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“Introductions by Eminent Writers”: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf in the Oxford World’s Classics Series

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“For over 100 years Oxford World’s Classics have brought readers closer to the world’s great literature,” declares a statement at the beginning of recent books in the series. “The pocket-sized hardbacks of the early years contained introductions by Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, and other literary figures which enriched the experience of reading.” Indeed, in 1928, Woolf and Eliot wrote prefaces to Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868) respectively. Two decades later, Greene contributed a foreword to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). These introductions increased the appeal of non-copyright works, and continue to serve the reputation of the World’s Classics as a major cultural enterprise.

This chapter focuses particularly on the late 1920s, at the time when Humphrey Milford (manager of the London branch of Oxford University Press) commissioned introductions by Woolf and Eliot. 1928 was a turning point in the history of modernism – the moment when commercial publishers published modernist writings that had previously been confined to little magazines and small presses.¹ This was the year when the Modern Library, an American series of classics, reprinted James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). However, the Modern Library was very different from traditional series of classics such as Everyman’s Library and the World’s Classics. It was sold as a daring series of “complete and unabridged” texts for readers who

¹ Lise Jaillant, *Modernism, Middlebrow and the Literary Canon: The Modern Library Series, 1917-1955* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014).

wanted to keep abreast of modern literature. The fact that *Portrait of the Artist* was reviewed as “slightly pornographic”² was not a problem for the Modern Library, since the subversive reputation of modernism contributed to the commercial appeal of the series.

In contrast, the World’s Classics published mostly out-of-copyright works and shied away from controversy. Oxford University Press, whose London branch bought the World’s Classics from Grant Richards in 1905, was known for its Bibles and scholarly works, not for literary experimentation. The group of Delegates who ran the press from Oxford were extremely reluctant to include contemporary fiction on the OUP list. Although the London office had a large autonomy, its successive managers preferred to avoid any conflict with Oxford. “If I once begun to publish novels,” wrote Milford to the novelist Constance Holme, “well, I don’t know what would happen. (The Delegates would probably discharge me, to begin with).”³ In practice, Oxford World’s Classics included a few contemporary novels, but none of them could be described as experimental or daring. In Mary Hammond’s words, “the books had to be inoffensive to the lower- and middle-class family reader.”⁴ The World’s Classics editors refused to reprint certain books (Zola and Maupassant did not appear on the list until 1933, with the publication of *French Short Stories*). They also expurgated some texts, including the *Twenty-Four Tales of Tolstoy* translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude – which became *Twenty-Three Tales* when the story “Françoise” was dropped.⁵ This kind of censorship aimed at protecting “innocent” readers of the World’s Classics – namely young people, women, and the lower classes. “Well into the twentieth century a double standard prevailed,” Peter Sutcliffe notes. “Expensive complete texts could be made

² Peter Pinto, ‘We Have Been Reading Lately,’ *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* [Montreal], 8 June 1928.

³ Humphrey Milford to Constance Holme, 21 December 1931. Oxford, Archives of the Oxford University Press (hereafter referred to as OUP), Letter books of Humphrey Milford.

⁴ Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 85-115, 103.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104-5.

available for the élite, for ‘ripe scholars’: for the masses expurgated editions would be required reading for many years to come.”⁶

So why would such a staid series include an introduction by T. S. Eliot, a writer with “a sustained interest in rotting orifices”?⁷ Why would a series associated with an old English university value the opinion of Woolf, who repeatedly criticized the patriarchal structure of the academic system? My central argument is that, by the late 1920s, Woolf and Eliot had become well-known names recognizable by the lower middle class, the self-educated and other readers of the World’s Classics. In Pierre Bourdieu’s term, Woolf and Eliot now had the “power to consecrate” old books, moving them to the centre of literary discussion and increasing their sales.⁸ The Oxford World’s Classics not only commissioned new introductions to Eliot and Woolf, but also reprinted some of their other works in the early 1930s. The second series of *Selected Modern English Essays* (1932), edited by Milford, contained Woolf’s “The Patron and the Crocus” (as well as an essay on T. S. Eliot, by C. Williams). *English Critical Essays, Twentieth Century* (1933) included Woolf’s “Modern Fiction” and Eliot’s essay on Samuel Johnson’s poems *London* (1738) and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749). Poems by Eliot also appeared in *A Book of American Verse* (1935).

Considering the cultural importance and longevity of the World’s Classics, it is surprising that the series has attracted so little scholarly interest. Even the three-volume *History of Oxford University Press* does not feature any chapter on the World’s Classics (although there are related essays on educational and classical books, and on the origins of the London branch of the press).⁹ The few sources of information on the series include a bibliography available on Western University’s

⁶ Peter H. Sutcliffe, *The Oxford University Press: An informal history* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 143; Hammond *Reading, Publishing* (see above, n. 4), p. 104.

⁷ Rachel Potter, ‘Obscene Modernism and the Trade in Salacious Books,’ *Modernism/Modernity* 16.1 (2009), 87-104, there 90.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), p. 42; Hammond, *Reading, Publishing* (see above, n. 4), p. 113.

⁹ Ian Gadd, Simon Eliot, and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The History of Oxford University Press*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

website,¹⁰ a succinct account in Sutcliffe's 1978 book, and a more detailed analysis in Hammond's chapter, "'People Read So Much Now and Reflect So Little': Oxford University Press and the Classics Series" in her *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (2006). Since Hammond focuses on Henry Frowde (the manager of OUP's London business) and his role in the early development of the World's Classics, she has little to say on the original creator Grant Richards, or on Frowde's successor Humphrey Milford. This chapter aims to put the introductions by modernist writers in the broader context of the history of the World's Classics, a series sold to a wide audience. It thus contributes to scholarship on the relationship between high modernism and the marketplace, and on Eliot's and Woolf's non-fiction writings.¹¹

Grant Richards, Henry Frowde and the World's Classics

Drawing on N. N. Feltes's work, Mary Hammond describes Grant Richards, who created the World's Classics in 1901, as an "enterprising" publisher - as opposed to the "list" publisher Oxford University Press.¹² Richards (1872-1948) was only twenty-four years old when he created his own firm with the help of his family - including his uncle, the writer Grant Allen.¹³ As a young publisher with a name to make, Richards could not set his sights on well-known authors, but he showed an aptitude to attract promising writers at the beginning of their careers. He thus published Laurence Housman's *Spikenard* (1898), G. K. Chesterton's first book *The Wild Knight and Other Poems* (1900), and Arnold Bennett's *Fame and Fiction* (1901). Like John Lane and other enterprising small presses, Richards did not shy

¹⁰ J. Godsey, Geoffrey Milburn, and Nicholas Murray, 'The World's Classics' and "Oxford World's Classics": A Guide to the Clothbound Editions (and Their Variants),' 16 April 2010 [accessed 8 May 2014], <http://www.edu.uwo.ca/worldsclassics/worlds.pdf>.

¹¹ For discussion of the "vertical expansion" of modernist studies towards popular culture, see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies,' *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 123.3 (2008), 737-48, there 744. For more on Eliot's and Woolf's non-fiction, see Michael Kaufmann, 'A Modernism of One's Own: Virginia Woolf's *TLS* Reviews and Eliotic Modernism,' in Beth C. Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino, eds., *Virginia Woolf and the Essay* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 137-55, as well as Rosenberg and Dubino's introduction to this collection of essays.

¹² Hammond, *Reading, Publishing* (see above, n. 4), p. 95.

¹³ George Sims, 'Grant Richards: Publisher,' *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review*, January 1989, 14-27, there 16.

away from controversial literature. He offered to take on James Joyce's *Dubliners* in 1906, but backed out when the printer objected to certain passages. As Robert Scholes notes, "much of his caution in dealing with *Dubliners*, as a matter of fact, stemmed from his precarious financial situation at the time."¹⁴ These financial difficulties had partly originated in the launch of the World's Classics five years earlier. As a small, undercapitalized publisher, Richards was ill equipped to respond to the enormous and unexpected demand for his inexpensive reprints. "When I started the series," Richards later said, "the trade generally prophesied failure for it. Success, however, was immediate, increasing and continued, and the series might almost be said to be running its rivals off the field."¹⁵

How can we account for this success, at a time of heightened competition from other cheap series? Since Richards mainly selected popular non-copyright books, he could not count on the uniqueness of his list: *Jane Eyre*, the first book included in the World's Classics, had also appeared in Walter Scott's Camelot series in 1889 and in Bliss, Sands & Co.'s Burleigh library in 1896. However, as Richard Altick has shown, many cheap series were poorly produced: "Strenuously small (and often badly worn) type; thin margins, sometimes crowded with legends advertising tea, baking powder, or patent medicines; poor paper; paper wrappers; flimsy sewing - these were too often the result of the pressure to cut prices."¹⁶ To distinguish the World's Classics from its competitors, Richards paid particular attention to the material aspect of the books while keeping prices low: "Size five x three-and-a-half inches, their standard bulk-one-and-a-half inches, stamped with a gilt spine decoration by Laurence Housman, they sold at no more than 1s cloth and 2s skiver leather."¹⁷

¹⁴ Robert Scholes, 'Grant Richards to James Joyce,' *Studies in Bibliography* 16 (1963), 139-60, there 140.

¹⁵ Richards to Herbert B. Turner & Co, 2 January 1904. Archives of Grant Richards, 1897-1948 (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1979), Microform (hereafter referred to as GR), Letter book Vol. 4 (1903-1904).

¹⁶ Richard Altick, 'From Aldine to Everyman: Cheap Reprint Series of the English Classics 1830-1906,' *Studies in Bibliography* 11 (1958), 3-24, there 15.

¹⁷ Mervyn Horder, 'Grant Richards: Portent & Legend,' *London Magazine*, April/ May 1991, 36-46, there 42. On the material form see also John Birchall, 'The World's Classics: A Library within a Library,' *Books in Wernicke*, 11 March 2012 [accessed 8 May 2014], <http://booksinwernicke.blogspot.ca/2012/03/world-classics-library-within-library.html>.

In an effort to carve a unique niche for the World's Classics, Richards thought of including works by living authors – as long as they agreed on a reduced royalty rate compatible with the small profit margins of the series. Following Grant Allen's advice, he contacted the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who replied that the offer was too low to be considered.²⁰ Richards had better luck with Theodore Watts-Dunton, whose 1898 bestseller *Aylwin* joined the World's Classics in 1904. As the leading critic of poetry for the *Examiner* and, from 1876, the *Athenaeum*, Watts-Dunton was a well-connected and respected literary man. Richards suggested that he write an introduction to his book: "This would be of considerable interest to the wide public your book will reach in the World's Classics, and would also draw fresh journalistic notice to the edition."²¹ As Hammond points out, introductions were already a well-established feature of classics series, appearing in Cassell's National Library, Routledge's World and Railway Libraries, Chandos Classics, the Minerva Library of Famous Books and the Temple Classics.²² But writers generally introduced older classics, not recent bestsellers such as *Aylwin*.

By the time of Richards's bankruptcy in 1905, the World's Classics included 65 titles. To sustain the rapid expansion of the series, Richards went heavily into debt. According to *Publishers' Circular*, "he had to borrow £8,000 off creditors on charges covering the series of books entitled 'The World's Classics,' the leases of 2 Park Crescent, and 48 Leicester Square, and other property."²³ The main part of the Richards estate was acquired by Alexander Moring, who then negotiated with Henry Frowde of Oxford University Press for the sale of the World's Classics.²⁴

After October 1905, the image of the series underwent a major shift. No longer owned by an entrepreneurial publisher with a taste for subversive texts, the World's Classics was now associated

²⁰ Richards to Charles Holme, 17 December 1903. Letter book Vol. 4 (1903-4), GR (see above, n. 15).

²¹ Richards to Theodore Watts-Dunton, 18 November 1903. Ibid.

²² Hammond, *Reading, Publishing* (see above, n. 4), p. 111.

²³ 'Mr. Grant Richards's Affairs,' *Publishers' Circular*, 22 April 1905, 434.

²⁴ Frowde bought the copyright, but also the stock and plates of the World's Classics (Contract between Alexander Moring and Henry Frowde, October 1905). Oxford, OUP, Letter books of Henry Frowde.

with a prestigious university press. However, Frowde's name appeared on the imprint, "to distinguish these sorts of books, and perhaps to distance them, from those published by the Clarendon Press" in Oxford.²⁵ The positioning of the series was therefore ambiguous, reflecting both an ambition to advertise links with Oxford while avoiding any embarrassment to the Board of Delegates.

Shortly after purchasing the series, Frowde asked Watts-Dunton to publicize his strategy for the new Oxford World's Classics in the *Athenaeum*. The announcement should articulate a three-point plan: "that new vigour would now be infused into the series, that important additions are to be made, that as in other series printed at the Oxford University Press writers can rely on the accuracy of the text."²⁶ First, in his effort to regenerate the series, Frowde commissioned introductions that would "lift some of the new volumes a little above the bare reprint style."²⁷ As Frowde explained, these introductions were written by "eminent writers."²⁸ Frowde thus contacted Edmund Gosse, asking him to suggest one or two new books he would like to introduce (Gosse eventually wrote the foreword to Thackeray's *Pendennis*, published in 1907).²⁹ The same kind of request appears repeatedly in Frowde's correspondence. He was happy to leave a great deal of freedom to the potential contributor, as long as the texts selected were non-copyright and "popular in character, for the first cost of production is not turned until from 10,000 to 15,000 have been sold."³⁰ The *name* of the writer who penned the preface was, to a certain extent, more important than the texts themselves. As Bourdieu has argued, "the consecrated writer is the one who has the power to consecrate and to win assent when he or she consecrates an author or a work - with a preface, a favourable review, a prize, etc."³¹ The "consecration" process worked in two ways: writers of introductions brought new prestige to old books

²⁵ Amy Flanders, 'The Press in London, 1896-1970,' in Ian Gadd, Simon Eliot and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The History of Oxford University Press*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 3: 136-88 (p. 140).

²⁶ Frowde to Watts-Dunton, 18 December 1905 (see above, n. 24).

²⁷ Frowde to Watts-Dunton, 18 December 1905. Ibid.

²⁸ Frowde to Watts-Dunton, 19 April 1906 and 18 December 1905. Ibid.

²⁹ Frowde to Gosse, 7 May 1906. Ibid.

³⁰ Frowde to George Wyndham, 6 November 1906. Ibid.

³¹ Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production* (see above, n. 8), p. 42.

(and to the World's Classics series), and in turn, these classics increased the cultural aura of already-distinguished authors.

In addition to renowned writers, Frowde also asked distinguished scholars to contribute introductions. Although he insisted that the World's Classics imprint was for "popular books" not schoolbooks or educational works (as published by the Clarendon Press),³² Frowde seemed nevertheless eager to appeal to the school market and to self-educated readers. Introductions by well-known academics would not only boost the prestige of the series, but also increase sales. "We shall be much gratified to see your name associated with the series, and an introduction from your pen will materially help the sale of the book," wrote Frowde to the Master of University College Oxford.³³

Introductions by famous names, as well as new additions, allowed the World's Classics to compete with Everyman's Library, a well-produced series created by J. M. Dent in 1906. In a letter to Watts-Dunton, Frowde wrote: "Dent is making a great splash with his series, and the specimens which I have seen are certainly deserving of success." Since Dent planned to eventually include a staggering 1,000 volumes in Everyman's Library, Frowde was determined to considerably increase the World's Classics list. He asked Watts-Dunton "for a list of any works which occur to you which ought to be included, and the best name in each case for an introduction."³⁴ In a report to Delegates written two years after the purchase of the series, Frowde noted that 61 new titles had been added to the initial list of 65 World's Classics books. In total, 250,000 volumes were sold each year, including one third in leather. "The success of the venture has, no doubt, been to some extent affected by the gigantic proportions of Everyman's Library which Mr Dent has since issued," wrote Frowde, "but notwithstanding this our sales are being fairly well maintained."³⁵

³² Frowde to Watts-Dunton, 12 January 1906 (see above, n. 24).

³³ Frowde to the Master of University College Oxford, 23 September 1909. Ibid.

³⁴ Frowde to Watts-Dunton, 30 January 1906. Ibid.

³⁵ Frowde to Charles Cannan, 27 November 1907. Ibid.

The third point of Frowde's strategy to develop the World's Classics relied on the accuracy of texts. One of the first things Frowde did after acquiring the series from Grant Richards was to have the volumes "very carefully read" to correct misprints.³⁶ Frowde used the distinguished scholarly reputation of Oxford to differentiate the World's Classics from other cheap series. More than twenty years later, his successor, Humphrey Milford could present the World's Classics editions of Tolstoy as "reliable translations" in a market saturated with cheap editions "so unreliable that they ought not to be encouraged."³⁷

Frowde followed Grant Richards's practice to issue the World's Classics in various formats sold at different prices. In spring 1906, he launched the first Pocket editions, printed on thin paper for holiday, travel and outdoors use. This was probably a way to side-step competition from Everyman's Library, whose books had a larger size.³⁸ World's Classics were also available in thick paper, for a more durable presence in a personal library. Copies in either thickness were sold in cloth and leather bindings. The 1907 catalogue gives an indication of this diversity in paper, binding and price.³⁹ The thick-paper edition was bound-up in ten different styles, as Table 1 shows:

Thick-paper edition	Pocket edition
Cloth (1/-)	Art cloth (1/-)

³⁶ Frowde to Watts-Dunton, 12 January 1906. Ibid.

³⁷ Milford to George Stephen, 22 June 1928 (see above, n. 3).

³⁸ Milford to H. Z. Walck, 14 August 1943. Oxford, OUP, WC Misc. (to June 1962), Ref: LOGE 000260 Box LG34.

³⁹ Qtd in 'The World's Classics,' 12 August 1943. Ibid.

Sultan red leather (1/6)	Sultan red leather (1/6)
Buckram (paper label) (1/6)	¼ Vellum (4/-)
¼ Parchment (1/8)	
Lambskin (2/-)	
Parchment (2/6)	
¼ Vellum (4/-)	
½ Calf (4/-)	
Whole calf (5/6)	
Three calf (5/6)	

[INSERT Table 1: Bindings and prices (in shillings and pence) for each edition of the World's Classics, 1907]

This broad choice of physical formats sat rather uncomfortably with the proclaimed uniformity of the World's Classics. As Frowde told the Delegates, "a popular series issued under a general title ought to consist of volumes uniform in size, binding, and price."⁴⁰ Frowde gave the examples of the Rulers of India Series and the Fireside Dickens Series, whose variations in prices had been "detrimental" to the success of the former and "unfortunate" for the latter. Frowde and Milford (who took over in 1913) probably used the various physical formats of the World's Classics to target different niches of readers.

⁴⁰ Frowde to the Delegates, 22 November 1905 (see above, n. 24).

For example, thick-paper editions bound in calf leather were well suited for those who wanted to build their own libraries, but not for travellers and low-income readers. The thick-paper edition was dropped in 1917 and, by 1928 the World's Classics series was issued only in the Pocket edition, in two bindings priced at 2s. for cloth and 3s. 6d. for sultan red leather.

Humphrey Milford and T. S. Eliot's introduction to *The Moonstone*

The turn towards more physical uniformity was accompanied by a relative modernisation of the list. Under Richards's and Frowde's leadership, the World's Classics had included works and introductions by writers associated with the Victorian era. Watts-Dunton's death in 1914 nearly coincided with the arrival of Humphrey Milford at the head of the London branch. While Richards and Frowde had started working in their adolescence, Milford went to the University of Oxford to study classics. Unlike the first two, he was an Oxford insider, selected by Charles Cannan, then secretary to the Delegates of the OUP.⁴¹ Amy Flanders suggests that "while Frowde's trade experience and entrepreneurship had served the London business well, Cannan perhaps felt that Milford's academic credentials would better suit the ever-growing list of literary and educational titles."⁴² Indeed, Milford kept a life-long interest in literature and followed contemporary developments by reading the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *London Mercury* and the *Criterion* (founded by T. S. Eliot in 1922).⁴³ Like Eliot, Milford also enjoyed various forms of popular culture. An avid reader of detective and mystery stories, he once told the politician Godfrey Collins: "I began *The Footsteps that Stopped* - what an excellent title - late one evening, and found myself at past midnight at the most exciting part, when a belated (and of course 'wrong-number') telephone-bell rang and terrified me out of wits!"⁴⁴

⁴¹ Martin Maw, 'Milford, Sir Humphrey Sumner (1877-1952),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 [accessed 8 May 2014], <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35020>.

⁴² Flanders (see above, n. 25), p. 144.

⁴³ Milford to F. V. Morley, 10 May 1928; Milford to Abel Chevalley, 5 January 1927 (see above, n.3).

⁴⁴ Milford to Collins, 2 October 1926. Ibid.

In 1924, Milford added an anthology of “uncanny tales,” *Ghosts & Marvels*, in the World’s Classics. Montague Rhodes James, a noted medievalist and author of antiquarian ghost stories, prefaced the book. The editor of the anthology, V. H. Collins, selected one of James’s stories (“Casting the Runes”), as well as tales by Daniel Defoe, Walter Scott, George Eliot, H. G. Wells, Algernon Blackwood, Barry Pain and others. Like other World’s Classics, *Ghosts & Marvels* was sold in Britain, the United States and throughout the British Empire. An advertisement from the Indian branch of the Oxford University Press declared that this “book of many thrills ... will please the lovers of the *Supernatural*.”⁴⁵ The *Times of India* also described it as “a fine parcel of creepy stories.”⁴⁶ In 1927, the first printing of 10,000 copies had sold out, and two additional printings of 5,000 and 10,000 copies were ordered.⁴⁷

The success of *Ghosts & Marvels* encouraged Milford to add more popular short stories to the World’s Classics. *Crime & Detection*, published in 1926, included stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Arthur Morrison, Richard Austin Freeman, Ernest Bramah, G. K. Chesterton, H. C. Bailey, E. W. Hornung, and Barry Pain. According to one advertisement, *Crime & Detection* contained “a delightful introduction (which will conquer the prejudices of the firmest disliker of introductions).”⁴⁸ In this clearly written preface, the Magdalen historian E. M. [Edward Murray] Wrong argued that the detective story could be traced back to the Bible: in the Apocrypha, for example, “Daniel’s cross-examination saves Susanna from the false witness of lecherous elders.”⁴⁹ Having placed detective fiction in the long history of Western literature, Wrong then went on to praise the Victorian writers who had re-invented the genre: Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859, reprinted in the World’s Classics in 1921) “made a happy connexion between villainy and detection” and *The Moonstone* was

⁴⁵ Oxford University Press, Advertisement, *Times of India*, 11 March 1927.

⁴⁶ ‘Current Topics,’ *Times of India*, 15 January 1925.

⁴⁷ Oxford, OUP, Production & Sales figures, *Ghosts and Marvels*.

⁴⁸ Oxford World’s Classics, Advertisement, *Spectator* 137 (1926), 400.

⁴⁹ E. M. Wrong, ‘Introduction’ to *Crime & Detection* [World’s Classics] (London: Oxford UP, 1926), pp. ix–xxx (p. ix).

“more orthodox because more of a pure puzzle.”⁵⁰ Wrong’s foreword was so influential that fifteen years later, the American publisher and mystery scholar Howard Haycraft could describe it as a “memorable introduction” that “remains the most succinct of all statements of detective story principles.”⁵¹ Haycraft also anthologized the preface in his collection of critical essays, *The Art of the Mystery Story* (1946).

It was highly uncommon for cheap series of classics to include detective fiction (*Fourteen Great Detective Stories*, largely inspired by *Crime & Detection*, was published in the Modern Library in 1928 and *Tales of Detection*, edited by Dorothy Sayers, appeared in Everyman’s Library only in 1936). As Haycraft put it, *Crime & Detection* was not only the first anthology on the subject “to be compiled in accordance with critical principles,” it also had an introduction that “marked the earliest attempt of a purposive historical and analytical survey and summation of the medium.”⁵² *Crime & Detection* was thus a unique product that caught the attention of many reviewers. *Contemporary Review* declared that “it was a good idea but a difficult task” to add detective stories to the World’s Classics. The journalist commended the selection, but found Wrong’s connection between the prophet Daniel and detective fiction rather “far-fetched.”⁵³ The *Times Literary Supplement* devoted its leading article to a long discussion on detectives, which was then reproduced in the American magazine the *Living Age*. The *TLS* reviewer, Harry Pirie-Gordon (13rd Laird of Buthlaw), praised Oxford University Press “for reissuing in cheap editions the finer achievements of the Old Masters of this form of craft.” According to him, *Crime & Detection* was interesting precisely because it contained many older texts written before the invention of modern technologies:

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. xii.

⁵¹ Howard Haycraft, *Murder For Pleasure: The Life And Times Of The Detective Story* (New York: Appleton, 1941), p. 273.

⁵² Howard Haycraft, ed., *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), p. 18.

⁵³ Unindexed back matter, *Contemporary Review*, 1 July 1926, 811.

In this way we can readily compare the technique of those who thrill us now with that of the men who kept our sires and grandsires awake till dawn with the prowess of heroes who landed each criminal fish in turn without the assistance of finger-prints or chemical reagents, telegraphic warnings over the official tape-machine to all police stations, wireless messages to shipmasters upon the high seas, photography, the telephone, or any means of locomotion more rapid than a hansom cab.⁵⁴

This focus on tradition fitted well with the image of the World's Classics, and with Wrong's account of the long history of the detective genre.

Crime & Detection was presented as a collection of venerable classics written by "Old Masters," but also as an anthology of thrilling tales grounded in modernity. The dust jacket thus showed a drawing of an executioner, in a purified composition of angular shapes and black lines (Figure 4.1). A similar style was used in a poster that grouped together *Ghosts & Marvels* and *Crime & Detection*, marketed as "short stories for the holidays" (Figure 4.2). These striking modern illustrations highlight an evolution in the positioning of the World's Classics. Milford trod a fine line between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, he was heavily invested in preserving the image of the World's Classics as a respectable, conservative series but, on the other, he was aware of the intensely competitive nature of the reprint market. In 1926, the same year in which *Crime & Detection* was published, Jonathan Cape launched the Travellers' Library, a cheap series that included copyrighted texts such as James Joyce's *Dubliners*. Milford chose to position the World's Classics somewhere between Everyman's Library and the Travellers' Library, by incorporating aspects of the new art and new literature without losing sight of the World's Classics core mission of providing family-friendly books to a large audience of middle-to-lower-class readers.

⁵⁴ Harry Pirie-Gordon, 'Detectives,' *Times Literary Supplement*, August 12, 1926.

[INSERT Figure 4.1. Dust jacket, *Crime & Detection* (c. 1926) (Unknown illustrator).] By permission of Roxann Bilger and Oxford University Press.

[INSERT Figure 4.2 Poster, *Ghosts & Marvels* and *Crime & Detection*, reproduced in the *Bookseller*, August 1926, 32.]

Crime & Detection was an immediate bestseller: nine months after its release, nearly 10,000 copies had already been sold.⁵⁵ A comparison with *Ghosts & Marvels* shows that both books eventually reached a total sale of around 25,000 copies each. In 1927, Milford published a second selection of tales, *More Ghosts & Marvels* with a first printing of 10,000.⁵⁶ He then issued the second series of *Crime & Detection*. With these books, Milford had proved that detective fiction and ghost stories could be marketed as “world’s classics” without endangering the credibility of the series.

It is in this context that Milford decided to add Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* to the World’s Classics. In December 1926, Harold Raymond of Chatto & Windus confirmed that Collins’s preface to the second edition was free to be used.⁵⁷ The novel itself had been out-of-copyright since 1910, and was already available in several publisher’s series (including Nelson’s Classics and Harrap’s Standard Fiction Library). However, Milford was confident that a preface by a well-chosen writer could create interest in the book. In January 1927, Milford read T. S. Eliot’s praise of *The Moonstone* in the *New Criterion* (“The great book which contains the whole of English detective fiction in embryo ... ; every

⁵⁵ Oxford, OUP, Production & Sales figures, *Crime & Detection*.

⁵⁶ Oxford, OUP, Production & Sales figures, *More Ghosts & Marvels*.

⁵⁷ Harold Raymond to Gerard Hopkins, 3 December 1926. Oxford, OUP, File *The Moonstone*, Ref: 010117 Box: OP1365.

detective story, so far as it is a good detective story, observes the detective laws to be drawn from this book”).⁵⁸ Milford wrote to the author:

I am about to add it to the World's Classics series, and it would give me great pleasure if you would write an introduction - pleasure both in being associated with your name, and in having the *Moonstone* properly discussed. It remains so much the greatest of detective novels that someone ought to do it justice among the populace.⁵⁹

Here we see a reference to the name of the consecrated writer, and to his power to re-evaluate a work that has so far been neglected.

Eliot was delighted by Milford's letter, which came with a gift of the World's Classics books (including *The Woman in White*). He replied on the same day to accept the offer, pending the authorisation of Faber and Faber, who had an option on all his non-periodical work. Eliot also mentioned that he was working on a long article on Collins for *The Times*, and suggested that *Armada* should be added to the World's Classics.⁶⁰ In mid-April, Milford, desiring to publish the book as soon as possible, asked Eliot to submit his preface within three to four weeks.⁶¹ Eliot took less than that, and sent his preface on 1 May 1927 along with a cover letter:

I am afraid that you may find it rather short for your purpose. But I found that if said more in a general way, about Collins or about this form of fiction, it seemed to cease to be an Introduction to this book; and if I said more particularly about this book I was telling the new reader more than he wanted to know in advance. It is difficult to write a long introduction to a single novel, and I doubt whether many readers want it.⁶²

⁵⁸ *New Criterion*, January 1927, 140. Qtd in Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, eds., *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 4 vols. (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), 3: 395, n. 3.

⁵⁹ Milford to Eliot, 31 January 1927 (see above, n. 57).

⁶⁰ Eliot to Milford, 31 January 1927. Ibid. Qtd in *Letters of T. S. Eliot* (see above, n. 58), 3: 395-6.

⁶¹ Milford to Eliot, 12 April 1927 (see above, n. 3).

⁶² Eliot to Milford, 1 May 1927 (see above, n. 57). Qtd in *Letters of T. S. Eliot* (see above, n. 58), 3: 493.

For Eliot (and for Woolf), an introduction was at best an invitation to read the book and, at worst, a pedantic discourse that would create a boundary between reader and the novel.

Eliot was well aware of the role of scholars in the Oxford World's Classics series. One of the volumes sent by Milford, William Congreve's *Comedies*, was edited and introduced by Bonamy Dobrée, a professor of English at the Egyptian University in Cairo. Eliot's distrust of academia probably explains his reluctance to write a long introduction, which risked turning the reader away from the novel. His own experience of academic life, including graduate work at Oxford, had been far from happy. He once wrote to his friend Conrad Aiken: "I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books and hideous pictures on the walls ... Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead."⁶³ As Gail McDonald argues, Eliot was convinced that erudition was not enough to explain a work of art: the creation of poetry and criticism could bring insights not available through traditional academic disciplines.⁶⁴

As we have seen, the Oxford World's Classics had a rather ambiguous positioning. Although it was published by a university press and included many academic contributors, it was sold to a large audience of non-specialist readers (the "populace" mentioned by Milford in his first letter to Eliot). The opportunity to reach a wide readership certainly appealed to Eliot. While he has often been presented as an elitist writer who wrote difficult poems for a small coterie of readers, Eliot, in fact, deplored the divide between high and low culture. The importance of addressing a broad audience is a central theme in "Wilkie Collins and Dickens," published on the front page of the *Times Literary Supplement* in August 1927. "Those who have lived before such terms as 'high-brow fiction,' 'thrillers' and 'detective fiction' were invented," wrote Eliot, "realize that melodrama is perennial and that the craving for it is

⁶³ Eliot to Aiken, 31 December 1914. Qtd in *Letters of T. S. Eliot* (see above, n. 58), 1: 74.

⁶⁴ Gail McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern: Pound, Eliot, and the American University* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 44.

perennial and must be satisfied.”⁶⁵ As David Chinitz puts it, “Eliot describes the disjunction between the ‘high’ and the ‘popular’ as a sort of iron curtain that has only recently descended across the arts.”⁶⁶ For Eliot, Collins’s melodramatic plots appealed to all kinds of readers and ensured his literary legacy. Even long after his death, *The Woman in White* - “the greatest of Collins’s novels” - continues to be a novel that “every one knows.”⁶⁷ Eliot also praised the *Moonstone* as “the first and greatest of English detective novels,”⁶⁸ which became “the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels” in the introduction to the World’s Classics edition.⁶⁹ The editor of the *TLS*, who published Eliot’s article in August for “holiday reading,”⁷⁰ must have been delighted by the light and enthusiastic tone of the piece. “Best” and “greatest” are recurring words. Eliot does not directly criticize contemporary writers for being too obscure or highbrow, but reminds them that “the first – and not one of the least difficult – requirements of either prose or verse is that it should be interesting.”⁷¹

Although Milford had planned to publish *The Moonstone* shortly after receiving Eliot’s introduction, the book did not appear until March 1928.⁷² The 2,500-word introduction is a more focused version of the 3,500-word article. In particular, Eliot made cuts to the discussion on the divide between high and low culture. He also expanded his comparison between *The Moonstone* and contemporary detective novels: “Modern detective writers have added the use of fingerprints and such other trifles, but they have not materially improved upon either the personality or the methods of Sergeant Cuff.”⁷³ This observation resembled Harry Pirie-Gordon’s review of *Crime & Detection* in the *TLS*. For both Eliot and Pirie-Gordon, the detective’s use of new technologies did not necessarily make

⁶⁵ Eliot, ‘Wilkie Collins and Dickens,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 August 1927, p.1.

⁶⁶ David Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 55.

⁶⁷ Eliot, ‘Wilkie Collins and Dickens’ (see above, n. 65).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Eliot, ‘Introduction’ to *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins [World’s Classics] (London: Oxford UP, 1928), pp. v–xii (p. v).

⁷⁰ Eliot to Milford, 1 May 1927 (see above, n. 57). Qtd in *Letters of T. S. Eliot* (see above, n. 58), 3: 493.

⁷¹ Eliot, ‘Wilkie Collins and Dickens’ (see above, n. 65).

⁷² It is probable that Bruce L. Richmond, editor of the *TLS*, asked for this delay, so that Eliot’s article would be seen as original and exclusive rather than an advertisement for the forthcoming World’s Classics edition. Milford mentions his negotiation with Richmond in his letter to Eliot, 3 May 1927 (see above, n. 57).

⁷³ Eliot, ‘Introduction’ (see above, n. 69), p. xii.

the novel more interesting. “Sergeant Cuff is the perfect detective,” wrote Eliot, “Our modern detectives are most often either efficient but featureless machines, forgotten the moment we lay the book down, or else they have too many features, like Sherlock Holmes.”⁷⁴ Eliot’s analogy between human beings and machines is reminiscent of the typist in *The Waste Land* who “smooths her hair with automatic hand,/ And puts a record on the gramophone.”⁷⁵ As Tim Armstrong has argued, the “mechanized body or the body attached to a machine” is a central theme of modernism.⁷⁶ Far from celebrating this penetration of the body by emerging technologies, Eliot bemoans the lost era of the fallible detective who solved crimes unaided by modern means.

In his review of *The Moonstone* in the American magazine the *Dial*, Gilbert Seldes agreed with Eliot that contemporary detectives lacked the personality of a Sergeant Cuff.⁷⁷ Seldes had known Eliot for a long time (they first met at Harvard in 1912) and as the managing editor of the *Dial* between 1921 and 1924, Seldes oversaw the publication of *The Waste Land* in the magazine.⁷⁸ An early admirer of Eliot’s and Joyce’s work, he nevertheless enjoyed popular culture. A few months before reviewing the *Moonstone*, Seldes had written on *Fourteen Great Detective Stories*, an anthology published in the Modern Library series.⁷⁹ He even wrote his own detective stories, under the penname of Foster Johns. As Michael Kammen puts it, Seldes “never ceased to believe that high culture and popular culture could beneficially converge.”⁸⁰

Drawing on Eliot’s introduction, Seldes deplored that writers like S. S. Van Dine considered a murder as essential to the detective novel: “In *The Moonstone* the diamond itself is made interesting by the prologue giving its bloody history and giving, as Mr Eliot says, the sense of fatality for the whole

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. xii.

⁷⁵ Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 32.

⁷⁶ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), p. 86.

⁷⁷ Gilbert Seldes, ‘Mr Eliot’s Favourite,’ *Dial*, November 1928, 437-40, there 438.

⁷⁸ Chinitz, *Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (see above, n. 66), p. 60.

⁷⁹ Gilbert Seldes, ‘Extra Good Ones,’ *Dial*, June 1928, 519-21; Jaillant (see above, n. 1).

⁸⁰ Michael G. Kammen, *The Lively Arts: Gilbert Seldes and the Transformation of Cultural Criticism in the United States* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), p. 10.

book.”⁸¹ In an endnote, Seldes explained that he had already publicly disagreed with Van Dine on this issue.⁸² Eliot’s foreword thus allowed him to bring new arguments to this on-going discussion. In short, Milford’s plan to have *The Moonstone* “properly discussed” had been entirely fulfilled: thanks to its preface, the book re-emerged, both in Britain and in the United States, as central to the canon of detective fiction.

The title of the review, “Mr Eliot’s Favourite,” highlights the aura of the writer, whose name was enough to attract the attention of readers. Like Hollywood stars advertising their favourite soap, Eliot’s recommendation of a particular book was a guarantee of increased sales. This explains why his introduction was mentioned on many, if not all advertisements for the World’s Classics.⁸³ Although *The Moonstone* was not a quick success like *Ghosts & Marvels* and *Crime & Detection*, it sold steadily over a long period of time (Appendix 1). The book was still available in the series in the mid-1960s, with a dust jacket that referred to the introduction by T. S. Eliot (Figure 4.3). Overall, Milford made an excellent bargain by paying fifteen guineas for a preface that continued to boost the sales and cultural prestige of the series for several decades.⁸⁴

[INSERT Figure 4.3. Dust jacket, *The Moonstone*, Oxford World's Classics, c. 1966.] By permission of Oxford University Press.

Eliot’s introduction has been so enduring in part because of its striking statements that can be turned into blurbs. An editor himself, Eliot was known for his business sense, and he often wrote blurbs

⁸¹ Seldes, ‘Extra Good Ones’ (see above, n. 70), 439.

⁸² Ibid., 440.

⁸³ See for example, *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 March 1928; 22 March 1928 and 22 November 1928.

⁸⁴ Milford to Eliot, 31 January 1927 (see above, n. 57).

for Faber & Faber book-jackets.⁸⁵ He was certainly aware that a phrase such as “the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels” (repeated twice in the introduction) could boost the sales of *The Moonstone*. However, Eliot probably felt that such enthusiastic declarations had to be used cautiously. Too many introductions, with too many “best” and “greatest,” would have a decreasing effect on readers, and could even endanger his position as a consecrated writer. In the preface to Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1937), Eliot declared:

When the question is raised, of writing an introduction to a book of a creative order, I always feel that the few books worth introducing are exactly those which it is an impertinence to introduce. I have already committed two such impertinences; this is the third, and if it is not the last no one will be more surprised than myself.⁸⁶

Here, Eliot gave the image of a modest writer, who had no authority to judge literary masterpieces. The purpose of the introduction, Eliot said, was simply to encourage the reader to read the book. In other words, a good preface was nothing more than an expanded blurb. “In describing *Nightwood* for the purpose of attracting readers to the English edition,” Eliot explained, “I said that it would ‘appeal primarily to readers of poetry.’ This is well enough for the brevity of advertisement, but I am glad to take this opportunity to amplify it a little.”⁸⁷ Eliot’s introductions can therefore be seen as advertising materials that would circulate his name and help increase the sales of the books.

Virginia Woolf’s Introduction to *Sentimental Journey*

One year after approaching Eliot, Humphrey Milford wrote to Virginia Woolf about the proposed World’s Classics edition of Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*. “I should be delighted if you

⁸⁵ Matthew Evans, ‘Guru-in-Chief,’ *Guardian*, 6 June 2009 [accessed 8 May 2014], <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jun/06/t-s-eliot-faber-matthew-evans>.

⁸⁶ Eliot, ‘Introduction’ to *Nightwood*, by Djuna Barnes, 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 1-7 (p. 1).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

would consent to write a recommendatory introduction for the ‘common reader,’” declared Milford.⁸⁸ Ironically, this ordinary reader could be reached through a series published by Oxford University Press and edited by an Oxford-educated man. It seems surprising that Woolf, who deeply resented the authority of university men, would have contributed to a series so much associated with an elitist academic system. For Woolf, the “common reader” differed “from the critic and the scholar”: “He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others.”⁸⁹ Woolf thought that readers should make their own decisions on the value of a text, without any guidance from so-called “experts.” So why did she agree to write not one, but two introductions to cheap editions published by Oxford World’s Classics and the Modern Library in 1928? In my monograph on the Modern Library, I argue that Woolf wanted to widen her audience in the United States.⁹⁰ This chapter develops my argument by looking at Oxford World’s Classics, a series well distributed in the United States.

Woolf, who had started reviewing books for the *Times Literary Supplement* in her early twenties, was already familiar with the World’s Classics series. In 1917, she praised series’ publication of Tolstoy’s *The Cossacks and Other Tales of the Caucasus*. She agreed with the translators, Louise and Aylmer Maude, that Tolstoy was “the greatest of Russia’s writers.”⁹¹ Woolf’s attraction to Russian literature would lead her to take language lessons, and even contribute to translations of books published by The Hogarth Press.⁹² Her essay “Modern Fiction” (reprinted in the World’s Classics in 1933) also celebrated the influence of Russian writers on Anglophone literary modernism.

In addition to Russian literature, Woolf often wrote about her interest in Sterne’s work. As early as 1905 she described *Sentimental Journey* as a pioneering book, well suited for contemporary readers:

⁸⁸ Milford to Woolf, 6 January 1928. Oxford, OUP, File *Sentimental Journey*, Ref: 010120 Box: OP1365.

⁸⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 11.

⁹⁰ Jaillant (see above, n. 1).

⁹¹ Woolf, ‘Tolstoy’s “The Cossacks,”’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 February 1917, p. 55.

⁹² See Rebecca Beasley, ‘On Not Knowing Russian: The Translations of Virginia Woolf and S. S. Kotelianskii,’ *Modern Language Review* 108.1 (2013), 1-29.

“Sterne, when he invented the title of *Sentimental Journey*, not only christened but called into existence a class of book which seems to grow more popular the more we travel and the more sentimental we become.”⁹³ Four years later, Woolf wrote a long review of Sterne’s biography which was published on the front page of the *Times Literary Supplement*.⁹⁴ In Woolf’s critical writings, Sterne appears as one of the first truly modern English writers. In 1919, she wrote: “English fiction from Sterne to Meredith bears witness to our natural delight in humour and comedy, in the beauty of earth, in the activities of the intellect, and in the splendour of the body.”⁹⁵ Considering Woolf’s well-documented admiration for Sterne, it is not surprising that E. M. Forster suggested, in his *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), that there was a strong affinity between the two writers.⁹⁶

Milford, who had included Forster’s essay “Philo’s Little Trip” in his *Selected Modern English Essays* (1925), probably got the idea to contact Woolf after reading *Aspects of the Novel*. In Milford’s correspondence and in the World’s Classics catalogue, Forster and Woolf are often linked together. In 1929, Milford asked Forster to write the introduction to Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* in the World’s Classics, and sent him “a copy of one of the latest volumes, the *Sentimental Journey* with Virginia Woolf’s introduction.”⁹⁷ Forster declined, but his work later appeared alongside Woolf’s in *Selected Modern English Essays, Second Series* (1932) and in *English Critical Essays, Twentieth Century* (1933). In bringing the names of Forster, Woolf and Eliot to his catalogue, Milford therefore updated the image of the World’s Classics, from a traditional series of classics to a modernist institution of a sort.

The presence of Woolf also signalled a timid turn towards more women in the series. Although the early World’s Classics had included the works of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Jane Austen and

⁹³ Woolf, ‘Journeys in Spain,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 May 1905, p. 167.

⁹⁴ Woolf, ‘Sterne. Rev. of *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, by Wilbur L. Cross,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 August, 1909, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Woolf, ‘Modern Novels,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 April, 1919, p. 189. This article was later reprinted under the title ‘Modern Fiction.’

⁹⁶ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 34-7.

⁹⁷ Milford to Forster, 11 October 1929 (see above, n. 3).

Elizabeth Gaskell, those who wrote introductions were, with very few exceptions, men. For instance, Theodore Watts-Dunton wrote the preface to Brontë's *The Professor* and to Eliot's *Works III* (both published in 1906, shortly after Henry Frowde took over the series). However, Frowde was not hostile to having women write prefaces. When he was planning to add Washington Irving's *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada*, he contacted Gertrude Atherton, a prolific American writer. As Frowde explained, the World's Classics books "have a very large circulation and many distinguished authors are consequently willing to contribute introductions although the fee I am able to offer is so small."⁹⁸ Atherton seemed unimpressed, and never contributed to the series. The gender imbalance of the World's Classics list did not change much in the following years. Milford thus refused to publish Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, with an introduction by George Catlin (Vera Brittain's husband). "In England, at least," Milford told Catlin, "women have secured political equality, and I believe very few of us can no longer feel any strong interest in the subject."⁹⁹ Despite this lack of interest in the suffrage movement, Milford slightly increased the representation of women in the World's Classics. Indeed, his collaboration with Woolf in 1928 was followed by multiple attempts to add introductions by Rebecca West and Edith Sitwell.¹⁰⁰ From 1931, Milford also reprinted several novels by Constance Holme, the first living female author to join the series. In addition, Phyllis Jones edited *English Critical Essays, Twentieth Century* (1933), which included essays by Woolf and Eliot. Although the World's Classics remained a male-dominated series, it was no longer closed to contemporary female authors and contributors.

After receiving Milford's letter in January 1928, Woolf asked him to confirm that she would be able to publish a version of the introduction in America before it came out in book form.¹⁰¹ Milford replied that since the World's Classics edition would also be sold in the United States, he would prefer

⁹⁸ Frowde to Atherton, 15 April 1907 (see above, n. 24).

⁹⁹ Milford to Catlin, 12 June 1928 (see above, n. 3).

¹⁰⁰ Milford to Secretary Clarendon Press, 15 October 1930 (see above, n. 3); 'ACW' to H. Z. Walck, 6 December 1945. Oxford, OUP, File: Henry James: *The Portrait of a Lady*, Ref: 010149; Box OP 1367.

¹⁰¹ Woolf to Milford, 11 January 1928 (see above, n. 88).

it if the article did not appear “long in advance of the book.”¹⁰² He was perhaps thinking of Eliot’s *TLS* article on Wilkie Collins and Dickens, published so long before the publication of *The Moonstone* that it could not be used to advertise the book. When it became clear that Woolf’s essay would appear in September in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Milford asked that the editors mentioned that it was a reprint of the introduction to *Sentimental Journey*.¹⁰³ “Whether they do so or not you will no doubt be able to make use of the article to boost our edition,” wrote Milford to the American branch of Oxford University Press.¹⁰⁴ In short, the publication of the introduction in America was beneficial to Woolf (who was eager to increase her audience there) but also to the World’s Classics, a series with global ambitions.

In October 1928, three weeks after the release of the *New York Herald Tribune* article, the publisher Harcourt, Brace brought out the first American edition of *Orlando* with a first printing of 6,350 copies.¹⁰⁵ The book soon became a bestseller and contributed to Woolf’s growing celebrity in America.¹⁰⁶ In November and December, *Sentimental Journey* and *Mrs Dalloway* were published in the World’s Classics and the Modern Library series - and sold to a wide audience of common readers. The British side of Oxford University Press issued *Sentimental Journey* with a first printing of 5,000 copies.¹⁰⁷ Since the World’s Classics did not have to pay royalties on the text itself,¹⁰⁸ the edition of *Sentimental Journey* could be sold for only 80 cents in the United States. That was even cheaper than the 95-cent Modern Library edition, which reprinted Woolf’s copyrighted novel. The dust jackets of

¹⁰² Milford to Woolf, 12 January 1928 (see above, n. 3).

¹⁰³ Milford to Woolf, 16 August 1928 (see above, n. 88).

¹⁰⁴ Milford to OUP American Branch, 16 August 1928 (see above, n. 88).

¹⁰⁵ B. J. Kirkpatrick and Stuart N. Clarke, *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 63. Woolf’s article was published on 23 September, *Orlando* on 18 October 1928.

¹⁰⁶ “There were five re-impressions totalling 14,950 copies between November 1928 and February 1933.” Kirkpatrick and Clarke, *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* (see above, n. 105), p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Oxford, OUP, Production & Sales figures, *Sentimental Journey*.

¹⁰⁸ However, the press paid fifteen guineas to Woolf for the introduction to the World’s Classics edition. Milford to Woolf, 6 January 1928 (see above, n. 88).

both the World's Classics and Modern Library editions mentioned the introduction by Woolf to increase the appeal of the volumes.¹⁰⁹

The two prefaces present striking similarities. In both cases, Woolf places the reader at the centre of her analysis. In the foreword to *Sentimental Journey*, she writes: "the writer is always haunted by the belief that somehow it must be possible to brush aside the ceremonies and conventions of writing and to speak to the reader as directly as by word of mouth."¹¹⁰ She argues that Sterne was able to create a conversation with readers, instead of treating them as passive listeners. In the introduction to *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf gives fragments of interpretation on the text but she frames her discussion in reference to readers: "even so when everything had been brought to the surface, it would still be for the reader to decide what was relevant and what not."¹¹¹ Woolf was well aware that a wide public would read these introductions, and she eagerly sought to engage with her new readers.

In January 1929, the *Times Literary Supplement* published a long article on the World's Classics edition of *Sentimental Journey*.¹¹² "As a pocket volume in 'The World's Classics,' to which it has been added by Mr Humphrey Milford with a generous type and margins," declared the reviewer, "the little novel may seem to glide by us in a flash." The article by Arthur Sydney McDowall, entitled "Mrs Woolf and Sterne" focused mainly on the relationship between the two writers. In particular, it explored the modernity of Sterne's work: "Certainly he might recognize something of himself in the varied sensibility, the personal expressiveness, the audacities of modern fiction." While Sterne appeared as an ancestor to modern literature, Woolf was placed in the long canon of English literature: "Is there no analogy to Sterne in the undertones of *To the Lighthouse* or the elastic brilliance of

¹⁰⁹ Jaillant (see above, n. 1).

¹¹⁰ Woolf, 'Introduction' to *Sentimental Journey, by Laurence Sterne* [World's Classics] (London: Oxford UP, 1928), pp. v-xvii (p. vii).

¹¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, eds. Andrew McNeillie and Stuart N. Clarke, 6 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-2012), 4: 549.

¹¹² Arthur Sydney McDowall, 'Mrs Woolf and Sterne,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 January 1929, p. 25.

Orlando?” The World’s Classics series therefore contributed to Woolf’s reputation as a major writer, comparable to Sterne.

Woolf’s collaboration with the World’s Classics was also noticed in the United States. In an article entitled “We Love the Modernists,” the *Christian Science Monitor* stated that the New York office of Oxford University Press had sent them several books, including Sterne’s work.¹¹³ This package came in response to an earlier article on series of classics that had failed to acknowledge the World’s Classics, which “are authoritatively edited, well printed, neatly bound and cost only 80 cents.” The journalist replied that they had no objection to mentioning the World’s Classics in the newspaper. “Nor had we waited until now to read Virginia Woolf’s introduction to the *Sentimental Journey* in this edition.” The tone suggests that no educated American reader could have missed such an important book. Moreover, the *Washington Post* reviewed *English Critical Essays, Twentieth Century* (1933), which included Woolf’s “Modern Fiction.” “There is nothing stuffy” about the book, stated the reviewer, before referring to the essays as “all very good reading on a quiet night.”¹¹⁴ *English Critical Essays* was also listed among recently added titles in a *New York Times* advertisement, which showed passengers on a steam-ship reading the World’s Classics books (Figure 4.4). Here, the cheap series was associated with leisure, luxury and taste - but also with portability (“a PERFECT POCKET FORMAT”).

[INSERT Figure 4.4. Advertisement for the World’s Classics, *New York Times*, 3 June 1934.]

Having established her name in the American market, Woolf refused to write another introduction for the World’s Classics and other publisher’s series. In 1930, E. M. Forster declined to

¹¹³ L. A. Sloper, ‘Bookman’s Holiday: We Love the Modernists,’ *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 June 1931, p.10.

¹¹⁴ Theodore Hall, ‘No End of Books,’ *Washington Post*, 10 March 1934, p. 9.

introduce Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (as he told Milford, the more he thought about the book, the more he hated it).¹¹⁵ Milford then turned to Woolf, who also rejected the offer.¹¹⁶ Shortly after, Woolf refused to write a preface to Anne Thackeray Ritchie's novels in the Travellers' Library. "I find these short introductions very difficult to do, and unsatisfactory from the writer's point of view," she told Jonathan Cape.¹¹⁷ As Hammond notes in her chapter on the World's Classics, "attempts were made – and refusals received – from the 1930s to at least the 1950s."¹¹⁸ In 1950, Milford's successor, Geoffrey Cumberlege, asked for permission to put a selection from Virginia Woolf's essays in a single volume of the World's Classics. "I think it would be good if some of her representative essays could be made available to a wider public than they may so far have reached," he told Harold Raymond, who now represented The Hogarth Press as an associate company of Chatto & Windus.¹¹⁹ But Leonard Woolf firmly rejected the proposal.¹²⁰ It seems that for Virginia and her husband, cheap reprint series could bring little to an already-established writer. When Woolf was trying to increase her stature in America, classics series offered her access to a wide market of common readers. But once she had obtained the recognition she was looking for, these series no longer served her purpose and risked competing with the inexpensive editions published by the Hogarth Press.

Although Woolf and Eliot wrote only one preface for the Oxford World's Classics, the books they introduced remained in the series for decades and sold to thousands of readers. Figures are available for the UK market, and show that *Sentimental Journey* and *The Moonstone* sold more than 17,000 and 23,000 copies respectively in the thirty years between 1928 and 1957. It is impossible to

¹¹⁵ Milford to Forster, 14 March 1930 (see above, n. 3).

¹¹⁶ Milford to Secretary Clarendon Press, 21 March 1930. Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Woolf to Cape, 1 May 1931. Reading, University of Reading Special Collections, Jonathan Cape archive, MS 2446. Permission to reproduce by the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf and Random House Group Ltd.

¹¹⁸ Hammond, *Reading, Publishing* (see above, n. 4), p. 111 n. 77.

¹¹⁹ Cumberlege to Raymond, 3 July 1950. Oxford, OUP, Folder World Classic Suggestions, Ref: LOGE 000267 Box LG35.

¹²⁰ Raymond to Cumberlege, 18 July 1950. Ibid.

give a precise account of the increased sales generated by the modernist writers' introductions, but we do know that during this period, *The Moonstone* sold around 10,000 more copies than *The Woman in White* (which did not feature a new introduction). *Selected Modern English Essays, Second Series* and *English Critical Essays, Twentieth Century* did even better, with nearly 26,000 copies sold between 1932 and 1957 for the former, and 31,000 copies between 1933 and 1957 for the latter (Appendix 1).¹²¹ These sales figures were comparable to those of the most successful titles in the series.¹²²

The collaboration between modernist writers and the World's Classics had an important cultural impact, not only in Britain but also in America. Eliot's introduction to *The Moonstone* seemed such an effective selling point that it was soon imitated. In 1937, the Modern Library launched its own edition of *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* in a single "Giant" volume, with an introduction by Alexander Woollcott. "*The Moonstone* was the first full-length detective novel. It is still the best," declared a blurb by Woollcott printed on the dust jacket. This was, of course, reminiscent of Eliot's "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels." This phrase and its variant "the first and greatest of English detective novels" have continued to be used in the marketing of *The Moonstone*. The latest edition in the Oxford World's Classics includes it as a blurb on the back cover. In the introduction, John Sutherland also comments on his illustrious predecessor. "Literary pontiff that he was, Eliot was less than well equipped to pronounce on the excellences of pulp fiction," writes Sutherland before arguing that *The Moonstone* is neither the first nor the best detective novel.¹²³ Eliot's superlatives have nevertheless become intrinsic to *The Moonstone* (even competitors to the World's Classics quote them on marketing materials).¹²⁴ Eliot's praise for *Armada*, which initially appeared in

¹²¹ Oxford, OUP, Production & Sales figures.

¹²² For example, Henry Fielding's *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, with an introduction by L. Rice-Oxley, sold nearly 27,000 copies from 1929 to 1957 (see above, n. 121).

¹²³ John Sutherland, 'Introduction' to *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins [World's Classics] (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. vii–xxix (p. vii).

¹²⁴ See, for example: webpage on Wilkie Collins, *Penguin* [accessed 8 May 2014], <http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000007536,00.html>.

the introduction to *The Moonstone*, is also used for the Penguin edition of the novel.¹²⁵ Eliot's introduction to the World's Classics edition has helped to sell cheap books for more than eighty years.

This chapter has aimed to highlight a neglected aspect of Woolf's and Eliot's engagement with the interwar marketplace. The World's Classics was far from the avant-garde institutions that we usually associate with modernism - the little review and the small press. The series was not only sold to a large audience, it was also positioned as a conservative, family-friendly enterprise that mostly reprinted out-of-copyright texts. Yet under the leadership of Humphrey Milford, the series became more open to the new art. Woolf and Eliot lent their already well-known names to boost sales of reprints, and they also benefited from their association with a large-scale publishing enterprise (including access to a wide American readership). The World's Classics contributed to transforming the image of these modernist writers from infamous avant-gardists to members of the artistic establishment.

Appendix 1

INSERT Figure 4.5: Cumulated sales figures, UK: *The Moonstone* (1928), *Sentimental Journey* (1928), *Selected Modern English Essays, Second Series* (1932), *English Critical Essays, Twentieth Century* (1933) © OUP.

Acknowledgements

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¹²⁵ "T. S. Eliot regarded *Armada* as being, after *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, 'the best of Collins's romances.'" Webpage on *Armada*, Penguin [accessed 8 May 2014], http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780140434118,00.html?strSrchSql=armadale%2A/Armadale_Wilkie_Collins.