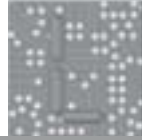


A 'guardian to Literature and its cousins'. The early politics of the PEN Club



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Abstract

The PEN Club formed in London in 1921 as a dinner circle for writers. Though its founders preferred to emphasize the Club's cultural significance, this article tracks PEN's politicization during its first decade. A Cornish novelist named C.A. Dawson Scott proposed the Club as a way to heal the rifts of World War I. British writers of sufficient stature would meet monthly giving writers from abroad a forum to meet their British counterparts. PEN's first President, the Nobel-prizer John Galsworthy, encouraged the group's apolitical self-image. Writers should stand aside from politics, he argued, precisely so that they might influence the politicians, diplomats, and powerbrokers who had led the world to war. PEN members rarely spoke of politics when they gathered, instead debating the boundaries of "literary" writing and the role of art itself. By refining their conception of aesthetics and cordoning off a space for cultural activity within civil society, this article argues that PEN members made a bold move into the political sphere they professed merely to influence. In doing so they foreshadowed the position that predominated among centrist and liberal writers on the Western side of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.

Founded in London in 1921, the PEN Club aimed to bring 'Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists' together to guard literature from politics. 'Literature is an Art which stands above politics', founding President John Galsworthy argued.¹ This conception of both literature and politics informed PEN's founding charter, drafted by Galsworthy and passed by delegates to the group's 1927 Brussels Congress.

The PEN stands for Literature in the sense of Art (not Journalism, nor Propaganda), and for the diffusion of Literature as art from country to country. The PEN stands for hospitable friendliness between writers, in their own countries, and with the writers of all other countries. The PEN stands for humane conduct. Such words as nationalist, internationalist, democratic, aristocratic, imperialistic, anti-imperialistic, bourgeois, revolutionary, or any other words with definite political significance should not be used in connection with the PEN; for the PEN has nothing whatever to do with State or Party politics, and cannot be used to serve State or Party interests or conflicts.²

Why did PEN position 'Literature' as an 'Art' distinguished from profit-driven journalism or politically-motivated propaganda? The conception of literature as elevated above the base realities of both marketplace and political instrumentalism grew from a desire to codify a normative conception of literary writing and to promote a certain class of writers as its guardians. The rhetorical separation of art from material realities that marked PEN's founding decade performed crucial ideological work, preparing the organization almost from its inception for action in the very realms – politics and the market – to which it professed superiority.

This article focuses on the first of these two realms PEN disavowed, politics, analyzing the dimensions and roots of the apolitical self-image PEN International crafted during its founding period, an image it continues to project to this day.³ The majority of existing published scholarship on PEN tracks the moment at which it 'politicized' – when it abandoned isolationism and entered the political fray. Inquiries structured around identification of politicization, however, privilege the assumption that literary activity can indeed exist separate from politics. Historians and other critics have tended to evaluate PEN history to the extent that it either 'fell' from or eventually 'realized' its promise. This assumption produces unsatisfyingly teleological accounts of the organization.

The historiographical preoccupation with PEN's politicization takes its cue from pronouncements made by the group itself. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the leadership of PEN formulated an 'artistic' conception of literature founded on a disavowal of politics. This discourse helped align the group with pre-War traditions, crucial considering it came into existence in response to the catastrophic fissures of the Great War. The wider ideological context of post-War internationalism, combined with an older tradition of liberal humanism, proved the most powerful formative influence on PEN during its founding decade. Apolitical, artistic 'Literature' could be used as a tool to aid PEN's efforts to rescue, rehabilitate, and model to the world conceptions of civility and civilization undergirded by normative high cultural forms. The elevation of literature above politics helped PEN define for itself a field of expertise. This authority could then be used to intervene in the political sphere. In this sense, PEN formed part of a constellation of groups founded in the 1920s that promoted transnational expertise as an antidote to national antagonisms.⁴

I conceive of literature and politics here as separate fields of endeavor each with their own forms of capital, rules of legitimation, and systems of reward and prestige. I argue, however, that while these fields function as discrete systems with their own conventions (writers are rewarded with literary prizes, politicians by election), they borrow from each other for legitimation more than is widely acknowledged. My research on PEN builds on the work of scholars such as Pascale Casanova, who investigate the dissemination of cultural prestige and modes of exchange between different forms of capital (prestige, money, political influence), work itself indebted to Pierre Bourdieu⁵ These writers emphasize the degree to which cultural ideals that present them as timeless and autonomous are in fact undergirded by material power relationships. Such research, however, sometimes succumbs to a trap similar to that it critiques. With an almost exclusive emphasis on the politics of the literary marketplace, these scholars seem to posit the ideal of radical autonomy of the literary sphere itself. Examination of PEN demonstrates the degree to which the literary and political fields were not only mutually constitutive, but also frequently converged.⁶

A materialist conception of culture in its descriptive sense therefore undergirds the following analysis. I am sensitive, however, to the fact that PEN members themselves remained committed to normative literary and cultural forms, to the concept of cultural idealism itself. Methodology can provide a solution to the tension that arises from imposing a materialist interpretative framework onto a group devoted to rescuing (to borrow their deliberate capitalizations) Culture and Art from a world torn asunder by the cataclysm of war. Attention to members' literary work, combined with an embrace of a narrative prose voice, provide some amelioration of this tension.

To illustrate the manner in which PEN's non-instrumental definition of culture helped ensure its political influence, this article proceeds on two fronts. First, it locates the roots of PEN's conception of literature in the traditions and circumstances of the English branch, the organization's founding center and the seat of its International Executive. Particular attention must be devoted here to the ideological perspective of the group's first International President, Galsworthy. Second, it examines the varied ways different poles of the group interpreted PEN's purported mission. Only then does the paradox undergirding the organization's authority become apparent: PEN's political influence was indexed to the extent to which it denied aspirations to such influence.

1. Mrs. Dawson Scott's Dinner Club

Though Galsworthy went on to define the group's mission, a novelist named Catherine Amy Dawson Scott originally conceived of the PEN Club. Dawson Scott was gently mocked by her contemporaries for her middle-brow sensibilities, a tone

and a worldview that stamped the first incarnation of PEN. Born in London in August 1865, Dawson Scott became a novelist known primarily for depictions of Cornish society. Her first published work, however, was a lyrical ode to the Greek poet Sappho. The young writer admired the Greek's championing of women's equal rights to education, confiding in her journal a desire to become known as 'the Sappho of this age'.⁷ She gave all of her savings – sixty-four pounds – to a vanity publisher for publication of her first book, an epic poem about Sappho.⁸ Although she achieved little critical recognition for the piece – and less than a month after it appeared her publisher's warehouse burnt down, taking her uninsured life's savings with it – she felt this signaled her entry into the literary world. To mark her transition, she discarded 'Amy' and christened herself after her idol. Apparently unaware of any sexual implications, 'Sappho' felt obliged to assure PEN delegates later in life that she was not a lesbian.⁹ Critics considered her literary work breezy entertainment at best and provincial at worst.¹⁰ Her chief advocate, her friend the publisher William Heinemann, confided to a literary agent, 'it is a great pity that [she]... has not clever people to sharpened her wits against. It is bad for her and shows in her work'.¹¹

Dawson Scott was, however, celebrated for her zeal and organizational capacities, and remembered for her enthusiastic networking. She arrived in London in the early 1890s and integrated herself into a circle of writers surrounding Heinemann and Walter Besant, founder and head of the Society of Authors. Contemporaries appreciated Heinemann's lunches partly because he refused to invite the spouses and partners of writers, arguing that they led his guests to 'censor themselves' and 'impeded the lively flow of discourse'.¹² The obligations of middle class life, however, eventually took the writer away from London. In 1898 Dawson Scott married a doctor whose career sent them first to the Isle of Man in 1902 and then on to Cornwall in 1908. In Cornwall in 1917 she founded a harbinger of the PEN Club, the To-Morrow Club. The To-Morrow Club aimed to nurture young writers by bringing them into contact with established authors over teas, which Dawson Scott staged and directed, from lettering invitations down to ordering china, in her house in Cornwall.

Given the success of the To-Morrow Club, Dawson Scott went on to found PEN in 1921. Using information gained through Heinemann, she recruited writers with greater stature than herself to attend the dinner. The PEN would provide a much-needed social space for writers, invitees were informed. 'London has no centre where well-known writers of both sexes can meet socially, no place where distinguished visitors from abroad can hope to find them,' her introductory letter began. 'As a dinner-club would supply this need, it is proposed to start one.'¹³ Like Heinemann before her, Dawson Scott prohibited spouses or any other ill-qualified people from attending. While members could bring a guest, preferably also a writer, they were barred from bringing the same person (most likely a spouse) twice per year.¹⁴ This

measure aimed to revive Dawson Scott's memory of the unhampered artistic and intellectual discourse she had experienced in London at the end of the Victorian era. Many writers accepted Dawson Scott's invitation either because of their relationship with Heinemann or because Dawson Scott's lobbying eventually proved effective. Rebecca West, one of the writers in whom Dawson Scott took particular interest, said of her in 1927, 'There isn't probably a person in London who hasn't called Sappho a pest.... [but] she is a loveable pest.'¹⁵ The tone of affectionate condescension West uses typifies most accounts of Dawson Scott. PEN struggled to overcome conflation with her reputation during its founding period.

PEN's effort to transcend its founder's identity also spoke to its need to overcome the 'taint' that nonpartisan associationalism would come increasingly to connote during the interwar years. Dawson Scott typified her social context. She sprang from middle class world whose members peopled a vibrant associational culture. Secular in character yet almost evangelical in their zeal, issue-based clubs, societies and lobby groups flourished in the 1920s. Largely in response to the seemingly unnecessary barbarism of the War, many of these groups were 'committed to creating and defending space within associational life that was free from partisan or sectarian conflict.'¹⁶ By the 1930s, such groups would come to seem increasingly incompatible with a world divided by ideological extremes, with a political and artistic ethos that called for commitment before compromise.¹⁷

Derision of Dawson Scott also belied a decidedly gendered worldview. As active and decisive political alignment came to dominate conceptions of the role of the writer by the 1930s, PEN's paradigm of cultural civility could be cast as excessively feminine. The PEN model of literary civility owed debts more to the private salons of the eighteenth century than to the rhetorical practices of the public sphere formalized by the nineteenth century. As PEN grew into an international organization, Dawson Scott would become increasingly marginalized from its activities. Galsworthy became President of the group in 1921, while Dawson Scott and her daughter Marjorie Watts administered the group. In 1927 a salaried Secretary, Hermon Ould, a playwright and acolyte of Galsworthy, replaced them both. Dawson Scott unironically assumed the mantle 'Sappho, The Mother of the PEN'.¹⁸ While women would continue to fill PEN's rank-and-file membership, no woman to this day has ever served as International President. Storm Jameson functioned as a de facto International President during the Second World War. While French writer Jules Romains had officially been elected President, as English branch President Jameson was left to run operations when Romains decamped to New York in anticipation of the fall of France. Tension amidst the English Executive against the idea of a woman leader must have been palpable, considering Jameson felt compelled to remark to Ould after her election to the English PEN Presidency, 'I felt horribly sorry last night that I was a woman, thus bringing dissension into the Club by the hand of Henry Simpson and some others. I must work harder to remove this awful stigma.'¹⁹ Considering the commendation Sappho received after her elevation to

the 'Mother of the PEN', to the condemnation Jameson reports experiencing, interwar PEN clearly embraced and perpetuated normative gender roles.

In this sense the PEN example provides a contrast to conclusions reached by historians of women's literary and international activities. As scholars of both of nineteenth and early twentieth century feminism and of literary history have argued, writing and print provided one of the key routes through which women shared ideas, explored new social roles, and inched their way into a civil society that denied them suffrage. The vanguard of women's empowerment and feminist exchange often took place in print. Authorship itself provided a way for middle class women to pursue employment outside of the home, while intellectual and activist women exchanged political ideas through journals and magazines. 'The creative arts' are often seen as 'the 'core' of avant-garde activity.' 'Like the 'new woman', 'feminism' was closely bound up with its representation in print – to be a feminist was very centrally a reading experience.'²⁰ Marginalized from more aggressively 'political' activities, literary culture typically provided women a means to access the public sphere.

The fact that PEN privileged men's voices over women's suggests two conclusions. Firstly, as will be demonstrated below in relation to literary hierarchies, by the 1920s literary writing had been somewhat dissociated from excessively 'middle-brow', 'feminine' connotations. Yet this program was not yet complete by the 1920s. Male PEN members could be pilloried for excessive softness. The type of man involved with a group like PEN formed precisely Orwell's target when he excoriated 'the Nancy poets' – the fey and effeminate artistic men who refused to take an assertive political position.²¹ Orwell scathingly described Galsworthy as 'the perfect Dumb Friends Leaguer.'²² Secondly, the privileging of male perspectives suggests PEN's desire to speak above all to the political and diplomatic powerbrokers. Writers, the fundamental premise of PEN maintained, were to serve above all as ambassadors between the fields of culture and politics. While women had long performed such mediating roles in an informal sense, the process of professionalization encouraged the increasing rigidity of gender barriers.

2. From Dinner Club to Discussion Circle

Galsworthy was the highest-profile writer to accept Dawson Scott's initial dinner invitation. The potential of the idea rather than her articulation, however, most sparked his interest. The PEN as he envisioned it would function less as a private dinner circle and more as a forum for international cultural communication. At the first PEN dinner at the Florence Restaurant in west London in October 1921, Galsworthy rose to give a toast, which demonstrates the rhetorical and practical direction in which he would push the group. 'We writers are in some sort trustees for human nature; if we are narrow and prejudiced we harm the human race. And

the better we know each other... the greater the chance of human happiness in a world not, as yet, too happy.²³ Writers, in short, possessed unique talents that enabled them to function as links across cultures. Because art stood above politics, writers could help nations transcend political strife. The Press almost without exception attributed the PEN idea to Galsworthy. While Galsworthy denied credit ('I am very sorry people keep attributing the PEN Idea to me instead of to your mother,' he wrote to Dawson Scott's daughter Marjorie Watts in 1924²⁴), this factual slip belied the reality: Galsworthy above all aspired to something greater than a dinner club, and he who pushed PEN from London to the world.

PEN branches began largely through the personal initiative of Galsworthy, who sent letters to friends and contacts worldwide urging them to found centers. The branches that formed in the 1920s thus owe their composition and ideological character to the web of relationships within which Galsworthy operated.²⁵ He personally wrote to contacts in each of the nations PEN branches formed during the first decade,²⁶ explicitly urging them to found centers:

England: Thomas Hardy W.H. Hudson	Austria: Arthur Schnitzler	Canada: Stephen Leacock
America: Edith Wharton	Russia: Maxim Gorky	Spain: Blasco Ibáñez Salvador de Madariaga
France: Anatole France Romain Rolland	Sweden: Selma Lagerlöf	Holland: Louis Couperus Herman Robbers Willem Kloos
Italy: Gabriele d'Annunzio Matilde Serao	Norway: Knut Hamsun Johan Bojer	Belgium: Maurice Maeterlinck
Germany: Gerhardt Hauptmann Herman Sudermann	Denmark: Georg Brandes Martin Andersen Nexø	

Galsworthy's list of invitees provides insight into his milieu. Most founding PEN members were middle-aged. Many shared Galsworthy's liberal humanism. 'Liberal humanism' may be understood here as a concern with social justice and a faith that the health of civil society could be secured without recourse to political alignment. For Galsworthy's generation of Edwardians, this often involved critique of the injustices of industrial capitalism through involvement in reform lobbies on an issue-by-issue basis. Galsworthy considered his literature a vehicle for social and

political criticism as early as 1910, when he staged his play *Justice* as a commentary on Britain's penal system.²⁷ 'John Galsworthy,' as one critic has noted, 'shared the faith of many Liberals... that English society could be made more equitable and humane.'²⁸ He refused, however, to join a political party, choosing to remain unaligned, in contrast to Fabian socialist contemporaries such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells. Galsworthy also eschewed the Church, preferring to self-identify as a 'humanist' in its most ecumenical sense. 'The world has an incurable habit of going on, with a possible tendency towards improvement in human life,'²⁹ he wrote in measured tones in 1919, echoing the cautious optimism and faith in the resilience of civil society most often associated with exemplars of nineteenth century liberalism such as John Stuart Mill. PEN remained a vehicle for expression of liberal humanist ideals until Galsworthy's death in 1933.

Most importantly, recipients of Galsworthy's overtures were well-known to a general public outside of literary circles. Some writers, like Edith Wharton, refused to join 'owing to Romain Rolland having been invited.'³⁰ Others, like E.M. Forster, averred without giving reason, leaving Galsworthy to surmise the cause of hesitation himself. 'I've written to Forster, but I doubt if I shall shake him... he really wants to join the Bloomsbury boycott of the PEN.'³¹ PEN's prominent members by and large operated within genres well-established before the War, particularly the long-form narrative novel with a realist inclination. They tended to embrace linear narrative styles and engaged little with modernism or other avant-garde currents of the day. Given this tendency, the 'Bloomsbury boycott' made sense. English PEN struggled from its inception to overcome perceptions that it catered to middle-class, middle-brow writers of mediocre merit: precisely the type of 'Edwardians' who Virginia Woolf argued had begun to be drown out by the 'axes' and 'shattering glass' of a younger generation of 'Georgians' like D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot in her famous essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' – the essay in which, famously, she coolly pronounced that 'in or about December, 1910, human character changed.'³²

PEN, in contrast, suggested that human character was immutable. Literature could transmit epistemological certainties that linked the post-War world with pre-War glory, helping heal the scars of war. Thus Galsworthy summoned a transcendent conception of literature and of art itself:

Any real work of Art, individual and racial though it be in root and fibre, is impersonal and universal in its appeal. Art is one of the great natural links (perhaps the only great natural link) between the various breeds of men. Only writers can spread this creed; only writers can keep the door open for Art... and it is their plain duty to do this service to mankind.³³

Yet what does it mean to describe a work of art as 'real'? What might one identify as 'impersonal' and 'universal'? While national branches would go on to interpret this ideal differently, and its boundaries would shift over time, Galsworthy's articulations proved a decisive early influence on English PEN and, by extension, the

International Executive, which remained folded into the English branch until well after the second World War. During PEN's founding decade the group issued frequent pronouncements at Congresses affirming 'Literature as an Art', something 'impersonal and universal' that 'transcends national divisions'. The argument was reiterated so often because PEN operated within a wider context disinclined to view literature in such elevated terms.

3. Negotiating Cultural Hierarchies

PEN was able to define literature as an art partly because writing had been established a generation earlier as a profession. Writers unions proliferated during the nineteenth century. Britain's Society of Authors, which had been founded by Dawson Scott's acquaintance Walter Besant in 1883, modeled itself after France's Société des Gens de Lettres, which had in turn been founded in 1838. Similar groups sprouted across Europe and America, marking the elevation of writers from Grub Street hacks to professionals entitled to copyright and other protections.³⁴ These Societies formed part of the wider unionization impulse of the nineteenth century, rallying writers together to defend their craft against those who purchased and by implication controlled their labor, in this case publishers and editors. Through their lobbying efforts, indeed by their very existence, writers' unions asserted that writing was a respectable craft. Or, as many increasingly argued by the end of the nineteenth century, a legitimate profession.

PEN stood on the shoulders of these earlier groups. Writers concerned with contractual, financial, or legal questions, for example, could be referred to the Society of Authors, freeing PEN of the burden of acting on this front. The two groups openly discussed the delineation of their separate spheres, at one point even shared office space,³⁵ and many PEN members carried cards for both groups. The fact that the Society covered these professional and lobbying functions left PEN free to devote itself to higher matters. 'The PEN Club,' wrote PEN Secretary Ould, 'does not aim at usurping the function of organizations, like the Society of Authors, which deal with the economic status of writers.'³⁶ A less successful writer was more likely to use the Society's on-call legal advisor, while by the time a writer had achieved sufficient stature to gain access to PEN he or she likely no longer needed or desired participation in the Society. 'The Society of Authors, unlike the PEN,' wrote E.M. Forster, 'does not represent my particular tendencies. The two may cooperate on occasion, but their functions are quite different. The Society of Authors has to do with contracts, the PEN with culture. I know that one can't draw a hard and fast line, as [suggested by] our BBC definition by classes as cultivated, but I feel... clear [this] is its basic definition in each case.'³⁷ Others had completed the labor of establishing writing as a Profession. PEN, in turn, could afford the luxury of positioning writing as an Art.

Bearing the authority not just of professional expertise but artistic insight, writers were thus uniquely positioned to transmit wisdom. Galsworthy toasted the special insights writers could offer the wider world. 'We writers are in some sort trustees for human nature; if we are narrow and prejudiced we harm the human race. And the better we know each other... the greater the chance of human happiness in a world not, as yet, too happy.'³⁸ The ultimate purpose, however, was to transmit the wisdom gained from cultural authority to political leaders. 'We'll be a model to politicians,' Dawson Scott scrawled to Galsworthy in a letter affirming his expression of the group's ethos: 'books for diplomats!' To claim total authority in the cultural field, 'politics' had to appear to be excluded. This was not because PEN was disinterested in or indifferent to the political field, but rather the opposite. PEN consolidated cultural authority in order to gain influence with political authorities. 'The PEN is propaganda. The biggest that has yet been attempted,' Dawson Scott went on to conclude: 'It is an attempt to make art serve the community.'³⁹ PEN aimed to make a political impact from its inception. Cultural autonomy became a prerequisite for political influence.

Indeed, the group borrowed nationalist discourses and mimicked institutional practices that typified the political sphere. 'The amazingly spontaneous world-response to the idea seems to herald the development of PEN into a world-Parliament of literature.'⁴⁰ Journalists who drew parallels between PEN and Parliaments, or parallel international bodies like the newly founded League of Nations, took their cue from PEN itself. As early as 1924 PEN began to cast itself as 'a world-Parliament of literature.'⁴¹ Descriptions of PEN from its founding decade root Literature – often vaguely, allusively – in both the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. Frequent references to both a 'World Republic of Letters' and to '*Welllitteratur*' crowd members' and journalists' accounts.⁴² 'One of the great dreams of that great European, Madame de Stael, was a literary league of nations,' began one newspaper report on a PEN Congress, concluding that PEN has 'realized this ideal'.⁴³ Just as art and culture could redeem individuals and cultures, it could also impact communities and states.

During its first decade PEN formulated the citizenship requirements and constituency of its imagined Republic of Letters. Although the title 'PEN International' would not come into use until after the Second World War, as early as 1924 PEN began to devise ways of sharing Executive power at the international level. The French suggested the formation of a 'Superior Council' at the 1924 Congress which would 'deal with all future developments of the PEN in its wider aspects, and with questions concerning individual centers' and 'shall have the power to take any initiative action which is in conformity of with the ideals of the PEN Club.'⁴⁴ While the Superior Council was to meet in London, the French, American and German branches were to enjoy permanent votes on the Council, with a fourth seat to be rotated amongst the smaller centers, specifically the center next on the roster to host an international Congress. The influence of the League of Nations clearly loomed large.

Like the League, PEN found it difficult in practice to draw together different national and cultural interest groups to achieve practical ends. The Superior Council, for example, barely functioned in reality. For the yearly meeting of 1930 the Berlin Center wrote to say it wasn't sending delegates ('they cannot afford it, they say'⁴⁵), while the French center's Benjamin Cremieux had to be 'reminded' of the meeting, and the American center simply forgot to come.⁴⁶ In the absence of a coherent international governing structure, The English Club functioned as PEN's global executive. English PEN, however, had barely enough money to cover the administrative costs of mailing newsletters to the international membership. Galsworthy temporarily shored up the finances of English PEN, and ensured it would continue to function as the seat of the International Executive after his death, by donating the proceeds of his 1932 Nobel Prize to the Club. The Galsworthy endowment, disbursed yearly from a trust after his death in 1933, covered the salary of the part-time administrator. PEN had no financial resources outside the Galsworthy endowment, which meant the writers who attended its Congresses self-selected on the basis of personal means, further reinforcing its middle class image.

While PEN members themselves rarely discussed social class, as an organization PEN was preoccupied from its inception with literary hierarchies. 'To belong you must have 'arrived', the *Glasgow News* informed its readers in 1923.⁴⁷ Technically membership was only open to poets, playwrights, essayists and novelists who had published in 'reputable' forums. In reality, however, this proved almost impossible to enforce, and membership was distributed along the lines of preexisting social networks. Thus W.H. Auden's card stood blank; he was simply nominated by the Executive Committee and seconded by Cecil Day Lewis.⁴⁸ The process came to be seen as so causal (someone called Charles Walter Berry, though not a writer, was admitted because 'he's a man of the world and might prove an excellent Club Fellow'⁴⁹) that by 1923 the Executive took to stamping the each card with the following message: 'Nominators must have read applicant's work.'⁵⁰ Considering the difficulty English PEN faced imposing any kind of membership standard on its own branch, its protests against the American PEN's admittance of publishers, the French PEN's predisposal towards critics, and German PEN's high number of academics were, unsurprisingly, ineffectual.⁵¹ Although PEN advertised its exclusivity, in reality it proved difficult to police the borders of its imagined Republic of Letters. That the PEN Executive remained committed to a policy of artistic exclusivity despite the impossibility of implementing it in practice underlines just how important the concept of exclusivity was.

4. Becoming 'International'

Once it established membership eligibility, PEN began to position itself as a literary Parliament. Members debated the appropriate boundaries of the various constitu-

encies of the literary world. Should branches model themselves along the lines of preexisting nation-states? Or did language above all dictate a writer's allegiance? If the later held, what of writers who spoke the same language from distinct national territories? At the 1926 Congress in Berlin Ould, on behalf of the English Executive, raised the question of 'whether a PEN Centre can be established to represent a literature which is not attached to a homogenous territory.'⁵² Louis Piérard of the Centre Wallon – one of two Centers in Belgium – protested that 'clearly the tactful English centre really meant Belgium.'⁵³ Piérard went on to argue that the Walloon and Flemish speakers continue to be allowed separate centers because they 'met in perfect amity in the PEN Centre in Brussels.'⁵⁴ Karl Federn of the German branch responded to Piérard that the question could not be kept abstract for another reason: the German organizers of the 1926 Congress had received two telegrams from Warsaw 'emphatically rejecting the suggestion that a Yiddish chapter of the Warsaw chapter should be formed.'⁵⁵ Federn was right. The 'tactful English' did not, in fact, allude here to the Belgian center, but rather to Jewish writers who wrote in Yiddish in Poland who were pushing for the right to be allowed a branch separate from Polish writers. Galsworthy, Ould, and other members of the International Executive were reluctant to allow Jewish writers a separate branch.

From as early as 1923 writers living in Poland who published in Yiddish, led by Zalman Rejzin and Scholom Asch, had begun petitioning the International Executive in London expressing their desire to be known not as 'Polish' writers but as 'Yiddish-speaking' writers. They wished to join PEN as Yiddish-speakers, and to be allowed to form a Yiddish-speaking PEN branch, instead of joining under the auspices of the Warsaw branch. At the same time the English branch received a letter from Galsworthy's contact in South Africa, a novelist called Sarah Gertrude Millin. Galsworthy had written Millin urging her to found a PEN branch. But Millin deemed the prospect impractical owing to the 'enormous distance' between the cities in South Africa and 'the fewness of writers,' suggesting instead South Africans simply join the London branch and access PEN through Britain.⁵⁶ The English membership committee balked at implications of this proposal in light of the Yiddish-speakers' petitions. 'There appears to be some fear in the back of people's minds that if we once allowed writers not in England to become members of our Centre the door in England would be open to those Yiddishers who claim the right to a Centre although they have no territory of their own.' Ould concluded, 'I do not see that the cases are in any way parallel but I thought you ought to know what people were thinking.'⁵⁷ The International Executive rejected both suggestions, urging South African writers to form their own branch and advising Yiddish writers to participate in the activities of the Warsaw center, unless they could prove Yiddish really comprised a distinct literature.

The Jewish contingent accepted the English challenge. They raised the matter at the 1926 Berlin Conference, but the delegates voted to defer decision, as 'it was thought the matter was too serious to settle within so short a time.'⁵⁸ A committee,

comprised of writers from England, Poland and Belgium (because Brussels was to host the next Congress) was established to discuss the matter. In preparation for the 1927 Brussels Congress the Yiddish group distributed a booklet to all attendees on the Congress floor forcefully presenting their case. Written in French, German, and Hebrew – neglecting English and, curiously, Yiddish itself – the booklet outlined a brief history of Jewish literature. The narrative began in the seventeenth century, discussing the works of Joseph Pintou and Moische Chaim Luzatu, moving on to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with Schlomo Levinson, Aron Wolfzon Berel Broder and Welwel Zabarager, and ended with a recitation of the works of Mani Lejb and M.L. Halpern.⁵⁹ Borrowing from the language of biological determinism which had also informed some strains of nineteenth century nationalism, the works of all of these writers, the text asserted, shared ‘a specific physiognomy, a uniform character, and exhibit the peculiarities of Jewish life.’⁶⁰ Jewish writers ‘already possess a fully-formed national literature.’⁶¹ They comprised, in short, a cultural nation.

The solution the 1927 Congress settled upon aimed to conciliate both sides of this question, both national and language imperatives. The Congress of PEN Clubs resolves that

- 1) there should only be one PEN branch per city;
- 2) there can be multiple PEN branches per country;
- 3) the multiple sections from a country must federate into a central committee at the national level.⁶²

Yiddish writers countered that they too wished to base their activities out of Warsaw, the place they lived. The assembly devised yet another compromise. It declared that a PEN Center should soon form in Palestine, noting that as soon as a PEN branch formed in the mid-East the Yiddish branch in Warsaw should consider itself a subset not of the Polish but of the Jewish group.⁶³ These resolutions, with their contradicting and conflicting logic (on the one hand, only one branch was to be permitted per city, so long as branches united at the national level; but then multiple branches were allowed in one city so long as they formed branches of different literary nations) had important implications for PEN’s later structure. First, it established a precedent by which PEN spread in other places. Only one PEN branch had existed at first in Yugoslavia, located in Belgrade, which aimed to speak for the whole of what was then the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Soon two new centers established themselves, one in Zagreb and the other in Ljubljana. At first all three considered themselves different national city seats of the same Club, and rotated votes at Congresses – ‘until the national element prevailed and they became ‘Croatian PEN and ‘Slovenian PEN’” respectively⁶⁴ Second, this was perhaps the first time a body purporting to be international voted that Jews living in Europe constituted part of a larger Jewish ‘nation’ whose logical homeland was in Palestine.

A delicate balancing act between nation and language mirrored the dualities of art/politics and national/international that PEN aimed to straddle. Galsworthy again most clearly articulated these tensions. 'I believe in my own country, I desire the best for it,' he said to PEN members. Yet national pride needed to be tempered by awareness of others' equally valid national pride. 'Because of that belief and that desire,' Galsworthy said, 'I understand how others feel about their countries.' PEN, as a federation, needed to respect and accommodate national pride:

If one is a child in a large family and wished to have for oneself all the nubby bits and warm corners, or even have more than one's fair share of them, one is commonly called and treated as, a pig, and rightly. I do not know why it should be otherwise in the family of Homo Sapiens, in which all modern nations are children.

This common rights conception of nationalism in turn formed a crucial plank of PEN's internationalism. A *laissez-faire* accommodation of national multiplicity formed the basis of Galsworthy and PEN's internationalism:

For myself I will say at once that practically all my interest in our organization, now so widespread, has from the beginning lain in its international side... That the PEN should bring the writers of all the nations into closer and friendlier touch with each other, and through them help to bring the nations themselves into closer and friendlier touch, has been my hope. There are people who sneer at such aspiration, but happily I have noticed that they are people whose sneers one can positively enjoy.

Scholars have ignored these fundamental links between PEN's politics and its culture, focusing instead on the moment at which PEN abandoned its idealistic promise to 'stand aside' from politics. Exact periodization often hinges on which branch the historian uses as a lens. Thus many cite Ernst Töller's speech at the 1933 Congress at Dubrovnik, during which he rose to condemn Nazi infiltration of German PEN as the assembled German delegates filed out of the hall in protest.⁶⁵ Germans have claimed this moment for German PEN.⁶⁶ A recent Serbian account, in contrast, points out that the protest owes a debt to the atmosphere of debate facilitated by the Serbian branch.⁶⁷ A history of the Austrian PEN, however, pushes the moment of politicization back in time, arguing that Austrian lobbying on behalf of Hungarian writer Laslos Hatvany in 1927 stands as the first example of political activism.⁶⁸ PEN members themselves located 'politicization' within their own national narratives. Thus French writer Jules Romains claimed to 'save Europe for the PEN' when he exiled himself from Paris to New York in 1939.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, writers on English PEN credit 1930s leaders such as H.G. Wells and Storm Jameson with pulling PEN from its complacent past into the politicized present. Politics were defined relatively.

5. Conclusion

By its foundation and propagation throughout the ‘civilized’ world, PEN asserted that a World Republic of Letters existed, and it positioned itself as its Parliament. This, according to Galsworthy, should remain its ultimate function. As Galsworthy confided in a private letter to Ould, ‘writers have no great, at least no direct influence, on world affairs. Such influences as they exert are vague and, as it were, subterranean; they do well not to pretend to possess political power they have not.’⁷⁰ PEN, he thought, should consider itself a model to the world. The PEN, he said in an early speech to members, ‘should be a sort of guardian to Literature and its cousins – Music, Painting and Sculpture – against chauvinistic national demons... [it] can educate the public opinion of the world to regard the achievements of art as supra-national, belonging to human nature as a whole.’⁷¹ Diplomats, politicians, and other writers – not readers – formed PEN’s intended audience. It was no small coincidence that Ramsey MacDonald, the newly ascendant Prime Minister, was guest of honor at an early PEN dinner.⁷²

PEN insisted on the exclusivity of its membership requirements, modeled its forums after legislative bodies, and displayed its cultural civility at Congresses with a very real political aim: nothing short of preventing another Great War. Promotion of liberal humanist ethos allowed the group to function as a bridge back to between pre-War traditions, helping PEN transmit a sense of literary and cultural tradition to the post-War world. Yet the values implied by these traditions were often defined restrictively, tending to perpetuate normative gender roles and affirm established rather than avant-garde literary forms. While this would leave the organization open to charges of conflating ‘universalism’ with a Eurocentric perspective after World War II, during its founding decade PEN aimed to do nothing less than return faith in ‘culture’, ‘art’, and humanism itself to a world still raw from the trenches that had sliced across Europe from 1914-1918.

PEN did not, of course, realize this lofty goal any better than the League of Nations or various pacifist groups. Indeed, the march of fascism, the problem of how to help exiles, and the question of the degree to which to aid allied governments would divide the next generation of members by end of the 1930s, causing the groups almost to cease to exist. Similar problems would arise again by the 1960s, when the CIA and other interests tried to infiltrate the group as part of the larger Cold War *Kulturkampf*. The potential for fragmentation concerned Galsworthy as early as 1927. He insisted that, practically, PEN not claim too much. ‘If the PEN idea,’ he said, speaking in the context of growing frustration at the apparent failure of the League of Nations and spreading disenchantment with internationalism in general, ‘is looked upon as a panacea for all evils, or even as a powerful preventative of international trouble, it is bound to disappoint and to furnish one more vanished illusion in a disillusioned world.’⁷³ If the PEN was to wield any practical power, it had to position itself as an ideal.

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- 1 Galsworthy quote stapled to PEN Newsletters during the 1960s. C0760, I. Governance, Box 5, Folder 4. PEN American Center Archives, Princeton University.
- 2 Resolution passed at the 1927 Brussels Congress. International PEN Archive, Harry Ransom Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin (here abbreviated to HRC), Uncatalogued PEN Vertical Files, Box 624: International Congress of PEN Clubs, Folder #29 Brussels, June, 1927.
- 3 'Our primary goal is to engage with, and empower, societies and communities across cultures and languages, through reading and writing. We believe that writers can play a crucial role in changing and developing civil society. We do this through the promotion of literature, international campaigning on issues such as translation and freedom of expression and improving access to literature at international, regional and national levels./ Our membership is open to all published writers who subscribe to the PEN Charter regardless of nationality, language, race, color or religion. International PEN is a non-political organization and has special consultative status at UNESCO and the United Nations.' The 'About Us' section of the PEN International website. <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/go/about-us>
- 4 See for example Brown (1979); Colgrove (2005), 167-191.
- 5 Bourdieu (1984); Casanova (2004). Also Damrosch (2003); Lawall (1994).
- 6 James English's recent work (2005) more successfully explores the overlap of different fields of endeavor, demonstrating the extent to which value in the cultural field can be shaped by, or mutually constitute, value assigned in the commercial or political fields.
- 7 Dawson Scott's daughter, Marjorie Watts, wrote a biography of her mother which, along with scattered files at the Harry Ransom Center in Texas, stands some of the only evidence on C.A. Dawson Scott's life. Watts herself served as first Secretary of the PEN Club, until the published writer and acquaintance of John Galsworthy, Hermon Ould, took over in 1926. The biography must be read as a primary source document which aims both to narrate the writer's own involvement with PEN and to restore Dawson Scott to the center of the group's history; Marjorie Watts (1987), 16.
- 8 Catherine Amy Dawson, afterward Scott, *Sappho: A Poem*; Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., London, 1889.
- 9 Francis King's foreword to Marjorie Watts (1987), ix.
- 10 Early in her career Dawson Scott wrote poetry, most notably *The Idylls of Womanhood*, Heinemann, London, 1892. Her best-known novel was *Madcap Jane: Or Youth*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1910; though she felt most proud of *The Story of Anna Beames*, Heinemann, London, 1907; which explored the stifled potential of women in Edwardian England. Both books came before her Cornish period, marked by works such as *Wastralls: A Novel*, Heinemann, London, 1918 and *The Vampire: A Book of Cornish and Other Stories*, Robert Holden & Co, London, 1925. Later in life she experimented with mysticism, which she documented in *The Guide to Psychic Knowledge: Questions from People on This Side of Death, Answers from People From That Side of Death*, C.W. Daniel, London, 1932.
- 11 Watts (1987), 35.
- 12 Watts (1987), 20.
- 13 Letter C.A. Dawson Scott to John Galsworthy, September 1924 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip., John Galsworthy, Box 15)
- 14 Watts (1971), 13-14.

- 15 King (1987), xi.
- 16 McCarthy (2007), 891.
- 17 Marwick (1964), 285-298.
- 18 A title repeatedly invoked as her introduction at PEN Congresses until her death in 1934. At Congresses many members enjoyed whispering about the apparent irony implied by the juxtaposition of 'Sappho' and 'mother'. Dawson Scott's opinions about this gossip went unrecorded, but the juxtaposition at least provoked interest and captured members' attention. This aspect of her identity overshadowed her substantial contributions to the PEN, which were largely portrayed as ceremonial, despite that fact that first she and then her daughter, Marjorie Watts, served as the first secretaries of the PEN Club, performing the bulk of its administrative activities, before a writer named Hermon Ould took their place by 1930, serving as Secretary until his death in 1952.
- 19 Letter storm Jameson to Hermon Ould, April 14 1938 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip., Jameson).
- 20 Delap (2007), 4. See also Peterson (2009).
- 21 Chapter Two of Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harcourt Brace and Co, London, 1958 [1937]) frequently invokes the term 'the Nancy Poets.'
- 22 George Orwell, 'Glimpses and Reflections, by John Galsworthy: Review,' published in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 12 March 1938, anthologized in *George Orwell: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, Harcourt, London, 1968, 308.
- 23 Chute (1972), 6-7.
- 24 John Galsworthy to Marjorie Watts, May 15 1924 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip, Galsworthy).
- 25 By 1926 branches existed in the following places: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Bucharest, Buenos Ayres, Christiania, Copenhagen, London, Madrid, Mexico City, Milan, Montreal, New York, San Francisco, Paris, Prague, Rome, Santiago (Chile), Stockholm, Toronto, Vienna, Warsaw. Letter Marjorie Scott to Tring, Society of Authors, 10 May 1926 (Society of Authors Archive, British Library).
- 26 Sheaf of letters sent by Galsworthy in PEN Recip., Galsworthy, 1921-1932 (HRC). Some complained that Galsworthy was too meddlesome: 'I must confess I was somewhat surprised to learn that Mr. Galsworthy had made so many suggestions', said Marion Ryan. Letter to C.A. Dawson Scott. 22 Febr. 1922 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip., Dawson Scott).
- 27 Nellis (1996), 65, provides a neat synopsis of Galsworthy's involvement in penal reform during the Edwardian era.
- 28 Gindin (1987), 207.
- 29 Quoted in Fréchet (1982), 175.
- 30 Watts (1976), 19.
- 31 Letter Galsworthy to Ould, March 11 1931 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip, Galsworthy).
- 32 Woolf (1929-1932), 320.
- 33 Galsworthy quote stapled to PEN Newsletters during the 1960s. C0760, I. Governance, Box 5, Folder 4. PEN American Center Archives (Princeton University).
- 34 For an overview of the literature treating the professionalization of authorship, consult Patrick Leary (2009), 172-213.

- 35 Letter Hermon Ould to Killam Roberts, Jan. 1943 (British Library, Society of Authors papers). The Society of Authors rented rooms to PEN in Bloomsbury until it found a permanent office of its own in the 1930s in Kensington.
- 36 Letter Hermon Ould to Killiam Roberts, March 12 1946 (British Library, Society of Authors Archive).
- 37 Letter E.M. Forster to John Galsworthy, June 1928 (Forster Repository, King's College, Cambridge).
- 38 Chute (1972), 6-7.
- 39 Letter C.A. Dawson Scott to John Galsworthy June 10 1924 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip, John Galsworthy, Box 15).
- 40 William Power, 'A Congress of Literature: PEN Conference at the Hague' (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Vertical Files, Box 624, Folder 34: Amsterdam, June 1931).
- 41 A Congress of Literature: PEN Conference At The Hague.'
- 42 Goethe coined the term *Weltliteratur*. 'The various branches of world literature', he predicted at the Congress of Natural Scientists in Berlin in 1828, would soon give rise to a new creative force, 'a European, in fact a universal, world literature.' Goethe to C.F. v. Reinhard, quoted in: Stritch (1946), 4.
- 43 'A Literary League of Nations', *The Scots Observer*, June 30, 1928 (HRC, PEN Archive, Vertical Files, Folder 28, Oslo Congress).
- 44 'Report of the 1924 Congress' (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Vertical Files, Box 624, Folder 27 New York, May, 1924)
- 45 Letter Hermon Ould to John Galsworthy, 9/10/1930 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip., Galsworthy, 1921-1932).
- 46 'Report of the 1924 Congress' (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Vertical Files, Box 624, Folder 27 New York, May, 1924).
- 47 'Publishers Barred', *Glasgow News*, Nov. 4 1923 (HRC, PEN Archive, Vertical Files, Folder 49, 1921-1925).
- 48 W.H. Auden's nomination card (HRC, Uncatalogued material, Box 13: Applications for Membership).
- 49 Charles Walter Berry's nomination card (HRC, PEN Archive, Uncatalogued material, Box 13: Applications for Membership).
- 50 PEN English Center Archive, Uncatalogued material, Box 13: Applications for Membership.
- 51 Watts (1987), 26.
- 52 'Le Congrès des PEN Clubs à Bruxelles' (HRC.,PEN Archive, PEN Vertical Files, Box 624, Folder 29, Brussels, June, 1927).
- 53 'Rough Notes of the Berlin Congress', May 1926 (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International PEN Congresses, 1-6).
- 54 'Le Congrès des PEN Clubs à Bruxelles', (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Vertical Files, Box 624, Folder 29, Brussels, June, 1927).
- 55 'Rough Notes of the Berlin Congress', May 1926 (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International PEN Congresses, 1-6).
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- 57 Letter Hermon Ould to John Galsworthy, Jan. 6 1927 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip, Galsworthy, Box 15).
- 58 'Rough Notes of the Berlin Congress', May 1926 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip., Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International PEN Congresses, 1-6).
- 59 'Memoire sur l'admission des écrivains juifs a l'union internatonale des Club PEN' (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International PEN Congresses, Folder 19, Brussels, June 1927).
- 60 'Minutes of the Brussels Congress, 21 June 1927 (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International Pen Congresses, 1-6).
- 61 'Memoire sur l'admission des écrivains juifs a l'union internatonale des Club PEN'. (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International PEN Congresses, Folder 19, Brussels, June 1927).
- 62 'Minutes of the Brussels Congress, 21 June 1927' (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International Pen Congresses).
- 63 Deuxième Séance. 'Minutes of the Brussels Congress, 21 June 1927 (HRC, PEN Archive, Series III, Box 3, Folder 1: International Pen Congresses, 1-6).
- 64 Palestrava (2006). The official name of the center in 1926 was 'PEN Club Belgrade, later to become Yugoslav PEN Centre Belgrade. The other two Yugoslav PEN centres that were founded several months later in Ljubljana (1926) and Zagreb (1927) were also named after their seats: 'PEN Club Zagreb' and 'PEN Club Ljubljana' until the national element prevailed and they became 'Croatian PEN and 'Slovenian PEN.' After the Second World War, another national centre was opened in 1962: Macedonian PEN. The Belgrade PEN Centre did not change its name to the Serbian PEN Centre until 1985 in order to denote the equal footing of all Yugoslav national PEN centers and remove any doubt or confusion that the Belgrade centre, owing to the 'Yugoslav' in its name, was superior to the other centers in the country.' Palestrava (2006), 13.
- 65 Chute (1972).
- 66 Peitsch (2006).
- 67 Palestrava (2006), 30-33.
- 68 Roček (2000).
- 69 Letter Jules Romaines to International PEN Congress 1938 (IMEC, Russian repository, 19:1).
- 70 Ould, John Galsworthy, 77.
- 71 Ould, John Galsworthy, 78.
- 72 Letter Galsworthy to Miss. Dawson Scott, April 17 1924 (HRC, PEN Archive, PEN Letters Recip., Galsworthy, 1921-1932).
- 73 Ould, *John Galsworthy*, 77.