

UNCONNECTED: RENTIER
INTELLECTUALS ÜBER ALLES IN E.M.
FORSTER'S *HOWARDS END*

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The broader project

Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, discusses Balzac & Austen, but leaves conceptual money on the table.

Bankman & Shaviro (2014) has fun with this. (And with Wodehouse.)

I gradually became persuaded that a project about literature & high-end inequality might prove to be fun, both for me & for readers.

Two huge challenges: figuring out how to write particular chapters, & developing an overall narrative trajectory.

The initial plan

3 studies per section, 6 sections, England & France in the Age of Revolutions -> modern U.S. (or world).

Mainly great novels (but also Ayn Rand). Films/plays: *The Wolf of Wall Street*, plus possibly *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Death of a Salesman*.

Working title, earlier this summer: *The Road to Ayn Randism: Literary Perspectives on the Rise, Fall, and Rise of High-End Inequality*.

A huge project to write – Forster chapter is #6 out of 18, finished #8 (Dreiser, *The Financier* & *The Titan* only last week.

And too long for publishers: 20 chapters X 10K each = 200K words.

The revised plan

Per the earlier working title – rise, fall, rise – there’s a natural division.
Gilded Age, Great Easing, New Gilded Age.

So 2 books, end Part 1 at the first Gilded Age, Book 2 to come.

The roster: (1) Age of Revolution (Austen, Stendhal, Balzac)

(2) England mid-19th century to WW I (Dickens, Trollope, Forster)

(3) America, Gilded Age (Twain-Warner, Dreiser)

Intro to American part also discusses Alger; postscript may briefly address other works (Howells, Fuller, Wharton, Tarkington).

Current Book 1 title: *Dangerous Grandiosity: Literary Perspectives on the Rise of High-End Inequality Through the First Gilded Age.*

Some underlying premises

High-end inequality & low-end inequality are different.

Importance of culture / status conflict to high-end inequality. Hence, e.g., aristocratic & capitalist societies w/ same distribution might differ.

Inadequacy of standard public economics for studying the high end. Utility just from own consumption? Negative externalities; might want taxes at the top above revenue-maximizing rates.

Need soft sociological inputs. Literary studies may help.

Choice metric & themes

No “hard social science” method for picking texts – the rule is that they have to interest me in a way that relates to the theme.

Importance of status issues, & of relations *within* the top 1% or 10%.

Also: egalitarianism vs. meritocracy; old wealth vs. new wealth; business vs. intellectual elites; why does finance so often have a “Master of the Universe” quality?

“Ayn Randism”: beyond the mere meritocratic celebration of success to toxic grandiosity; she’s a symbol of this but not its cause.

Howards End

Really is about 3 social groups: intellectual elite (idle rentiers), business elite (colonial empire), urban working class w/ white collar aspirations.

Treatment of Leonard & Jacky Bast has always made me uneasy (well-captured by Merchant-Ivory). But part of what's interesting!

Intellectual elite vs. business elite is timely to this day. Recognizable a la Obama-Romney & Clinton-Trump.

Some differences: the intellectuals are rentiers not professionals; none of today's fake-populist anti-elitist posturing by the elites.

“Only connect”

A great (unintended?) irony: this seemingly soft & fuzzy term is in fact highly weaponized.

While multi-faceted, it stands for the intellectual elite’s superiority to the business elite.

The 2 groups compete re. the working class (though differently than today) – intellectuals have greater compassion but also greater unease & a different type of snobbism.

Dominant feelings: anxiety about feeling unrooted and unconnected. Passive-aggressive hostility, unrealistic happy ending, the strange idealization of Mrs. Wilcox.