the example of *Untouchable*: it is clear at the end of the novel that Bakha's ethical subjectivity and his political situation are at odds. While the text highlights the ethical dimension of Bakha's relationships and behavior toward others, it emphasizes the absolute disenfranchisement he faces and the disappearance of his everyday concerns from the political debates that dominate the end of the novel. If Gandhi's ethical egalitarianism and the uprising that we glimpse among the "millions of faces" in the crowd seem to offer Bakha little hope for change (at least for the time being), what does the poet's version of politics offer him? As his speech makes clear, laws alone will not change Bakha's untouchable status.[101] But at the end of the novel the socialist vision of "a casteless and classless society" also seems unreachable, a dream of a future world, perhaps, but not one that will liberate Bakha in the near term. Still, the text makes clear that the problem of untouchability is both an ethical and a political concern, imbricated in complex ways with the matter of India's colonial status and its modernity and concerned with the "socially constituted set of beliefs, discourses, and institutionalizations expressive of social relations and contested configurations of power" that, according to David Harvey, marks the terrain of justice.[102]

Further, as we have seen, the novel generates this ethicopolitical connection at the textual level, weaving modernity's uneven development into Bakha's oscillation between Gandhi and the machine and generating the possibility of justice from the combined naïveté and perspicacity of Bakha's meandering point of view. The novel's innovative narrative voice and its multiplication of styles, voices, and perspectives help unsettle the consensus view of untouchability and to disperse responsibility for Bakha's condition, and for the condition of India at large, throughout the text. Derek Attridge claims that "there is a sense in which the formally innovative work, the one that most estranges itself from the reader makes the most sharply challenging . . . ethical demand."[103] While I do not believe that formal experimentation in and of itself generates ethical or political engagement, or that less innovative narratives make fewer claims on our moral sensibilities, I will argue that the experimentalism of *Untouchable* and the other narratives I will take up in this book is crucial to their ethicopolitical power, exhibiting the incommensurate experiences, uneven relationships, disrupted perspectives, and political uncertainties that characterize Bakha's modernity. I will not dwell longer on this complex and deeply moving novel here; chapter 2 will return to Anand and to the dimensions of his modernism. Still, the end of the novel hints at the way that narrative focalization, defamiliarization, refusal of closure, and play with the boundaries of fact and fiction both participate in the novel's response to the challenge of caste behavior, the geopolitics of colonialism, and the politicization of everyday life that marks Indian modernity and also help generate an Indian modernism that is at once formally innovative and deeply politically engaged.

Modernist Commitments

This is not to claim that we must remake the modern novel into a vehicle for narrative morality or describe it as providing "equipment for living," in Kenneth Burke's famous phrase.[104] Nor need we claim that modernist narrative always exhibits the direct political communication that Sartre, for example, describes in committed writing. For Sartre, prose writing is essentially communicative and utilitarian in that it displays the world for its audience and asks the audience to respond.[105] The prose writer (as opposed to the poet or painter) acts through his or her language; "he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates" in a manner that can provoke political indignation or enthusiasm.[106] The focus then is on the position or, to use existential language, the "choice" of the writer, which is communicated through words to the reader. While

the poet makes words into objects, the prose writer uses words to signify or indicate his commitment in relation to a condition of the world. Thus for Sartre, prose seems irrevocably tied to the mimetic function of realism, its political activity linked to the communication or disclosure of the writer's political position vis-à-vis the world.[107] This disclosure or unveiling of the world with the purpose of changing it, of course, requires the writer to develop new modes and techniques. Sartre does not suggest that only the most direct or most straightforward prose serves this purpose. But in distinguishing prose from poetry (at least modernist poetry), Sartre indicates his allegiance to transparency of form in literature, to *meaning* as such: "The writer deals with meanings."[108] Anything that gets in the way of meaning or the communication of the author's action, including the creation of aesthetic objects or the manipulation of form, is therefore suspect.

But certainly the author does not only deal with meanings. This is the central point of Adorno's celebrated critique of Sartre: "Although no word that enters into a work of literature divests itself fully of the meanings it possesses in communicative speech, still, in no work, not even the traditional novel, does this meaning remain untransformed."[109] Sartre's theory of the committed writer does not fully take into account the political ramifications of the transformations of form—the ramifications that I have been exploring throughout this chapter and that will be the focus of this book. Contra Sartre, Adorno claims that "there is no content, no formal category of the literary work that does not, however transformed and however unawarely, derive from the empirical reality from which it has escaped. It is through this relationship, and though the process of regrouping its moments in terms of its formal law, that literature relates to reality."[110] From this perspective, only in *rejecting* transparency and direct relationship to reality can art become politically engaged.

It is not surprising that Adorno will turn to modernism to find examples of the kind of political resistance through form that he calls "engagement." It bears stopping for a minute, then, to consider the implications of his aesthetics for understanding the political potential of modernist narrative. For Adorno, what matters most in considering the literary text's engagement is understanding the dialectical relationship between world and artwork. Rather than existing in some sort of complementary or mirroring relationship, art is defined by its essential otherness from reality and its efforts to differentiate or "seclude itself from the world." In its form, writing not only distinguishes itself from the reality it inhabits but also in doing so critiques that reality. "Even the most sublime work of art takes up a definite position *vis à vis* reality by stepping outside of reality's spell, not abstractly once and for all, but occasionally and in concrete ways, when it unconsciously and tacitly polemicizes against the condition of society at a particular point in time."[111] So, we might say, the moments where a modernist text foregrounds its technique or steps out of a mimetic mode become the moments of tacit critique and opposition to the status quo.

These moments are not unlike what I have been calling "redescription"—places where the text casts a new version of the world or intervenes in its unfolding in a manner that resists or revises social reality. The crucial addition, however, that comes to us through Adorno is the notion that this redescription need not be bound to a wishful verisimilitude or a utopian version of a realistic future. Rather, the disruption of mimetic realism is precisely where the possibility of redescription emerges, and moments of linguistic or textual nontransparency open up the text not just away from reality but also toward critique. Thus, we might imagine, in the Woolfian context, the critique of advertising and propaganda in the opening pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* as the aeroplane spells its nearly indecipherable message of consumption across the London sky, or, in the Joycean context, the critique of bourgeois Dublin and commodity culture that inheres in the formal anomalies of the "Circe" chapter, where, as Franco Moretti reminds us, commodities literally come to life,[112] or, as I will discuss in chapter 3, the opposition to British imperialism that emerges through the use of language in *Ulysses* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Adorno points out that Kafka's resistance to monopoly capitalism is made more salient because it is not addressed directly as a matter of theme but rather emerges in the interrelationship between social content and language use: "By zeroing in on the dregs of the administered world, he laid bare the inhumanity of a repressive totality, and he did so more powerfully and uncompromisingly than if he had written novels about corruption in multi-national corporations."[113] Thus, engagement emerges obliquely through form's departure from everyday reality and its opposition to a given social world.

But there is reason to distance ourselves from Adorno's assumption that the social significance of modernist art, or art more generally, is its "opposition, at the level of artistic form, to the existing world and . . . its readiness to aid and shape that world."[114] Though his theory helps us understand the possibilities of a noninstrumental politics, the way back to the world that emerges out of radically experimental texts, and the potential for critique in the fractured forms and languages

of many varieties of modernism, it posits the work's autonomy and its disengagement from reality as a first principle.[115] As I have argued, literary modernism knits together aesthetics and the ethicopolitical experience of modernity so that the world becomes the problematic to be addressed, transformed, configured, and reconfigured, rather than refused. The text is inseparable from the rhetorical exigence that calls it into being; it cannot refrain from acting in the world. Further, Adorno seems to privilege the work of art as an autonomous element arising out of history rather than being produced within it. Its potential to resist arises from this separate status. Yet we must heed Raymond Williams's reminder that "the analysis of representation is not a subject separate from history . . . the representations are part of the history, contribute to the history, are active elements in the way that history continues; in the way people perceive situations, both from inside their own pressing realities and from outside them."[116] Across its worldwide range of practices, locations, and temporalities, modernist narrative not only inscribes the pressing realities of historical modernities but is inseparable from them.

Further, as Williams also points out, modernists' efforts to disconnect themselves from the bourgeois culture in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century often put them in contact with movements of social and political opposition.[117] Thus, the processes of disconnection and critique become two sides of the same coin. The disassociation from reality instigated by antirealist form or by efforts to bring the disruptions of modernization into the realm of aesthetics was often part of a broader attempt to disengage from dominant culture and to construct an alternative social imaginary. Symbolism and anarchism grew up together; manifestos of futurism or vorticism are manifestos of both aesthetic and political movements; feminism operates in the political and aesthetic domains at once. Yet the codification and canonization of modernism at midcentury erased the political allegiances of modernism, and its ultimate commercial success brought it safely into the fold of dominant culture.[118] Therefore, if we are to rethink modernism's role in imagining justice, we need to re-create the social and political implications of its refusal of verisimilitude, its blurring of fact and fiction, its disruption of conventions of genre or narrative structures of address, its display of uneven temporalities, its destabilization of the fact/value split, and other styles and attitudes as they arise around the world.

Further, in his celebrated essay "When Was Modernism?," Williams makes clear that the delimiting of modernism—as a formal movement requiring avant-garde technique; as a product of a particular period from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century; as a select and self-referential canon of "works of radical estrangement"; and, finally, as a universalized commodity that passes easily back into the mainstream of late capitalism—must be seen as an act of ideology that erases the complex relationships between modernisms and cultures and that silences modernist critique.[119] Clearly, the selection of a period for modernism has always been arbitrary, disputed, and tied to particular critical categories and national literary histories. Williams points out that if we privilege texts that are "outriders, heralds, and witnesses to social change" then we may ask why the "metaphoric control and economy of seeing discovered and refined by Gogol, Flaubert or Dickens from the 1840s on, should not take precedence over the conventionally modernist names of Proust, Kafka, or Joyce."[120] A similar point may be made about the usual periodization of modernism. When we segregate so-called thirties literature from the mainstream of American and European modernism, we necessarily define modernism against social and political engagement.[121] The means by which scholars separated work by George Orwell, Rebecca West, the radical American writers of the 1930s, or the members of the so-called Auden generation from canonical modernism was precisely the degree of political commitment in evidence in their writing—and the means of recuperating them for modernism, as many scholars have recently begun to do, is often to argue for their formal complexity. Commitment that seems to take precedence over form remains a sort of marker for "that-which-is-not-modernism."

Yet if we resurrect the long tradition of engaged, antibourgeois writing within the history of literary modernisms, and we recognize the role of experience in relation to both ethics and politics in the development of modernism, then we will not mistakenly presume that to be *engagé* means being less interested in form or that the avant-garde need fetishize form to such an extent as to extinguish the language of political commitment. Further, the principle of "radical estrangement" so often applied to modernism as a formal criterion, at least in its early-twentieth-century, European version, or as an element of Adornian negative dialectics, can also have strong political implications. In Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which I will discuss in chapter 4, the experience of the Spanish Civil War becomes one of ongoing estrangement or defamiliarization, which disrupts our assumptions about both British and Spanish politics and produces a genre that acts in the world by mediating between memoir and propaganda.

For the Spanish writer Max Aub, the tortured geographies of wartime Spain give rise to a labyrinthine novel cycle that bears witness to the horror of total war while challenging the boundaries between home and battle fronts. In Anand's work, as we have seen, estrangement on the level of language, marks not only the site of ethics but also the place of potential resistance to colonialism. The novel's challenge to the tradition of the bildungsroman emerges from its translocation of the genre into the time/space of a colonial untouchable and confrontation with the demands of that geography.

Transnational Optics

The problem of delimiting modernism, which Williams ties to the matter of periodization, clearly also has a geographical dimension. Williams is careful to locate his analysis in Europe and particularly in what he calls the "great imperial capitals of Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and Petersburg," as well as London and New York.[122] The specific histories of these cities and the movements of people and capital between and among them within the economy of late capitalism are crucial for modernism in Europe in the early to mid-twentieth century, and to Williams' critique of it. But, it must be said, specifying the locations of modernism and its histories risks the same pitfalls as too strict periodization. For one, there is always another city to add to the list or another that falls to the wayside. As Susan Stanford Friedman has pointed out, any attempt to define modernism metonymically, by reference to a select set of canonical texts that might stand in for the whole or, as here, by listing key locations that represent modernism's relationship to the metropolis and to capitalist modernity, always raises the question of who or what is left out.[123] It is fundamentally impossible to represent a multivalent collection of texts and locations by a short list of canonical figures or metropolitan "hotbeds." And though Williams singles out these cities in order to highlight the connections between the development of modernism and the rise of late-capitalist imperialism—a connection also famously raised by Edward Said—his work nonetheless cements the relationship between modernism and the European metropolis.

Instead, if we step outside the hypercanon of European modernism, beyond the domain of the metropole and its associated "republic of letters," and into the worldwide sphere of textual activity, we discover a multiplicity of transnational modernisms that foreground their ethical and political dimensions as essential horizons for modernist experimentation, inseparable from their other purposes and commitments.[124] Rather than conceive of the political imperatives of modernist narrative in an additive fashion, as a second-order formation or a vagary of context appended to a formally innovative text, we can recognize narrative's construction of an "as if" realm of justice as a crucial aspect of its challenge to realist epistemologies and a sign of its disruption of the Humean fact/value split. Further, if we understand the text as on every level socially, historically, and rhetorically situated, then we cannot help but see its formal and political attitudes as deeply motivated and inseparable from the exigencies surrounding it. Modernism's formal and political demands operate within the local context, to be sure, but at the same time also function transnationally, placing Anand's *Untouchable*, for example, in contact with anticolonial or working-class writing elsewhere. For Jack Conroy, writing his novel *The Disinherited* in the Depression-era Midwest, the need to represent the political voices of unemployed workers within the brutal context of 1930s America, necessitates his use of a decentered narrative structure, a style inflected by orality and a political recasting of the mode of *skaz* (the sketch). As chapter 5 will elaborate, this reworking of voice from a working-class perspective sometimes bears more affinity to the politically engaged modernism of the Harlem Renaissance than to the hardboiled socialist realism to which it is usually compared. In this and the many other examples gathered in this book, whether written from Madras, India, or Madrid, Spain, the imbrication of modernist experimentation and politics demonstrates the role of narrative in revising ethical experience, resituating social action, and imagining a future justice within its local and global situations.

Thus, it will be my argument that if we take up a comparative perspective on transnational modernism, one that brings previously marginalized languages and literatures into view and shuttles among the variety of locations, temporalities, languages, and histories of modernism, then we will also finally dismantle the sway of a universal modernist canon, complete with the mythology of its inward turn or its dissociation from politics. Further, if we conceive of modernities and the modernisms that arise in conjunction and response to them as modes (for Lodge), ideologies (for Jameson), or groups of problems or contradictions (for Moretti) rather than a substantive set of attitudes, formal attributes, or texts, then our reading will seek to organize and compare these problems and responses rather than to assimilate them into a universal answer.[125] Transnational modernism

will emerge as a dynamic series of aesthetic relationships or responses to the problematics of modernity in which we can see worldwide textual correspondences and intersections among its social and political commitments.[126]

This model responds to Gayatri Spivak's call, in her book *Death of A Discipline*, for a method that takes each literary work in its specificity and as nearly as possible from within its own cultural contexts rather than assuming that it will travel or translate easily into Euro-modernist frameworks. Still, this process need not overvalorize the local. As I have been arguing, we can attend to the cultural activity of a text in its geographical specificity without foreshortening its range. Certainly, if we imagine the cultural, communal, and geopolitical contexts of a work as multiple—potentially both local and global at once—then our reading practice ought follow suit, following the activity of texts as they gesture beyond their immediate contexts, helping us see the possibility of movement beyond the purely local, and asking us to imagine the ways that the many versions of texts become new in new contexts and vary according to how and where they are read. This is in part what I mean to indicate as a transnational "optic," a mode of reading that marries close attention to the local activity of the work in its specific contexts with a willingness to follow the nodal lines of interconnection that spin out from each text to its broader sphere of engagement. This transnational mode of reading would thus accommodate the "transversal movements of culture" that, according to Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, characterize the complex ways in which "minor cultural articulations" circulate "in productive relationship with the major (in all its possible shapes, forms, and kinds), as well as [in] minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether . . . and produce . . . new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries."[127] We must, however, acknowledge that reading beyond the original context is a transformative matter. Texts are altered as they are viewed through this optic—first contexts may begin to seem less "original," and the sphere of the text's activity may shift dramatically when seen in a global light. Yet transnational modernism demands to be read as operating both at home and abroad at once, sometimes operating as what Rebecca Walkowitz calls "comparison literature"—texts that "do not belong to any one national, ethnic, or linguistic tradition"[128]—at other times operating as what other scholars have described as writing born to travel.[129] Placing James Joyce and Anand together, as I will do in chapter 2, allows us to see Joyce's anticolonial politics in a new light, even as it shows us how to place Anand in one key node of anticolonial modernist work.[130] Reading Max Aub's Spanish-language narrative about the Civil War in concert with Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and the film *The Spanish Earth*, as I will do in chapter 4, highlights the political commitments of Aub's deeply experimental, labyrinthine texts at the same time as it traces the fine line between engagement and propaganda in international multimedia responses to the Civil War.

Further, as I described earlier in this chapter, the transnational optic I employ in this book implies more than an ability to follow the lines of international textual travel or transculturation. It seeks to unsettle our assumptions about the European nexus of modernism and its national spheres of literary activity while highlighting the nonnormative dimension of the text as it operates both locally and globally. In calling attention to the "trans-" dimension of this way of reading—rather than characterizing it as "international" or "global"—I thus hope to highlight the interlocking ethical and political commitments that suffuse and connect modernist texts worldwide and to allow their potentially transgressive power to infuse our critical practice.[131] The transnational critical optic thus challenges us to attend, "to the political production of transnational texts," but also to recognize the political activity inaugurated by our transnational ways of reading them.[132]

Franco Moretti plays the provocateur by pushing for what he calls "distant reading."[133] Spivak argues that the text's activity begins in the local. The transnational optic that I have described here helps us reconcile these positions by insisting that both near and distant reading are necessary. The cultural activity of a text in its original context may be at odds with its global circulation, but together they create a new textual geography that claims our attention by arguing for close reading in the original language where possible but in the context of the transformative work of translocation, and by focusing on the many nodes and circles of interconnected social and political activity among global modernisms rather than on a single homogenizing worldwide literary sphere. As we shift to a nodal model of transnational modernisms, as scholars such as Friedman, Ramanzani, Hart, Walkowitz, Laura Doyle, Laura Winkiel, and Anita Patterson have, in various ways, begun to do,[134] we'll see wider patterns of intertextual exchange and global correspondence rather than simply the transmission of influence from metropole to colony or from colony back to the center.[135] We will

also begin to see the socially and politically transformative potential of these nodes as they become articulated with discourses of justice and politics worldwide and begin to shift texts, languages, social imaginaries, and political realities.[136] These nodal correspondences will create oppositional and revisionary connections among modernist texts and practices, generating novel patterns of association and responsibility while demanding a new transnational critical practice that recognizes transversal movements of culture and reorients modernism around its multiple local and global commitments. In the chapters that follow I trace several transnational lines of connection, especially where they take us to modernisms mistakenly seen as marginal, ancillary, or belated, hoping to capture the energy of their narrative commitments, both aesthetic and political, and their singular claims on us as readers.

Frederic Jameson's exploration of modernism and modernity begins from the assumption that there can be no correct use of the word "modernity."[137] Susan Stanford Friedman argues that in reading modernism "dissonance matters." The approach to transnational modernism I elaborate in this book takes these caveats to heart, exploring modernism and modernity as a dynamic set of relationships, problematics, or cultural responses to modernity rather than a static canon of works or a given set of formal devices. If modernity is a "practice-based label," as Eric Rothstein has argued—a term used for a variety of experiences, habits, practices, and ideologies that accompany the political, social, and technological shifts of the development of global late capitalism, rather than these developments themselves—then so, too, is modernism, and we must therefore attend closely to its diverse activities and practices as they emerge in a variety of locations around the world.[138] In describing how modernist narratives generate both ethical being-in-the-world and the action of imagining justice, this book also privileges the "as if" potential of our thinking about modernism and modernity. Narrative engagements with social imaginaries worldwide generate new literary and political synergies that might have looked incorrect, dissonant, or out of time in relation to the old modernist canon. If the transnational optic shows us the otherwise-effaced political valences of modernist narrative and highlights the complex relationships among modernist texts and the streams of discourse, political imperatives, rhetorical situations, and social ideologies in which they are immersed, both locally and globally, it also demonstrates the futility of building a new, global canon or strictly delimiting the temporal-spatial boundaries of modernism. Rather, by describing transnational modernism as a mode that arises in conjunction with impending modernity in many places, guises, attitudes, and temporalities, and demonstrating the continuum of political engagement that helps to motivate it, I hope to offer not only an expanded account of modernist texts and commitments but also a new way of thinking about what modernism is and can do.

This book is divided into two parts. The two chapters that follow in part 1 are deliberately comparative. They read the canonical modernisms of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce in conjunction with the work of Jean Rhys and Mulk Raj Anand, writers who were born outside the Euro-metropolitan nexus of modernism and whose work foregrounds the complex geographies of empire. Reading these writers comparatively offers us a new optic for viewing the correspondences between anticolonial writers from a variety of locations; it also helps us to situate Anand and Rhys with Joyce and Woolf within an important node of transnational modernism.

Chapter 1, "Intimate and Global: Ethical Domains from Woolf to Rhys," begins by exploring the development of a feminist, intimate ethics across the gaps of lived experience in Woolf's *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse* by way of the figure of the fold. Whereas in these novels the fold signals an ethical leap into the lives of others, in *Three Guineas* the narrative gaps, interruptions, ellipses, and detours take on more conspicuously political weight, providing the link between word and deed and serving as the vehicle for Woolf's political engagement with the Spanish Civil War. Thus, I will argue, Woolf's experimental style pushes us constantly beyond the personal, to a re-perception of the folds of ethics and experience that make accounting for ourselves and for others a matter of progressive, feminist politics.

In Jean Rhys's early novels *Quartet*, *Good Morning Midnight*, and *Voyage in the Dark*, this narrative self-accounting always takes place within the geographical spaces of empire. For Rhys's heroines, the question, "who are you?" calls up the uneven development and disrupted futurity of colonialism, which conditions both their corporeal experiences and their ability to disclose themselves to others in narrative. Rhys's heroines struggle to account for themselves in narratives with shifting perspectives, distorted temporalities, and uncertain plots. They walk the borderland between colony and metropolis, back room and sidewalk cafe, playing a geopolitical game that has at once no end and no future. Rhys thus shows us not only, like Woolf, the potential of narrative folds and gaps to generate ethical relations and resist their political foreclosure but also the power of convoluted life

stories to refuse the political imperatives of twentieth-century colonial geographies.

Chapter 2, "Comparative Colonialisms: Joyce, Anand, and the Question of Engagement," takes up the transnational connection between James Joyce and the politically engagé Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand, whose reading of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* inspired his own novels of Indian resistance. This chapter begins by examining the profound geographical sensibility that inhabits Joyce's work and the importance of questions of geography to modernist engagement with the sociopolitical spaces of modernity. Positioning Joyce within the contours of modernist geography, I argue, helps reorient our understanding of Joyce's confrontation with colonialism even while it foregrounds the global politics of location within his work.

In the second section of the chapter I show how this modernist geography helps Anand build a new Indian literary tradition that responds both to his Joycean inspiration and to the exigencies of his Indian locations. Anand crafts a cosmopolitan Indian modernism rooted, as we have seen, in matters of caste, poverty, national identity, and colonial status in late-colonial India. This chapter ends by highlighting the way that both Joyce and Anand revise the tradition of the bildungsroman, using narrative experimentation to challenge the political model of the exemplary, representative man within the geographical spaces of colonial modernity.

Part 2 of this book steps away from the explicitly comparative framework of the first chapters to delve more deeply into less studied transnational modernisms in three different settings: late-colonial India, Civil War–era Spain, and the United States of the 1930s. I examine modernism's textual encounter with the problem of justice and the ways in which experimental narratives in a variety of genres (novel, memoir, reportage, short story, creative essay) bridge the gap between ethics and politics. These chapters are, to a certain extent, case studies: each one represents a different geographical location, political imperative, or modernist textuality. Certainly, other situations and texts might have figured here. I must leave it to other scholars with different language skills to explore Bengali, Portuguese, or Japanese modernisms.[139] But with this book I hope to engage in a conversation about the stakes and aims of modernism worldwide that will continue well beyond its pages.

Chapter 3, "Modernism in the Zenana: The Domestic Spaces of Sorabji, Hussain, and Ishvani," explores the writings of several little-studied women writers of late-colonial India whose work presents an intersecting critique of gender and genre that realigns women's social and political identities while opening a space for an alternative narrative modernism. By masquerading as autobiography or reportage, Cornelia Sorabji's narratives about servants, children, and women living under conditions of purdah not only trouble the distinction between autobiography and fiction but also employ that liminal zone as a place of ethical encounter across irremediable gaps of knowledge and experience. In her later work, Sorabji employs the trope of the intermediary who intervenes between a secluded woman and the external world in order to recast the rhetoric of domestic and political spheres and develop modern citizenship for Indian women. Such writers as Iqbalunnisia Hussain, G. Ishvani, and Kamala Sathianadhan—whose work is mostly unknown and almost entirely out of print—plunge us more directly into the women's world of the zenana—the part of the Indian house often reserved for women among both Hindus and Muslims—yet they refuse the absolute dichotomy of home and world, individual and community. They resist the reinscription of the traditional model of "mother India" into the site of the zenana and, I argue, raise politics as a matter of communal responsibility and voice, even within seclusion.

Chapter 4, "Commitment and the Scene of War: Max Aub and Spanish Civil War Writing," seeks to bring Spanish narrative about the Civil War into the mainstream of discussion about modernism and politics rather than segregating it within the Spanish tradition or in the category of war writing. By allowing for the continuity between experimental narrative and war writing, this chapter challenges the assumption that choosing sides dooms narrative to what has been called a "ruined naturalism." The chapter first focuses on the writing of Max Aub, whose six-novel Civil War cycle, *El laberinto mágico* (*The Magic Labyrinth*) is at once a tour de force of narrative innovation and a chronicle of war that rarely travels to the front. It clearly demonstrates the possibility that modernist styles and perspectives can rise to the task of bearing witness. The chapter then shifts attention to the question of propaganda as the corollary or obverse of committed writing. By exploring the role of propaganda in multimedia responses to the war, including the vast visual record of Civil War posters and magazine covers and the films *The Spanish Earth* (directed by Joris Ivens and narrated by Ernest Hemingway) and *L'espoir* (directed by Andre Malraux and adapted from his book by Max Aub), as well as George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, this section highlights the link between the manipulation of perspective, play with verisimilitude

in propaganda, and the aesthetic construction of political attitudes within narrative modernisms.

Finally, chapter 5, "Arising from the Cornlands: The Working-Class Voices of Conroy and Le Sueur," argues that the narrative strategies that allow many radical writers in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s to incorporate working-class voices, rhythms, and experiences into narrative fiction have affinities with the projects of modernist writers. It reads the restless, shifting narrative perspective of Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited*, for example, or the floating, collective voices of a group of women in Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl*, as aesthetic responses to the conditions of modernity in the United States, particularly for working-class people in and out of employment, as well as key aspects of the ways that the texts register resistance to those conditions. Conroy's work uses an episodic narrative structure that creates *skaz*, or sketches from "overheard" stories and interrupted autobiography, and then assembles those sketches into a communal tale of political disenfranchisement and burgeoning consciousness. In *The Girl*, the suffering of female bodies in hard labor, hunger, childbirth, or partner abuse generates an iterative style that rejects the authority of a presiding narrator and emphasizes the narrative dimension of the "contact" between the embodied lives of working-class women. These working-class narratives thus take us beyond the conventions of either narrative realism or a modernism characterized by interiority and aestheticism in order to allow orality, folk culture, and the materiality of everyday life, especially as it is displayed through the bodies of working women and men, to emerge as the locus of a politically engaged, experimental narrative tradition.

Finally, in the afterword of the book, I reflect on the connections among narrative, politics, and justice by way of Barack Obama's 2010 Nobel Peace Prize speech. By challenging us to recognize the tension between what is and what ought to be, Obama retells the story of the interrelationship between ethics and politics and brings this book full circle.

Part I