

**Single Women, Space, and Narrative in
Interwar Fiction by Women**

Ruth Emma Burton

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of English

September 2015

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

© 2015 The University of Leeds and Ruth Emma Burton

The right of Ruth Emma Burton to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer special thanks to Katy Mullin and Tracy Hargreaves in the School of English, who have supervised this project. Katy and Tracy have offered invaluable advice throughout my time at Leeds and have been a genuine inspiration to work with. My thanks also go to the staff at Leeds University Library for all their help and support.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Helen and Paul Jiggins and Bob and Shiela Scanlan without whose generosity and kindness I could never have begun, continued, or finished this thesis.

And to Dave. For everything else.

Abstract

In this thesis I examine single women in the interwar fiction of five women writers. Jean Rhys, Rosamond Lehmann, Dorothy L. Sayers, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Virginia Woolf were all writing during a period of intense speculation about unmarried women and all gave major roles to them in their fiction. During the period following the First World War the single woman was repeatedly dismissed as 'surplus' or 'superfluous', with the suggestion that there was no place for her in Britain. Anxieties circulated about her financial status, her moral standing, and her sexual and psychological stability. I propose that single women offered distinct textual challenges and revolutionary opportunities to women writers, and I consider the effects of these women on the narratives of writers who chose to offer them a place in their texts.

Contents

Introduction	1
1. 'La Vie est un Spiral': Singleness, Fallen-ness and Narrative Shape in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys	28
2. 'Where is my Place?' Single Women, Romantic Idealism and the Sexual Imperative in Rosamond Lehmann's Interwar Fiction	80
3. Dangerous Women: Detecting Deviance in the Professional and Domestic Worlds of Dorothy L. Sayers	123
4. Sympathy for the Devil: Domestic and Urban Disruption in Sylvia Townsend Warner's <i>Lolly Willowes</i> and <i>Summer Will Show</i>	173
5. 'Reconstruction of the most radical kind'? Virginia Woolf's Spinsterly Revision of Domestic and Urban Space	219
Conclusion	261
Bibliography	267

Introduction

None of those many facts which the Census returns have illustrated is more significant or gives graver reason for thought than the huge disparity between the number of women and the number of men in Great Britain.

(*The Times*, 25 August, 1921)¹

In August 1921 the results of the first census taken after the First World War were published. They were widely reported by the press who focused on the gender imbalance that the figures highlighted. The death toll of the war, which had included over 700,000 British troops, was found to have exacerbated an already existent preponderance of women within the population to the extent that there were now 1096 women to every 1000 men.² Broken down by age group and marital status the figures were still more shocking, although these would not be released until 1927. Although the disparity between 20-24 year old unmarried women and unmarried men was less than the average ratio, at 1,043 to 1000, for those in the next three age groups the disparity was much greater. For those aged 25-29 there were 1,154 unmarried women to 1000 unmarried men; for those aged 30-34 there were 1470 to 1000; for those aged 35 to 44 the ratio was 1683 to 1000.³ Extrapolating from the figures they had been given the press conjectured that 'two million [...] can

¹ 'Surplus Women', *The Times*, 25 August 1921, p. 9.

² Military casualties from the British Isles are given as 702,410 in The War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914-1920* (London: London Stamp Exchange, 1992), p. 237. J.M. Winter has identified a wide variance in war death statistics, which he estimates at 772,000 using census data, Scottish Registrar General Reports and Ireland's Memorial Record. For a useful list of estimates and their sources see J.M Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 66-99. For the statistic 1096 women to 1000 men, see: 'Sexes, Ages and Marital Conditions', *General Report on the 1921 Census*, Part V,(1927), <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/SRC_P/6/EW1921GEN> [accessed 03 December 2009].

³ Table 40: 'Excess of Females in the Marriageable Population (i.e. Single and Widowed and Divorced), Aged 20 Years and Over', *General Report on the 1921 Census*, www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table_page.jsp?tab_id=EW1921GEN_M40&show=DB [accessed 03 December 2009].

never become wives.’⁴ The newspapers labelled these unmarried women ‘surplus’ and ‘superfluous’ and in so doing they inferred that despite the work women had performed during the war, despite partial suffrage, and despite their entrance to Higher Education and the professions, it remained marital status by which women were primarily judged. These labels also suggested that rather than just being one portion of the population, excess unmarried women formed a discrete ‘problem population’.⁵ Suggested solutions recalled responses to other ‘problem populations’ identified by nineteenth-century law, including convicts and prostitutes. Faced with the ‘problem’ of the surplus woman both *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* reported that the mass emigration of unmarried women to the colonies was being considered.⁶

Taken out of context these details seem to suggest that there was no place for the single woman in interwar Britain immediately following the war. The reality of the situation was of course infinitely more complex. Firstly, the newspapers were not monolithic in their approach. While Billie Melman has identified the particularly pejorative use made of the terms ‘surplus’ and ‘superfluous’ by the Rothermere Press, other social historians including Adrian Bingham have contextualised these articles with others, even in the same newspapers, that celebrated as well as critiqued the modern single woman.⁷ Articles in *The Times* were also more measured. While one *Times* article considered that the statistics raised a question ‘so

⁴ Quoted in Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 29. See also ‘The Census’, *Daily Mail*, 24 August 1921, p. 4; ‘The Census’, *The Times*, 24 August 1921, p. 8. Both of these articles feature the term ‘surplus women’ in their subheadings.

⁵ Kathrin Levitan, ‘Redundancy, the ‘Surplus Woman’ Problem, and the British Census, 1851-1861’, *Women’s History Review*, 17:3, 2008, 359-376 (p. 361). Levitan uses the phrase to refer to Victorian concerns about the ‘redundancy’ of single women alongside other ‘problematic populations’ including the unemployed, the unskilled, and the criminal.

⁶ ‘Surplus Women’, *The Times*, 25 August 1921, p.9; ‘No Surplus of Women’, *The Times*, 05 September 1921, p. 10; ‘Surplus Women, Emigration Plans’, *Daily Mail*, 29 August 1921, p. 10.

⁷ Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) pp.1-37; Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 7. Lucy Bland emphasizes the co-existence of positive and negative portrayals of modern women in the same newspapers: Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 7.

immense and so far-reaching that few have yet realised its import', *The Times* did at least suggest that women 'on the eve of their enfranchisement', would be active participants in the renegotiation of their roles: 'we fail accurately to estimate their capacity if they do not soon comprehend its dimensions and play their leading part in its solution.'⁸ While newspapers were undoubtedly the format through which the general public were most likely to read about the 'question' or 'problem' of the 'surplus' woman, discussions in the press were quickly joined by debates about the subject in a wide range of cultural forms including, but not limited to, women's magazines, medical textbooks, self-help literature, sex manuals, and fiction addressed to low-, middle-, and high-brow audiences.⁹ The purpose of this thesis is to examine single women in the fiction of five women writers in the context of these debates. Jean Rhys, Rosamond Lehmann, Dorothy L. Sayers, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Virginia Woolf, all gave major roles in their fiction to single women. I consider the effect on their writing of the incorporation of women dismissed by other discourses as marginal, surplus or superfluous, and the narrative challenges and opportunities that the single woman as protagonist posed.

Historical Context and Debates

While unmarried women did make the headlines in 1921, by the end of the First World War they had been considered problematic for almost seventy years. Termed 'surplus', 'superfluous', 'odd' and even 'redundant', unmarried women had vexed the Victorians after the census of 1851, the first to record marital status. In 1851, 1,042 women to 1,000 men had been recorded and there had been a slow increase in this disparity with each decade until the 1901 and the 1911 censuses had both recorded 1,068 women to every 1,000 men.¹⁰ Many of the concerns that circulated during the interwar period therefore, including the employment and even the mass-emigration of surplus women, had been discussed from the mid-nineteenth century

⁸ 'Surplus Women', *The Times*, 25 August 1921, p. 9.

⁹ During the interwar period approximately two-thirds of the population read, or had access to a newspaper, on a daily basis: Bingham, p. 3.

¹⁰ 'Sexes, Ages and Marital Conditions', *General Report on the 1921 Census*.

when unmarried women had been the subject of polemical essays and unsympathetic as well as sympathetic fiction.¹¹ The intervening years however had seen an array of changes to the social position and opportunities afforded to women and these changes had affected what women did, where they went, and how they viewed the possibilities opening up for them outside of marriage and the family home. Philanthropy, consumerism and new types of employment had created fissures in the ideology of separate spheres, and provided routes by which middle-class women could excuse themselves from the drawing room and go out into the public world.¹² Some women had become politically active, campaigning for, among other issues, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and suffrage.¹³ Women had been granted limited franchise in 1918; they had enjoyed increased opportunities in education and in the workplace prior to the war, and during the war they had fulfilled many of the roles left vacant by men serving in the forces.¹⁴ Increasingly, as the result of work by sexologists, psychologists, sex-reformers, as well as writers, they were also being seen as sexual beings with active desires.¹⁵ From the 'odd' woman to the 'new' woman, and from the Victorian lady philanthropist to the munitions worker of the First World War, women's abilities and their expectations had, in many circles, changed dramatically by the interwar

¹¹ Examples of anti-spinster polemic include W.R. Greg's widely cited, 'Why are Women Redundant?' *National Review*, 28 (1862), pp. 424-460. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) and George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) both depict communities of single women favourably: Gaskell in her eponymous village and Gissing in Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot's office where they teach secretarial skills. For a full analysis of the spinster in the Victorian era and her representation in fiction and autobiography see: Emma Liggins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, lesbians and widows in British women's fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

¹² Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850 – 1920* (London: Virago, 1985); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late-Victorian London', *Representations*, 62 (1998), 1-30.

¹³ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880 – 1930* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997); Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995); Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1978).

¹⁴ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45* (London: Penguin, 1984).

¹⁵ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 258.

period. These changes invite the question why the labels 'surplus' and 'superfluous' re-emerged.

Many critics and historians identify in the years following the First World War a paradigmatic shift that increased the importance accorded to the family home and to women's domestic role within it, particularly as wife and mother. Deidre Beddoe argues that '[t]he single most arresting feature of the inter-war years was the strength of the notion that women's place [was] in the home', and identifies the implicit and explicit means through which women were encouraged to go 'back to home and duty'.¹⁶ Women were expected to vacate positions where they had replaced men in service and this was partially enforced in legislation including the 1919 Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act, but it was more broadly encouraged through public opinion.¹⁷ At the same time, marriage bars introduced in many of the professions prevented married women from working at all within these spheres. The government campaign for 'homes fit for heroes', marketing campaigns for domestic goods, and an array of new magazines all promoted this idea that women's position was in the family home. Between 1920 and 1945 around sixty women's magazines were launched, including the monthly *Good Housekeeping* (1922) and *Woman and Home* (1926) and the weekly *Woman's Own* (1932).¹⁸ White notes that, '[a]most without exception, the new periodicals dedicated themselves to upholding the traditional sphere of feminine interests and were united in recommending a purely domestic role for women'.¹⁹ Moreover, as Hilary Hinds has noted, in the post-war world, and an era of 'homes fit for heroes', 'feminine selflessness and domestic duties bec[a]me [...] matters of national as well as familial loyalty.'²⁰ While this 'cult of domesticity' was not unilaterally celebrated, opposition to it was much less in evidence than, for example, the very visible campaigns that

¹⁶ Deidre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918 – 1939* (London: Pandora Press, 1989), pp. 1-14.

¹⁷ Pamela Horn, *Women in the 1920s* (Stroud: Allan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995) pp. 15-16; Strachey, pp. 370-380.

¹⁸ Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693 – 1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970).

¹⁹ White, p.100.

²⁰ Hilary Hinds, 'Ordinary Disappointments: femininity, domesticity and nation in British middlebrow fiction 1920-1944,' *Modern Fiction Studies*, 55 (2009), 293-320, (p.313).

had marked the pre-war campaign for suffrage.²¹ This is partly because women who had been united in their campaign for the vote held widely different opinions regarding women's social role. While some women loathed domestic work and saw a return to the home as a regression to Victorian standards of inequality, others, who were labelled 'new' feminists, including Eleanor Rathbone, argued that the home was the new frontier of feminist activism: that equality would be found not in the public sphere, but in the appreciation of women's domestic work and in the endowment of motherhood.²²

These differences of opinion regarding where women should be 'placed' are characteristic of an era in which modernity, though increasingly visible in the number of motor-cars, picture palaces and shorter hemlines, remained coloured by the vestiges of deep-seated Victorian values and perspectives. Storm Jameson wrote that 'the minds of most men and women over thirty have a Victorian sub-structure', and even later in the thirties both Winifred Holtby, an 'old' feminist, and Virginia Woolf, labelled the interwar years an age of 'transition'.²³ In 1934 Holtby asked 'Why is it still considered a bad joke or a miracle to succeed in one of the spheres hitherto occupied by men?' Noting women's collusion in this she asked, 'Why [...] are women themselves often the first to repudiate the movements of the past hundred and fifty years, which have gained for them at least the foundations of political, economic, educational and moral equality?'²⁴ In 1938, Woolf envisaged women on the transitional structure of a 'bridge which connects the private house

²¹ For 'cult of domesticity' see: Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel and E.H. Young* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 11.

²² Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870 – 1950: Sexual Division and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984), pp. 103-06. For a contemporary discussion on the distinction between 'old' and 'new' feminists see Winifred Holtby, 'Feminism Divided', in *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby*, ed. by P. Berry and A. Bishop (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 47-50. For attitudes to domestic work see Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism*, p. 6.

²³ Storm Jameson, *No Time Like the Present* (London: Cassell, 1933), p. 129; Winifred Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilization* (Chicago: Academy Press Limited, 1978), p. 96; Virginia Woolf, 'Three Guineas', *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp.115-334 (p. 133).

²⁴ Holtby, *Women*, p. 96.

with the world of public life', having 'issue[d] from the shadow' of the home.²⁵ Jeffrey Weeks has highlighted that one problem with the term 'transition' is that it implies inevitable progress, in this case a changing of the guard, from one era to the next, and a slow but perceptible move from one sphere to the other.²⁶ In relation to the interwar years, when many viewed the private sphere not as a 'shadow[ed]' domain, but as an 'ideal home', a better term to describe the era, and again one used by Woolf, is 'hybrid age'.²⁷ The hybridity of this age is evident in the complex and conflicting approaches to the 'problem' of the single woman during this period, and this has been amplified by later historians and commentators who have characterised the single woman variously as marginal to both the domestic home and the world of employment, but also as enjoying more opportunities than ever before.

Throughout the interwar years the surplus woman was discussed in a variety of cultural forms in addition to newspaper articles, including women's magazines, medical textbooks, self-help literature, and a broad spectrum of fiction where she, and the questions or problems which people associated with her, were variously articulated. Different constructions of the problem suggested different solutions. The writer May Sinclair saw the unmarried woman's difficulty as an economic one, and considered that it would be solved as long as women were allowed to work.²⁸ In a post-war world where tensions regarding women's employment were already high, this was a contentious solution but also not one that addressed all aspects of the issue. The right to wife- and motherhood was another articulation of the problem, and one that found particular resonance in a country in which concerns about the decline of the birth-rate were circulating.²⁹ Meanwhile, medical and

²⁵ Woolf, 'Three Guineas', pp. 130-133.

²⁶ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 2nd edition (London: Longman, 1989), p. 199.

²⁷ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 118.

²⁸ 'Surplus Women, All Well if they can Find Work', *Daily Mail*, 04 August, 1921, p. 3.

²⁹ This concern, which was affected by the war, had also predated it. Weeks, p. 202; Lucy Bland, 'Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s-1914', in *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850 – 1940*, ed. by Jane Lewis (Oxford:

sexological texts considered the biological or psychosexual ramifications of the 'problem'. In pamphlets and books from mainstream authors including Marie Stopes' *Married Love* (1918) to more marginal works including Anthony Ludovici's *Woman: A Vindication* (1929) the psychological and biological repercussions of sexual abstinence for women were debated. For social purity campaigners whose influence waned after the First World War but nevertheless continued in attenuated form, concerns about the moral issues generated by so many single women, and fears about the 'health' of the nation dominated.³⁰

Even within these different constructions of the issue approaches to unmarried women were not consistent and a small selection of the books available shows diverse attitudes and tones. Both Marie Stopes and Mary Scharlieb wrote in the popular medical tradition, but while Marie Stopes' work focussed on the importance of sexual relations and expressed concern about lifelong virginity, Mary Scharlieb, who was in her late seventies by the time she wrote *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* (1929), came from a social purity tradition that valued spinsterhood. Stella Browne, who wrote to the *Freewoman* journal agreeing with an article in which the spinster was characterised as 'the barren sister, the withered tree, [...] silent, shamefaced, bloodless and boneless' and 'our social nemesis', was not an anti-feminist but a sex reformer and one of the few advocates of the right to abortion.³¹ In contrast, texts offering similar descriptions of the spinster, including Arabella Kenealy's *Feminism and Sex Extinction* (1920), Charlotte Haldane's *Motherhood and its Enemies* (1927) and Charlotte Cowdroy's *Wasted Womanhood* (1933) were all firmly anti-feminist, as their titles suggest. These books demonstrate the extent to which gender politics, individual opinion and pseudo-scientific

Blackwell, 1986), pp. 123-146 (p.136). For concern following World War One see Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 104; Stevenson, p. 22.

³⁰ Alan Hunt, *A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.184.

³¹ Quoted in Jeffreys, p. 95.

knowledge were intertwined in some texts of the period.³² As you might expect from such a wide spectrum of debates, the tone in which the 'surplus' woman was discussed was also diverse. In *Woman: A Vindication* (1929) Ludovici calls her 'an abnormal influence in society', and warns that 'the fact that modern society can offer no satisfactory solution of the surplus-woman question does not justify us in overlooking the evils which are the outcome of surplus women in our midst.'³³ In contrast to this tone of gothic melodrama, Marjorie Hillis' self-help book *Live Alone and Like It* (1936) is characterised by the brisk, no-nonsense approach that Nicola Humble identifies in much middlebrow fiction of the era by women, and which is perhaps best epitomised by the fictional *Mrs Miniver*.³⁴ For Hillis, single women are not a 'problem' at all: not only is singleness a transitory state of affairs ('Lonely Hearts' are 'a group to which no one with any gumption need belong for more than a couple of weeks') it is also an anachronistic category:

If you are in the habit of thinking of yourself as a widow or a spinster, this, too, is something to get over as speedily as possible. Both words are rapidly becoming extinct – or at least, being relegated to another period, like the bustle and reticule.³⁵

Single women in fiction

Given the interest in the 'surplus' woman following the First World War the sheer volume of unmarried women in interwar fiction is unsurprising. Nor is it surprising that this fiction displays the same diversity of concerns, treatment, and characterisation regarding the single woman that is evident in the non-fiction of the period. In some cases this was not purely the consequence of a shared *zeitgeist*, but

³² Cowdroy in another essay discussing the same subject of the arrested development of university women offers a wonderful comparison to abnormally large tadpoles. Charlotte Cowdroy, 'Thwarted Women', *Evening News*, 19 September 1921, p. 4.

³³ Anthony M. Ludovici, *Woman: A Vindication* (London: Constable & Co. Limited, 1929), pp. 229-279 (pp.230, 232).

³⁴ Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 209 – 212; Jan Struther, *Mrs Miniver* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1942).

³⁵ Marjorie Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It: A Guide for the Extra Woman* (London: Duckworth, 1936), pp.14, 23.

rather the result of a more direct relationship and, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, fictional representations of single women influenced non-fictional writing on the subject and vice versa.

The women writers that I focus on in this study have been chosen because their fiction contains a multiplicity of single women and demonstrates a range of approaches towards the 'problems' of sex, family, money and employment that were aligned to the 'surplus' woman during the period. The single women of Jean Rhys, Rosamond Lehmann, Dorothy L. Sayers, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Virginia Woolf, are both diverse and legion. There are old-fashioned spinsters but there are also unmarried professionals; there are virgins and prostitutes; heterosexual women and lesbians; divorcees, and widows. I have also chosen to include alongside these women several who are still married, although they are separated from their husbands. These very modern and differently single women, who appear in the fiction of Rhys and Lehmann, challenge the conceptualisation of the 'surplus' woman as it appeared in the newspapers of 1921. They are married and so would not have appeared in the census statistics regarding single women, but they are nevertheless treated, by the society in which they are depicted if not by the authors who write them, as superfluous, largely on account of their unhusbanded status. These five writers approach the single woman in her different incarnations variously, and between them they highlight the broad range of discussions in which the single woman was embedded, and also the discrete challenges to genre and narrative that she posed. Rhys and Lehmann are forced to abandon or reconfigure the romance to accommodate their single women, while Dorothy L. Sayers' protagonists run amok in the active roles, including murderer and sleuth, offered them by detective fiction. Sylvia Townsend Warner's single woman fiction begins with realist narratives that are fragmented as her protagonists defy convention, and Woolf's generations of spinsters offer alternate genealogies through which to filter history.

All of these writers, in some way, challenge literary or social conventions for the sake of their single women, even if the objective of some of these writers is to re-integrate their protagonists into society rather than to revolutionise it. This sense of a shared purpose, the elevation of the 'surplus' woman to a necessary and central role in their fiction, bridges the critical divide between writers who have been accepted into the modernist canon and those who have been designated by the equally slippery and protean term 'middlebrow'. Sharing a subject is not, of course, enough to close some critical divides, and a consideration of the single woman as she appears within medical and self-help literature, and popular and literary fiction necessarily requires nuanced approaches. However, in their engagement with the single woman, both modernist and middlebrow writers (and these are terms that I will consider carefully below) are drawn out of what have been perceived as their comfort zones. Modernist texts, accused by their detractors of being 'obscure, unreadable and conceited', become engaged with the personal, the emotional, and the economic.³⁶ Likewise middlebrow fiction, derided as 'an unproblematic vehicle for middle-class values', is driven to critique the family and the home, as well as to adopt experimental literary strategies.³⁷

The Critical Field

Few book length studies on the modern single woman in literature have been produced, although the single woman has been the focus of historical analyses, and has featured in chapters of literary criticism, as well as a much larger number of papers.³⁸ Both Dorothy Yost Deegan's *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (1951), and Laura Doan's collection *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters* (1991), take the spinster as their focus. Deegan's extensive survey considers one hundred and fifty single woman characters in novels by American writers published from 1851 to

³⁶ Jameson, p. 166.

³⁷ Kristin Ewins, "'Revolutionizing A Mode of Life": Leftist Middlebrow Fiction by Women in the 1930s', *ELH*, 82 (2015), 251-279 (p. 251).

³⁸ Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England 1914-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

1935, using the criteria that each woman is a spinster, 'still single at thirty years of age, who remains single throughout the novel, and who expresses no plan or intention to marry.'³⁹ Deegan's findings are that spinsters in the American novel within this timeframe lag behind their more positive real-life counterparts, and she asks 'Why does the stereotype linger when its prototype has all but passed out of society?'⁴⁰ One reason she suggests is that, for the most part, spinsters are given only minor roles in novels, and so are not fully drawn characters, but her summary of the results makes for depressing reading:

[I]t is almost impossible to find among all the single-woman characters women who are wholly admirable. If their overt activities are above reproach, if they are decorous and conventional, they are sad or bitter or dull or queer or utterly resigned to a life of pettiness.⁴¹

In contrast, the chapters of Doan's collection, while similarly limited to the spinster, welcome her as 'a fully realized and radicalized woman as envisioned by twentieth-century writers.'⁴² The chapters, which include analyses of single women narratives by English, American and Australian writers from the first decade of the twentieth century to the 1980s, are organised into three types of women. These are Old Maids, Excellent Women and Radical Spinsters, with the final category including one spinster who falls within Deegan's timeframe: Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*. In these examinations, critics identify diverse spinsters who 'break out of the confines of traditional narrative strategies' and demand 'new alternative literary forms'.⁴³ If Deegan's spinsters are the pitiable figures of tradition, condemned to 'lead apes in hell', then Doan's must be contextualised as highly positive, but cherry-picked examples. Other early twentieth-century writers including May Sinclair and F.M. Mayor, keen to highlight the social stigma of spinsterhood and its repercussions succeeded in rendering the spinster monstrous in novels including *The Life and Death of Harriet Freaan* (1922) and *The Third Miss Symons* (1913). Nor has

³⁹ Dorothy Yost Deegan, *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 28. Laura Doan (ed. and intro.), *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ Deegan, p. 186

⁴¹ Deegan, p. 185.

⁴² Doan, *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, p. 15.

⁴³ Doan, p. 10.

the monstrous spinster entirely disappeared. The aptly named Barbara Covett, in Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* (2003), is just one twenty-first century example of the persistence of the stereotype.

Other analyses that offer a useful comparison of the single woman across narrative forms include Billie Melman's *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (1988). Melman, who examines the young surplus women identified as 'flappers', as depicted in newspapers, best-sellers and story papers, offers a valuable contrast to critiques of middlebrow and modernist literature. More recently, Emma Liggins' *Odd Women? Spinsters, Widows and Lesbians in British Women's Fiction 1850s – 1930s* (2014) has examined single women from the mid nineteenth century to the Second World War, highlighting the anxieties surrounding unmarried women well before World War One. Liggins has identified the spinster and the widow as 'queer presences' and building on the work of queer critics and theorists of feminine masculinities she identifies the differently disruptive potential offered by the spinster, widow and lesbian, to heteronormative narratives.⁴⁴ Liggins' examination of the widow in particular offers a new dimension to discussions about the single woman, which have repeatedly subsumed the figure into the realms of the married, and she expands the discussion of the single woman in literature to autobiography.

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to literary criticism on interwar fiction by women in several ways. Firstly, by broadening the definition of the single woman from the strictly unmarried, I offer an alternate perspective from which to consider the new types of single women who were appearing in fiction in large numbers for the first time during the period. Sexually experienced and living as unmarried although technically wives, these women are variously glamorised, pitied and pilloried in the fiction that I examine. Their representations convey the slow-moving but perceptible palimpsest in social opinion regarding love, marriage and sexuality that gained momentum in the era. Moreover, their presence in fiction also

⁴⁴ Liggins, p. 3.

helps to contextualise the changing characterisations of the virginal spinster that occurred concurrently, and which reflected the backlash against certain types of single women in some discourses.

The second aim of this thesis is to contribute to the wider debates surrounding literary representations of women and space, including those concerned with the historical presence of women in domestic and urban spaces. I argue that alongside class, gender, and race, marital status is a key element in the relationship between women and space in interwar literature. My focus on single women in relation to space and narrative acknowledges the heterogeneity of women's experiences and provides a platform from which to consider the social position and opportunities of the single woman in the context of the varied debates outlined above as well as the intervention of women authors into the single woman question.

The 'place' of the single woman, both social and physical, is a recurrent theme in many of the 'surplus' woman debates: her place in society, her place in the home, or out in the world of employment. It combines concerns about personal fulfilment, sexuality, social hierarchy, the 'place' of the single woman in the community, but also, more widely, in the nation. Virginia Woolf famously stated that a room of her own and five hundred pounds a year were what the woman writer needed to be autonomous, linking space, money and intellectual freedom together in a single blueprint of what women could strive for in modernity.⁴⁵ But during the interwar years not all women wanted to be writers: many wanted romance, and many wanted to be wives. For some, house-shares in the city represented not freedom, but failure: a world away from the domestic ideal that they dreamed of. In this sense, space and narrative are intimately connected; the meaning of the home, the workplace, the streets, or the city is largely determined by the narrative in which these spaces feature. These are not just narratives in fiction, although fiction both reflects and critiques these narratives, but are the way we make sense of our daily lives. Spaces 'mean' differently, and these differences are not only affected by the

⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 103.

gender, class, nationality, race, religion or sexuality of the individual who walks through them, but also personal aspiration: the answers to those questions, where do I want to go and who do I want to be? Space is thus intimately connected with a sense of selfhood at the same time as it is 'social relations stretched out.'⁴⁶ Moreover, as Doreen Massey has noted, '[t]he spatial organization of society is integral to the production of the social and not merely its result.'⁴⁷ In the fiction that I examine, direct and indirect strategies of spatial exclusion are revealed to produce the social hierarchies by which they are apparently governed, but these spaces are also made porous by women writers, 'audaciously trespass[ed]', and reconfigured.⁴⁸ Narrative paths are re-routed and physical streets dismantled, brick by brick; where they cannot be moved narrative strategies including irony, humour, and attention to economics, offer alternative perspectives through which the single woman's position in society can be critiqued and re-examined.

This focus on space also feeds into critical debates surrounding the modern and the middlebrow in early twentieth-century literature, and my research builds on work by critics and historians writing about women's interwar literature, women's changing relationship to public and private spaces, and modern sexualities. For over thirty years critical studies of women's writing have been challenging the many definitions and exclusions of modernist literature, as well as its privileged literary status. These challenges have taken a number of forms. Nicola Beauman, Alison Light, and Nicola Humble, have all identified the importance of the "'woman's novel" [...] usually written by middle-class women for middle-class women' as a field of examination, and in so doing have expanded literary studies of the interwar period beyond literature enshrined in the modernist canon.⁴⁹ While some critics have elevated the status of 'middlebrow' writing as a subject of interest in itself, others have sought to expand the territory of modernism with definitions

⁴⁶ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 2.

⁴⁷ Massey, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *Room*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914 – 1939* (London: Virago, 1983), p.3; Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars* (London: Routledge, 1991); Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow*.

including ‘para-modernism’ and ‘popular modernism’.⁵⁰ Since women-authored interwar fiction is frequently situated in and around the family home, one consequence of these studies has been the identification of the domestic as a site of interest: a counterpoint to debates that have repeatedly located modernity primarily in relation to the urban. Drawing on these studies, and using the proliferation of the domestic in women’s interwar writing, Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei have developed the term ‘domestic modernism’ to group together writing by authors traditionally positioned across the modernism/middlebrow divide including Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, E.M. Delafield, E.H. Young and Elizabeth Bowen.⁵¹ The term, which invites a reappraisal of much interwar fiction by women and initially seems a useful bridge between authors who have been qualitatively divided by critics, raises its own questions. Is ‘modernism’ here aligned to textual form or is it purely chronological? Does ‘domestic’ just refer to setting, or, in an era in which women were encouraged to go ‘back to home and duty’, are there ideological ramifications for the term, particularly for the unmarried spinster? The ambiguities of the term ‘domestic modernism’ therefore, provide a useful starting point from which to unpick some of the critical and spatial terms with which this thesis will be concerned.

Briganti and Mezei characterise the ‘domestic novel’ as a novel which ‘portrays the social relations and daily life of a contained community – house, village, urban parish’, following the *OED* definition of domestic as ‘of/belonging to the house, home or household.’⁵² Humble, Briganti and Mezei all suggest that for women writers the domestic environment of home and garden, its furnishings and ornaments, and its rituals, provided an ‘epistemology of the home’ through which women could articulate an alternative experience of modernity to that of male

⁵⁰ Humble, pp. 15, 25; Light, p. 66.

⁵¹ Christopher Reed uses the same term to characterize the works of Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry, which he identifies as modern, but differently modern to the International Style of Le Corbusier. Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 4.

⁵² Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, ‘Domestic Novel’, Lorna Sage (ed), *The Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 197.

writers.⁵³ Humble's claims for the radical potential of this in 'feminine middlebrow' writing are more muted than those of Briganti and Mezei, and she suggests that any 'overt resistance to the pro-domestic ideology' of the interwar years is limited in scope within these novels, its boundary marked by the wry critique of E.M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady*.⁵⁴ Moreover, Humble asserts that women in novels of this type 'remain firmly contained by their despised domestic roles.'⁵⁵ Briganti and Mezei's claims for the 'domestic novel', which includes works by modernist as well as middlebrow writers, are more assertive. They contend that 'the textualization of house and home offered women writers a pattern within which to write or against which to write', and that the form was flexible enough to incorporate the 'alternative domesticities' of individuals including the spinster.⁵⁶

Domestic, in these descriptions, is clearly linked to the interior, but also to a certain kind of ideology. It is a term that works to homogenise the diversity of interiors and social groupings to be found in the house or village and particularly the 'urban parish', differences related to the class, race, culture or gender of the inhabitants. In contrast, a close reading of the rooms and houses written by the interwar women writers included in this thesis reveals heterogeneous approaches to the interior in women's fiction as well as the multiple meanings, uses and ideologies that pervaded and surrounded actual dwellings in Britain at this time. In these novels any simple equation of 'house' with 'home' is undermined, as is the equation of 'domestic' with 'house'. Carol Dyhouse has noted that the ideal upper-middle-class home of the nineteenth century would have been 'large enough to give physical and spatial expression to distances between social groups based upon sex, class and age, and to social hierarchy.'⁵⁷ Feminine drawing rooms, masculine studies, nurseries and servants' quarters all combined to make up the household, which was divided

⁵³ Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, 'Reading the House: A literary perspective', *Signs*, 27:3, 2002, 837-846 (p.837).

⁵⁴ Humble, p.5 and p.130.

⁵⁵ Humble, p.130.

⁵⁶ Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, 'House Haunting: The Domestic Novel of the Inter-War Years', *Home Cultures*, 1 (2004), 147-168 (p. 154).

⁵⁷ Carol Dyhouse, 'Mothers and Daughters in the Middle-Class Home, c.1870-1914', in *Labour and Love*, ed. by Jane Lewis, pp.27-47 (p.28).

into rooms and territories but also inhabited by all. As Wendy Gan has noted, the men and women inhabiting these rooms and their early twentieth-century equivalents experienced the same spaces very differently. While male householders may have experienced the home as a private refuge from the world of work, women often worked within the home and had little or no access to spaces in which they could be private.⁵⁸ Morag Shiach, writing about the study as a room that is interior but not domestic, has noted a ‘too easy tendency to identify the interiors of houses with the idea of a “domestic interior”’.⁵⁹ This differentiation between interior and domestic space is borne out in many of the interwar single women narratives that I consider; in these works it is the domestic aspects of the household that are often strikingly absent but to different effect. In the fiction of Woolf and Sayers stifling or pitiable domestic environments are transformed to dwellings in which the single woman can be ‘at home’, by a turn to non-domestic employment. In contrast, in the interiors of Lehmann’s fiction, the absence of domestic comfort is repeatedly used to signify the emotional as well as economic privations of modernity. In all of the texts examined the room or house is not a just physical site, but is a ‘spatial imaginary’: a place that may be geographically specific, with an economic value, but that is also emotionally and psychologically resonant, the site of personal memories as well as social traditions.⁶⁰

‘Domestic’ then is a complex term and it is important to ask what is meant when it is combined either with the label ‘modernist’ or the less critically acceptable label ‘middlebrow’. Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, a modernist text, and Jan Struther’s quintessentially middlebrow *Mrs Miniver* are both based in and around the home. In fact, Mrs Miniver’s repeated incursions into the city, driving her car, might suggest to the twenty-first-century reader that it is the more modern and less conservative of the two. If the distinction between the modernist and the

⁵⁸ Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 2-7.

⁵⁹ Morag Shiach, ‘Modernism, The City and the ‘Domestic Interior’, *Home Cultures*, 2 (2005), 251-267 (p. 258).

⁶⁰ Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

middlebrow cannot be made in terms of subject matter then other points of distinction need to be considered: the perspective of the text (e.g. class); the form of the text (aesthetics); the readership to which the book is written and / or marketed (audience); and its popularity (sales). What makes the distinction between the two terms so difficult is that writers and critics have not always agreed on which of these points are relevant in their search for definition.

The 'battle of the brows' is not a division that has been applied retrospectively by critics; it was a site of contention during the interwar period.⁶¹ J.B. Priestley broadcast a provocative paper 'To a High-brow' via the B.B.C. in October 1932 to which Woolf's famous but unsent letter 'Middlebrow' appears to have been addressed.⁶² Here the term 'highbrow' is used in conjunction with 'middlebrow' and 'lowbrow', rather than the term 'modernist' which begs the question whether highbrow and modernist can be considered synonymous. In Q.D. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public*, which specifically addresses the state of fiction in interwar Britain, highbrow is applied to a list of writers including Woolf, Joyce, and Lawrence that would be identified as modernist today.⁶³ However, highbrow in Woolf's essay, which considers past as well as present literature, is given a broader remit and includes Shakespeare, Dickens, Keats, Austen and Charlotte Brontë. Moreover, middlebrow, which Leavis describes in literary and sales terms is permeated with class overtones by Woolf. While highbrow is used by her to refer to intellect and an attitude to life rather than class, as in the case of Keats, middlebrow, an apparently ambiguous 'betwixt and between' term for Woolf, is pejoratively applied to taste, etiquette and intellect with stingingly specific class associations: faked furniture; reproduction pictures; houses in "'the Georgian Style'". Where Leavis and Woolf agree is in their characterisation of the middlebrow as

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Middlebrow' (1932), <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter22.html>> [accessed 10.02.12]

⁶² Kristen Ewins, "'Revolutionizing a Mode of Life": Leftist Middlebrow Fiction in the 1930s', *ELH*, 82 (2015), 251-279 (256). Unquoted by Ewins, but a clear indicator of the direction of Woolf's ire, is her description of Bloomsbury as a place where 'priests are not, nor priestesses, and, to be quite frank, the adjective "priestly" is neither often heard nor held in high esteem': Woolf, 'Middlebrow'.

⁶³ Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), p. 5.

unchallenging, parasitic and focussed on the past. Woolf derides the middlebrow consumer for their attraction to 'dead writers' and 'dead painters', while Leavis dismisses the middlebrow writer as a literary charlatan peddling 'commonplace sentiments and an outworn technique; echoes of the Best People of the past'.⁶⁴

In many ways these criticisms although identifiably monuments to class bias and intellectual elitism, remain at the basis of many definitions of what is, or what is not, modernist, 'highbrow' being a term now rarely used. Critics including Elizabeth English have pointed to the critical privilege enjoyed by the formally experimental works of the period in contrast to those in which contentious subject matter is couched in realist prose.⁶⁵ Kristen Ewins in a recent paper on Winifred Holtby and Storm Jameson has highlighted the need to challenge this continued critical view of the middlebrow as conservative or backward-looking. Holtby and Jameson, both university educated but avowedly anti-highbrow writers sued for social change through their domestic-based novels. Both utilised the 'readability' and large audience of the middlebrow novel, precisely those aspects of the middlebrow derided by Leavis, to wield the novel as a political tool. In this thesis, my choice to read writers considered modernist alongside those believed to be middlebrow has been made in order to further interrogate these distinctions and divisions: to ask whether the treatment of the single woman in a text might be indicative of its status as modernist or middlebrow, and to query which of these two camps, if either, offer the more robust rebuttal of the single woman's status as 'surplus'. Of particular interest in these debates is the writer Dorothy L. Sayers, whose book *Gaudy Night* in particular has proved critically divisive. While it was dismissed by Leavis as indistinguishable from the work of popular writers Edgar Wallace and Ethel M. Dell, it has recently been critically appraised by English in her study *Lesbian Modernism*.⁶⁶ I will discuss this further in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth English, *Lesbian Modernism: Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 17.

⁶⁶ Q.D. Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', *Scrutiny*, 6 (1937), 334-340 (p. 336).

One strong argument against the artificial division of these writers, despite Woolf's interjections on the subject, is made by the extent to which Rhys, Lehmann, Warner, Woolf, and to a lesser extent, Sayers, all crossed one another's paths, literally as well as figuratively. Lehmann repeatedly tried to befriend Rhys, but decided she was beyond the pale when on their fourth abortive meeting she found her passed out, dead drunk, on her sofa at home.⁶⁷ The Woolfs spent time at Lehmann's house with her second husband, and Lehmann's brother John worked for, and then bought Virginia's shares in, the Hogarth Press.⁶⁸ Woolf, Lehmann and Warner all knew people in common including the Garnetts and the sculptor Tommy Tomlin. Sayers and Lehmann were both Oxbridge educated in an era when that was unusual, and when Rhys complained to a friend about the bedsitting room she was renting in Brunswick Square in 1934, she was a stone's throw away from where Woolf had defied convention and lived with three unmarried men as well as her brother in 1910.⁶⁹ These social and spatial overlaps in real life all invite a comparison of the writing of these women and their approaches to real and imagined space, more so because many of them also read and commented on each other's work. Lehmann admired the writing of Warner, Rhys and Woolf, while Woolf thought that Warner 'has some merit – enough to make me spend 2/6 on her, I think.'⁷⁰ Warner wrote in her 1929 diary about '[s]ex in literature, pace Virginia's new book', opining '[t]he moment you say how women are to write well, you've given away your case, as a feminist.' Despite her astute critique, her final comment in the entry '[h]owever, I haven't yet read V.W.'s book', invites a comparison to Delafield's *Provincial Lady*: '[h]ave a depressed feeling that this is going to be another case of *Orlando* about which I was perfectly able to talk about most intelligently until I read it.'⁷¹ Writing

⁶⁷ Selina Hastings, *Rosamond Lehmann* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 159.

⁶⁸ Hastings, pp. 146-147; Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 610-612, 647, 704-5.

⁶⁹ Jean Rhys, *Letters 1931-66*, ed. by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 23.

⁷⁰ Hastings, p. 159; Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume 3: 1925-30*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1982), p.26.

⁷¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. and intro. by Claire Harman (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 50; E.M. Delafield, *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 5.

in her own diary a year later, Woolf thought Lehmann had 'a clear mind, beating up now & again to poetry', but decided 'its [sic] much work for little results.'⁷²

So far, I have considered only the interior spaces of women's fiction, but interwar single women in fiction are rarely confined to the home and the narratives of Rhys, Lehmann, Sayers, Warner, and Woolf, all juxtapose experiences of the interior with journeys beyond it. In my readings of the single woman's journeys beyond the home I have drawn on works about the changing relationship between women and the city by writers including Judith Walkowitz and Deborah Parsons, as well as primary sources including social purity literature and newspaper articles. Walkowitz, in *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992), has charted women's incursion into the 'contested terrain' of urban modernity. As philanthropists, consumers, Salvation Army 'lasses', striking match girls, and shop-girls among others established their places in the city Walkowitz notes that they 'revised and reworked the dominant imaginative mappings of London.'⁷³ Urban as well as domestic space, therefore, can be seen as a 'spatial imaginary'. In her influential *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000), Parsons examines how these new focal positions influenced the work of women writers including Rhys and Woolf who she locates as *flâneuses*. For Parsons, critical resistance to women's interventions in the city and concentration on their domestic roles serves to exclude women from modernity. The contested figure of the *flâneuse* is one that I discuss in relation to Rhys, Warner and Woolf.

Few studies, with the exception of Wendy Gan's *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (2009), have considered women in fiction in relation to both the interior and the exterior. Gan, who identifies a conflict between the private and the interior in the daily lives of women, also highlights the liberating possibilities of the city which women can experience as an 'urban mantle

⁷² Woolf, *Diary 3*, pp. 314-315.

⁷³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p.11.

of privacy'.⁷⁴ In my own examination of the single woman in fiction, I make a similar important decision to cross this spatial divide. The single woman fiction of the authors considered here resists a purely domestic or house-bound approach because their interiors are repeatedly thrown into relief or invaded by the exterior to the extent that each environment is constructed in reference to the other. Woolf's Eleanor Pargiter is 'in her element' not in her Victorian family home, but in the working-class streets of London, while the exterior dangerously encroaches on the single rooms of Rhys' and Lehmann's impoverished protagonists: fog seeps into the urban townhouse and through boarding house windows 'the feeling of a small street would come in.'⁷⁵ The single woman not only journeys beyond the home, she invites a critique of what is meant by the home itself. At the same time, in the works of Warner and Woolf in particular, she is permitted to witness visions in the city that remain imperceptible to her male and married female contemporaries.

One further discourse in relation to which the single woman was extensively discussed during the interwar period is sexuality. In some debates this was linked, as Victorian representations of the 'fallen' woman had been linked, with women's position in the city. Concerns about a wave of promiscuity beginning with the First World War, but continuing into the twenties included a perceived rise in the number of 'amateur' prostitutes, as well as concerns about the cafes, picture palaces and dance halls, at which young men and women could meet without the pre-war burden of chaperonage. Other anxieties which began to circulate regarding specifically older and confirmed 'surplus' women included concern that the spinster's sexual and / or maternal instincts were thwarted and would 'break[...] out irresistibly [...] undermining sanity and control'.⁷⁶ While it is important to note that these debates were not homogeneous and that they did meet with resistance,

⁷⁴ Gan, p. 56.

⁷⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), p.91; Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.128. All further references to these books will be made in the text.

⁷⁶ Stella Browne, 'The Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and their Bearing upon Social Reconstruction', in *A New World for Women: Stella Browne Socialist Feminist*, ed. by Sheila Rowbotham (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp. 90-105 (pp. 99-100).

the sheer volume of writing on the subject identifies it as a cause of significant anxiety in interwar Britain. Later on in the period, most obviously after the trial for obscenity of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, but also in fiction that predates this, concern about lesbianism also entered into debates on the single woman. Contemporary historians and commentators are divided on the extent to which concerns about sexuality affected the way in which the single woman was perceived. Sheila Jeffreys and Alison Oram have both suggested that after the First World War the increasing circulation of the psycho-sexual and sexological theories of Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis had a detrimental effect by suggesting that heterosexual sex, under the socially sanctioned auspices of marriage and motherhood, was essential to the happiness and wellbeing of women.⁷⁷ Sheila Jeffreys' book, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, has been particularly influential and is frequently cited on the subject. It has been critiqued by Lesley A. Hall, who questions the effect of sexologists on the public imagination and refutes Jeffreys' characterisation of their influence as the widespread capitulation of feminism to a patriarchal sexual paradigm.⁷⁸ While Jeffreys usefully refers to a broad range of primary sources her evident polemic invites a rigorous critique of her weighted readings. Moreover, her statement that 'any attack on the spinster is inevitably an attack on the lesbian', conflates views about different types of single women that I have found repeatedly to be rendered discretely in interwar fiction and non-fiction.⁷⁹ In relation to the novels of Lehmann and Sayers in particular, I critique this view, which is clearly undermined when protagonists are read in the context of their narrative roles and trajectories.

⁷⁷ Alison Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Interwar Feminist Discourses', *Women's History Review*, 1, (1992), 413-433.

⁷⁸ Lesley A. Hall, 'Feminist Reconfigurations of Heterosexuality in the 1920s', in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, ed. by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 135-149.

⁷⁹ Jeffreys, p. 100. For examples of her polemic see for example her description of Eleanor Rathbone's 'betrayal' of feminism, pp. 153-154.

The Limits of this Study

The single woman characters examined in this thesis cannot be said to be fully representative of single women in Britain during the interwar years. In the fiction I analyse Jean Rhys is the only writer to consider women other than British nationals, and working-class women appear infrequently. Where they do appear, for example Annie in Rosamond Lehmann's *A Note in Music* (1930) and Crosby in Virginia Woolf's *The Years*, they are often secondary characters in the narrative, for example live-in servants, whose living environment is contained within that of their employers. Women working in factories and mills were the subjects of stories in popular romances and magazines including *Peg's Paper*, but were largely absent from modernist and middlebrow texts aimed at a predominantly middle and upper-class readership.⁸⁰ While these popular fictions lie outside the remit of this thesis, I acknowledge the bias that such an absence introduces. Claims by critics about the 'marginal' presence or subversive potential of the genteel single woman in fiction, that she is for example 'an implicitly deviant and dangerous figure' need to be contextualised against the occlusion of a whole range of 'other' single women.⁸¹ Regrettably, the 'butterfly women' and female 'dope fiends' that Lucy Bland identifies as sources of anxiety in London's interwar West End also do not enter into any of the narratives discussed in this thesis.⁸² In any case, as Walkowitz has noted, '[j]ust because women are excluded from centres of cultural production, they are not left free to invent their texts'.⁸³ Marginality is not necessarily an indication of liberation, as I discuss in my chapter on Jean Rhys.

⁸⁰ Melman, pp. 121-133.

⁸¹ See for example Suzette Henke's claim that the spinster is 'an implicitly deviant and dangerous figure': Suzette Henke, 'Women Alone: The Spinster's Art', in *Herspace: Women, Writing and Solitude*, ed. by Jo Malin and Victoria Boynton (New York, London and Oxford: The Haworth Press, 2003), pp. 21-37 (p. 35).

⁸² Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, pp. 55-101.

⁸³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 9.

Overview

The first chapter in this thesis examines single women in the first three novels of Jean Rhys to be published: *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934). Several of these women would not have been included under the umbrella terms 'surplus' or 'superfluous' because they are married, but Rhys' descriptions of their lives serve to highlight the inadequacy of such methods of categorisation. Rhys depicts her protagonists, who are ex-chorus girls and inhabitants of the London and Parisian *demimonde*, in narrative trajectories that both reinscribe and critique earlier 'fall' narratives from Victorian literature and art, and contemporary concerns about the 'amateur' prostitute. Beginning with a brief examination of the Victorian 'fallen' woman, I consider Rhys' use of the fall narrative to highlight the double standard and gender inequality that she identifies in modernity, as well as her textual resistance to this power imbalance. Chapter 2 considers single women in three novels by Rosamond Lehmann, *Dusty Answer* (1927), *Invitation to the Waltz* (1932) and *The Weather in the Streets* (1936). Lehmann places her single women according to a hierarchy that Katherine Holden has identified as a feature of the interwar period: a 'continuum that places some women as more married than others'.⁸⁴ Lehmann's novels also incorporate the interwar concerns about the dangers of celibacy, and the consequences are a radical revision of received morality and the romance narrative. Rather than being pitiable but good, Lehmann's spinsters are monstrous, while her sexually adventurous protagonists are celebrated, and the romance narrative reconfigured around them.

Neither Rhys, nor Lehmann, are able to find a suitable home for their single women, but Dorothy L. Sayers, whose fiction I discuss in Chapter 3 finds places for her 'good' spinsters in worthwhile employment, either as sleuths, writers, or academics. In *Gaudy Night* (1935), Sayers offers 'a place achieved, unalienable' to her female academics, depicting a modern position for women that owes more to the

⁸⁴ Katherine Holden, "Imaginary Widows': Spinster, marriage and the 'lost generation' in Britain after the Great War," *Journal of Family History*, 30 (2005), 388-409 (p.389).

opening up of male tradition, than any thorough reconceptualization of the past.⁸⁵ In this novel, as well as in *Unnatural Death* (1927) and *The Documents in the Case* (1930), however, I find that any hint of sexual impropriety is liable to be punished either by death or dementia. Moreover, in Sayers' novels, sexuality, criminality and class are inextricably and repeatedly linked.

My final chapters, on Sylvia Townsend Warner and Virginia Woolf respectively in some way return to the ground, physical as well as figurative, covered by writers earlier in the thesis. Chapter 4 looks at two very different novels by Sylvia Townsend Warner: *Lolly Willowes* (1926), which follows the transformation of a dogsbody Maiden Aunt into a witch; and *Summer Will Show* (1936), in which an aristocratic Victorian wife abandoned by her husband follows him to Paris, becomes intimate with his mistress, and joins the communist party. Like Lehmann, Warner uses domestic space as an index of social and historical change, but unlike Lehmann's protagonists, Warner's are unconfined by the realities of the dwellings they inhabit. Warner's novels are set in different eras, and depict women with different marital backgrounds and varying sexualities, but I identify in them both a very similar narrative trajectory in which self-realisation can only occur after the wholesale rejection of the domestic. In Chapter 5, I turn finally to Woolf in whose novels and essays the grey, ubiquitous London streets described by Rhys are transformed. In my examination of *Night and Day* (1919), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Years* (1937), as well as some of Woolf's non-fiction writing, I discover just how central the spinster is to Woolf's project. In Lily Briscoe she is the figure through whom the past and the present are reconciled, and in *The Years*, she is the forerunner of each generation, demanding a room of her own and challenging the social, historic and aesthetic construction of the world around her.

⁸⁵ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), p.10. All further references to this book will be made in the text.

1. 'La Vie est un Spiral': Singleness, Fallen-ness, and Narrative Shape in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys

Introduction

Jean Rhys might initially seem an odd author with whom to begin a thesis on single women, not least because in the three novels that I consider in this chapter, two of the protagonists are married. Marya Zelli in *Quartet* (1928), and Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), are both referred to by the titles Madame or Mrs, and only the eighteen-year-old Anna Morgan of *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) has never had a husband.¹ Yet, these protagonists are some of the most alienated and isolated in modern fiction, a fiction itself repeatedly characterised by isolation and solitude. These women, who move in and out of boarding houses and hotels in London and Paris, are all surplus in the sense that they are unwanted and unneeded by their families and society. They inhabit the same environment, but more surprisingly, given the difference in their marital status, they also follow the same narrative trajectories: a succession of increasingly degrading intimate encounters with men, financial instability and impoverishment, and an unhappy, if not tragic, end. These similarities suggest that in Rhys' texts the states of marriage and singleness are not binaries, and that marriage is no longer able to function as a definitive resolution to a fictional narrative. Marriage for Rhys' characters is not experienced as emotional or economic security and it does not last. Where 'Reader, I married him', once functioned to conclude a novel, resolving personal and social conflict and establishing harmony, in Rhys' work it is reduced to a transient moment, undermined by such doubts and uncertainty that characters repeatedly question whether Rhys' protagonists have been married at all.² 'Is she really married to the Zelli man, I wonder' (8), asks Miss de Solla of Marya in *Quartet*. Written in an era in which 'marriage remained the normative expectation of women of all classes', and

¹ Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (London: Penguin, 2000); Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Penguin, 2000). All further references to these books will be made in the text.

² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 498.

sex outside of marriage was largely prohibited, Rhys' novels invite the question: what happens to women's narratives if marriage is transient?³ Her answers are not conclusive. 'Search me what the whole thing's about', Rhys' 'tart' Laurie says in *Voyage in the Dark*, 'the answer's a lemon. A lemon, that's what the answer is' (100).

In this chapter I examine Rhys' protagonists and their narratives with regard to two discourses that her novels gesture towards: the fallen woman novels and paintings that were so popular in the century prior to Rhys' writing and the conversations about the changing nature of sexual relations that were taking place after the First World War, fed into by social commentators, purity campaigners, and newspaper articles. In this I build on work by Lawrence Rainey who has considered the applicability of the 'fallen woman' label to early twentieth-century novels about sexually active women workers and Celia Marshik, who has compared the 'downward path' of Rhys' early novels to texts distributed by social purity campaigners.⁴ Beginning with a brief summary of the 'fallen woman' in Victorian literature and art, I identify key features in her representation, including the fallen woman's relation to the home and the idea of exile. I then query to what extent these tropes are replicated in Rhys' first three novels, all of which feature a protagonist who is identified in some way as fallen. Marshik has identified a correlation between the downward trajectory of Rhys' protagonists, and prophecies regarding the consequences of sexual immorality made by social purity campaigners, but her limited focus results in a reading of Rhys as both less resistant (in terms of narrative strategy) and more resistant (in terms of social commentary) to the idea of the fallen woman, than I think is correct. Rainey's paper offers a useful bridge between the Victorian idea of the fallen woman and how this might be transposed onto a later era, but his conflation of 'Victorian' and 'fallen' needs to be unpicked and I do this below. I note how the designation 'fallen' worked to collapse

³ Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950*, p. 3; Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 99.

⁴ Lawrence Rainey, 'From the Fallen Woman to the Fallen Typist, 1908 – 1922', *English Literature in Transition 1880 – 1920*, 52 (2009), 273-297; Celia Marshik, *British Modernism and Censorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 167-206.

the boundaries between single and married women in Victorian literature and art, how in a similar fashion, interwar commentators found it difficult to explain changes to women's sexual behaviour without recourse to the idea of the fallen woman or prostitution, and I consider how Rhys' texts variously negotiate these changing concepts. Rhys' interwar publishers marketed her novels as 'utterly modern', but I identify in them a tension between the old and the new that remains unresolved.⁵ Rhys' narratives include modern dilemmas and milieux: open relationships, abortion, the *demimonde* and the literary set of 1920s Paris; they lead the reader through a profoundly unsettling modernist textual landscape fragmented by the tangential reminiscences and temporal digressions of their protagonists. At the same time, her protagonists sometimes appear almost wilfully old-fashioned: fatally passive, rarely employed, and totally dependent on the men they meet, both economically and emotionally. For a twenty-first-century reader this disjunction can be disorienting. As Katie Owen has noted, 'it is hard to see how feminist critics can claim any part of [Rhys]', and yet Rhys' characters are utterly compelling, if not heroic, in their repeated, violent outbursts against a system they feel they cannot influence, holding their faith in the redemptive possibilities of 'luck', 'chance', and romantic possibility despite all evidence to the contrary.⁶

Francis Wyndham used the term 'composite heroine' to describe Rhys' protagonists, who are distinguished from each other by their age but who repeatedly share experiences and perspectives: all are lower middle-class, and participate in intimate relationships with men outside of marriage; several have a background as a chorus girl, and several have had babies who have died, or pregnancies that have not been brought to term.⁷ I have used this 'composite heroine' as a means by which to organise this chapter, and since age is clearly a determining factor in Rhys' critique of the social status of her protagonists, I

⁵ 'Utterly modern' is how *Postures*, the publication name for *Quartet* in England, was described on its original book wrapper. A.M., 'Books of the Day: New Novels', *The Manchester Guardian* (1901 – 1959), 26 October 1928, p. 7.

⁶ Katie Owen, 'Introduction', in Rhys, *Quartet*, pp. v – xviii (p. xviii).

⁷ Quoted in Owen, p. v.

approach the novels in life-story order: *Voyage in the Dark*, *Quartet*, and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia reads the inscription 'La vie est un spiral' (13), on a picture she sees through a shop window. This phrase encapsulates not only the shape of each of Rhys' first three texts, all of which offer slight but perceptible deviances from the straightforward descent of the fallen woman, but also the comprehensive meta-narrative of social descent, that is revealed when the novels are read in the life-story order of the 'composite heroine', rather than publication order. Read in this way, Rhys' novels detail the successive vicissitudes of life of a woman over two decades, from eighteen-year old ingénue to late thirties, wandering drunk. By using the term 'composite heroine', I distinguish my approach from those critics and biographers who have focused their examination on the critically contentious figure of 'the Rhys woman'.⁸ This figure, in which Rhys is inextricably fused with her protagonists, haunts studies including Carol Angier's biography, in which Angier repeatedly infers details of Rhys' life from her fiction manuscripts.⁹ Rhys responded variously when questioned about the autobiographical nature of her work. Her transparent portraits of Ford Madox Ford and his partner Stella Bowen as the Heidlars in *Quartet*, were realistic enough to prevent Jonathan Cape publishing the novel for fear of libel, but Rhys responded ambiguously that it "'wasn't an autobiography [...] though some of it was lived of course'".¹⁰ On another occasion Rhys commented, "'I can't make things up, I can't invent... I just write about what happened. Not that my books are entirely my life – but almost'", but again the truth of this statement is questionable.¹¹ Rhys herself suggested that she 'talk[ed] wildly' during interviews in which she drank, and Helen Carr notes that Rhys 'was always – young, old, drunk, sober – immensely

⁸ Critics who use this term include: Elgin W. Mellow, 'Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp. 103 – 117 (p. 107); Walter Allen, quoted in Mellow, p.106. Critics who have argued against this term include: Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys*, 2nd ed. (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2012), p. 4; Sue Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 3.

⁹ Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys* (London: Penguin, 1992).

¹⁰ Owen, p. xviii; Jean Rhys, *Letters 1931-66*, p. 171.

¹¹ Quoted in Owen, p. v-vi.

self-deprecating'.¹² There was much more artistry to Rhys' writing than a simple transposition of the facts, and narrative shape was of great importance to her. In another interview she noted: 'The things you remember have no form. When you write about them, you have to give them a beginning, a middle, and an end. To give life shape – that is what a writer does.'¹³ David Plante has written that even in the process of creating her autobiography late in life, 'Jean often talked of the 'shape' of her books: she imagined a shape, and everything that fit into the shape she put in, everything that didn't she left out.'¹⁴ My use of the term 'composite heroine' then, acknowledges the categorical distinction between fiction and autobiography, with the caveat that both may be created in a similar fashion. It allows me to consider the similarities between Rhys' fictional protagonists while distinguishing them from Rhys herself. It also allows for an appreciation of the extent to which Rhys shaped, edited and re-edited her narratives, sometimes over a period of years, even if an autobiographical incident or period did act as the catalyst for her imaginative creation. Often Rhys complicated this distinction by answering questions about her protagonists in the first person.¹⁵ She took exception to a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer who likened Sasha from *Good Morning, Midnight* to a famous literary fallen woman, but more on the grounds of her own lack of success rather than implied immorality: 'I am *not* like Becky Sharp – wish I were,' she wrote.¹⁶ Rhys' works thus invited comparisons to fallen women as late as 1939. To consider why, I will now turn to the fallen woman in Victorian art and literature.

'Going, Going, Gone': Fallen Women in Victorian Art and Literature

If you go to the exhibitions of Victorian painting at the Tate Britain, or pick up a Victorian novel, it is likely that within a short space of time you will be faced by a fallen woman. As Linda Nochlin has noted, the fallen woman held a particular

¹² Jean Rhys, 'Making Bricks without Straw', in Frickey, pp. 35-37 (p.36); Carr, p. 8.

¹³ 'Jean Rhys: The Art of Fiction LXIV', *Paris Review*, 76 (1979), 218-237 (p. 225).

¹⁴ David Plante, 'Jean Rhys: A Remembrance', *Paris Review*, 76 (1979), 238-284 (p. 267).

¹⁵ See for example: Mary Cantwell, 'A Conversation with Jean Rhys', in Frickey, pp. 21-27.

¹⁶ Rhys, *Letters*, p. 138. The review was R.D. Charques, 'Novels of the Week, Lost Years', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 April 1939, p. 231.

fascination for artists, writers, philanthropists and social critics of the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁷ 'Fallen' here refers to a fall from virtue, but the simplicity of this idea belies the wide spectrum of practices and individuals to which it could be applied during the Victorian era. Amanda Anderson identifies 'fallen' as '[a] wide umbrella term' that 'cuts across class lines and signifies a complex of tabooed behaviours and degraded conditions.'¹⁸ Under its aegis 'prostitutes, unmarried women who engage in sexual relations [...] victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as delinquent lower class women' are conflated.¹⁹ But the list does not stop there. For strict Victorian moralists the taint of the fallen woman was contagious, radiating out to render suspicious any women whose friendship with the fallen painted them guilty by association. In real life George Eliot found that she was not accepted in mixed society after she moved in with George Henry Lewes.²⁰ In fiction, Little Em'ly's inexplicable capitulation to Steerforth, in Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850), is anticipated by her friendship with the prostitute Martha. Since the 'fall' from virtue was regularly accompanied in literary and artistic representations with enforced or self-imposed exile to prevent this contamination of the good, 'fall' also applied to a social and economic descent, as well as a moral one. In an era in which the majority of middle-class women were economically dependent on their fathers or husbands, exile from the home meant destitution.

Several points are important to note here, since just as fallen women were heterogeneous individuals, their treatment by philanthropists, artists and writers, both in real life and in textual and artistic representations, was in no way monolithic. Firstly, as with the categorical distinction made between Rhys'

¹⁷ Linda Nochlin, 'Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman', *The Art Bulletin*, 60 (1978), 139-153 (p. 139).

¹⁸ Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁹ Anderson, p. 2.

²⁰ Rosemary Ashton, 'Evans, Marian (1819-1880)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, May 2008 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6794>> [accessed 08 Jun 2015]; Tom Winnifrith, *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), p.51. Winnifrith notes that Eliot's brother also broke off relations with her.

autobiography and her fiction made above, a distinction needs to be made between women who society considered 'fallen' and representations of fallen women in art and literature. I will be looking at the latter. However, it should be noted that literary and artistic discourses did not of course exist in a vacuum, but interacted, reflected and critiqued prevailing social ideas. To cite just one example of their overlap, Charles Dickens' complex interactions with women Victorian society would have considered 'fallen', included an array of characters in his novels, his foundation of Urania Cottage, a philanthropic venture designed to rehabilitate female prostitutes and petty criminals, and his relationship with Ellen Ternan.²¹ While Dickens' novels repeatedly suggested that women who 'fell' would necessarily meet with death or exile, his philanthropy and personal relations suggested nothing of the sort. Both Linda Nochlin and Nina Auerbach suggest that while many Victorian reformers and social critics did not see a woman's fall as irrevocable, in art and 'in imaginative literature the myth persisted.'²² While artists and writers differed in their approaches to the fallen woman, and in the amount of sympathy that they offered her, it is nevertheless the case that certain key aspects in her representation are repeated again and again.

The second point to consider is the relationship between 'fallen' and 'Victorian'. In his examination of four early twentieth-century novels, and their sexually active clerical protagonists, Lawrence Rainey asks if these women are 'an improbable oxymoron, at once Victorian (fallen) and modern (secretaries)?'²³ Rainey's conflation of fallen and Victorian here, needs to be unpicked, since fallen woman narratives both predate the Victorian era and continue beyond it. Fallen-women ballads were

²¹ Michael Slater, 'Dickens, Charles John Huffam (1837-1896)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, September 2014 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7599>> [accessed 05 Jun 2015]; Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) pp. 180-81; Winnifrieth, pp. 95-111. Winnifrieth makes the interesting link that after Dickens met Ellen Ternan his final three and a half novels contain fewer women and 'practically no fallen women', p. 110.

²² Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, p. 159; and Nochlin, p. 141.

²³ Rainey, p. 273. Rainey examines: *Sally Bishop* (1908) by Ernest Temple; *The Questing Beast* (1914) by Ivy Low; *Latchkey Ladies* (1921), by Marjorie Grant; *Lilian* (1922) by Arnold Bennett.

in popular circulation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and William Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress* (1733), Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), and even Lydia Bennet's elopement with Wickham in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), can all be considered pre-Victorian variants on the fallen woman theme.²⁴ After Victoria the fallen woman found her way into Edwardian drama, and then Hollywood films where her initial ascendancy as glamorous gold-digger, *femme fatale* or Vamp, provided a strong cinematic contrast to her inevitable downfall.²⁵ However, if rather than conflating the fallen *with* the Victorian, we consider Victorian constructions of the fallen woman, a historically discrete picture does emerge. Winnifrith dates this specific incarnation of the fallen woman from around 1840, an age of what he terms 'high' Victorianism, and notes that while her earlier incarnations, including the Regency era Lydia Bennet, could be reclaimed through marriage, the fate of fallen women after 1840 was inevitably 'death or Australia'.²⁶ This is important because it is a narrative conclusion that remains relatively consistent despite various authors' approaches and/or sympathies to the fallen woman. Gaskell's eponymous heroine *Ruth* (1853), was such a sympathetic portrait that it inspired Josephine Butler to campaign for social change.²⁷ Nevertheless, Ruth suffered the same narrative fate as other fallen women, written by far more conservative authors including Mrs Henry Wood who wrote that to fall 'will be found far worse than death!'²⁸ To name a handful of other examples: Lady Deadlock in *Bleak House* (1853), Oliver's mother and Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (1838), Lady Isabelle Carlyle in Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Tess in Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbeilles* (1891), all die. Little Em'ly and Martha emigrate to Australia in *David Copperfield* while Hetty Sorrel

²⁴ Mary Trull, "Odious Ballads': Fallen Women's Laments and *All's Well That End's Well*", in *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Craig A. Berry and Heater Richardson Hayton (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 133- 154.

²⁵ Sos Eltis, 'The Fallen Woman in Edwardian Feminist Drama: Suffrage, Sex and the Single Girl', *English Literature in Transition 1880 – 1920*, 50 (2007), 27-49; Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (London: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁶ Winnifrith, p. 21.

²⁷ George Watt, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Beckenham, Kent: Crook Helm Ltd., 1984), pp. 1-2.

²⁸ Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (Toronto: Broadview, 2002), p. 335.

accomplishes both, by dying while being deported in Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859). As Jane Miller has noted however, endings need to be approached with caution: social indictment and indictment of an individual character can appear indistinguishable at the level of action.²⁹ Just as the breakdowns of New Women heroines were erroneously read by some late-Victorian readers as the consequences of their 'unnatural' travails beyond the sphere of the home, so the unhappy endings of some fallen women novels can be misread as the just desserts of the protagonist. This is a point that I will return to below. Nevertheless, despite increasing sympathy with them throughout the era, few Victorian fallen women in fiction survive: Wilkie Collins' *The Fallen Leaves* (1879) and *The New Magdalen* (1873), 'very odd novels by Victorian standards', in which prostitutes prosper and marry, and George Moore's eponymous *Esther Waters* (1894) are exceptions.³⁰ Poverty-stricken, exiled, and often in ill-health, few can say alongside Thomas Hardy's Ruined Maid, that "'One's pretty lively when ruined'".³¹

A summary of the narrative trajectory of the Victorian fallen woman in fiction is described pithily by Winnifrith: 'In half a page a Victorian three-decker about an erring wife tends to reduce itself into the easy formula of "Going, Going, Gone".'³² It is a formula that can equally apply to Rhys' protagonists. In order to compare what appear to be disparate narratives it is useful to consider some examples of Victorian art where fallen woman tropes are arranged in a single image. Fallen women in Victorian art are repeatedly represented at a moment of crisis in the parental or marital home, or having been already exiled from it. In Richard Redgrave's *The Outcast* (1851), a young woman with a baby stands framed by an open doorway through which the outside world is dark and snowy. Faced by an elderly man whose pointed finger directs her to leave, the woman's marginalisation is emphasised by the weighting of the picture, the majority of which is taken up by

²⁹ Jane Miller, *Rebel Women* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 21.

³⁰ Winnifrith, p. 140.

³¹ Thomas Hardy, 'The Ruined Maid', in *Selected Poems*, intro. by Tom Paulin (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 19, l. 20.

³² Winnifrith, p. 149.

her family and their home, leaving her only a small portion of the canvas. Frederick Walker's *The Lost Path* (1863), which shows a young woman walking in the snow sheltering a baby, could be a later scene from the same night, its clear conceit the fate of the wanderer from the paths of righteousness. In Augustus Egg's triptych now known as *Past and Present* (1858), the narrative unfolds over a period of five years. The first painting shows a wife prostrate on the floor in front of her children and a husband who holds a letter. Her 'fall' is implied by an apple and by paintings on the wall entitled 'Adam and Eve' and 'Abandonment'.³³ Two further paintings show the consequences of the scene five years later: in one, the daughters pray for their mother, while in another she is depicted homeless, on the floor of an external archway, the tiny feet that her shawl fails to cover evidence of her earlier adultery. When the paintings were exhibited the importance of the home was emphasised, as in *The Outcast*, by the placement of the first picture in the centre of the triptych. In *Past and Present*, as in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Found* (c.1859, unfinished), and George Watt's *Found Drowned* (1848-50), the moral fall of the subject is suggested by her proximity to the ground, either lying or crouched, although in *Found Drowned* the position of the woman, with her arms outstretched, against a city backdrop suggests she is more sinned against than sinning. Her position by the river is one repeated in literary representations of fallen women. These signifiers of the fallen woman: a baby, exile, homelessness, destitution, prostration, the city and the river all recur in Rhys' narratives, but these were written over half a century later, and in a different cultural climate. Before turning to these novels, I will briefly examine what these changes were.

'An Element of Serious Unrest'? The Rise of the 'Amateur'

We move forward now to the interwar period, during which concerns about single women were at the centre of several of the circulating debates regarding perceived

³³ Full analyses of this painting are given in: T.J. Edelstein, 'Augustus Egg's Triptych: A Victorian Narrative of Adultery', *The Burlington Magazine*, 125 (1983), 202-212; Frances Fowle, 'Past and Present, No.1', 2000, <www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/egg-past-and-present-no-1-n03278/text-summary>[accessed 13 April 2015]; Nochlin, p.141; Auerbach, p.154.

changes to women's sexuality: concerns that were escalated by the sheer number of single women in the population following the war. Fear about the psychological repercussions of sexual abstinence will be discussed in subsequent chapters but at the other end of the scale, anxieties were raised that single women's sexuality was becoming increasingly uncontrolled. Concerns about the dangerous sexuality of single women were in circulation during the war when 'war nymphomania' or 'khaki fever', the 'immodest and even dangerous' behaviour of young women – across the classes - elicited by the sight of a man in army uniform, was identified as a cause for concern.³⁴ In 1919 *The Times* reported that '[t]he tale of the streets during the war will never be told. How many have gone down corrupted for life must be unknown.'³⁵ By the post-war era the Victorian binary of wife and prostitute had been separated by more nebulous designations including the 'flapper' and the 'amateur', although both of these terms were associated, in varying degrees, with sexual activity.³⁶ At the same time, a sharp rise in the number of divorces, brought with it an increase in the number of divorcées, as well as women estranged from their husbands, two further categories of single women viewed by moral conservatives as sexually suspicious. In the decade after the war the divorce rate quadrupled, increasing from 703 divorces in 1917 to 4,018 in 1928.³⁷ There were multiple reasons for this rise, including the upheavals of the war and the

³⁴ Angela Woollacott, 'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), 325-347 (p. 325). Lucy Bland, "'Guardians of the Race" or "Vampires upon the nation's health?": Female sexuality and its regulation in early twentieth-century Britain', in *The Changing Experience of Women*, ed. by Elizabeth Whitelegg (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), pp. 373-388 (p. 380).

³⁵ Quoted in 'Health and Morals: Menage of the "Amateur" Prostitute', *The Times*, 22 February, 1919, p. 7.

³⁶ Samantha Caslin, 'Flappers, Amateurs and Professionals: The Spectrum of Promiscuity in 1920s Britain', in *New Sociologies of Sex Work*, ed. by Kate Hardy, Sarah Kingston and Teela Sanders (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.11-21 (p. 11); Melman, p.1 and throughout.

³⁷ Number of divorces, age at divorce and marital status before marriage, Table 1: Number of couples divorcing, by party petitioning / decree granted, 1858-2011, Office for National Statistics, <<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/2011/rft-divorces--number-of-divorces-age-at-divorce-and-marital-status-before-marriage.xls>> [accessed 02 May 2012].

Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923.³⁸ However, even the blame for this could be shifted onto the single woman and one reason given by the press prior to the Act for the increasing decline in morals was the large number of unmarried women in the population.³⁹ Both *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, in articles headed 'The 1920 Girl', reported one doctor's comments that 'much of the existing unhappiness was traceable to clandestine relations between young women and married men.'⁴⁰ Looking back on the twenties, in her chapter on 'sex delinquency' for *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* (1935), Mrs Neville Rolfe also identified the link and noted that 'the disappearance of the surplus of marriageable women would remove one reason or excuse for extra-marital intercourse.'⁴¹

Like the social concerns with which they were associated, the definitions applied to single women in this period were not entirely new, although their meanings were evolving. The idea of the 'amateur prostitute', or 'amateur' had been in circulation well before the interwar period and had appeared in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851).⁴² By the interwar period the range of activity that the term 'amateur' applied to was broad. Firstly, it was not confined to sexual relations; the journalist Ada Chesterton applied the term 'amateur' to women who earned their 'keep by going for joy rides with young men', and to women who 'make a habit of "teasing"'.⁴³ Secondly, it did not necessarily refer to sexual activity

³⁸ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London: Penguin, 1971) pp. 105-6; Mrs Neville Rolfe, 'Sex-Delinquency', in *The New Survey of London Life and Labour, Vol.9, Life and Leisure*, ed. by Hubert Lewellyn Smith (London: P.S. King, 1935), pp. 287-345 (p.290). The Matrimonial Causes Act equalized the grounds for divorce cited by both sexes and also lessened the cost of divorces by allowing them to be considered by the Court of Assizes.

³⁹ Melman, p.18

⁴⁰ 'The 1920 Girl', *The Times*, 5 February, 1920, p. 9; 'A Million Women Too Many, 1920 Husband Hunt', *Daily Mail*, 5 February, 1920.

⁴¹ Rolfe, p.290

⁴² Bracebridge Hemyng, 'Prostitution in London', in *London Labour and the London Poor: Volume IV, Those that Will Not Work, comprising Prostitutes, Thieves, Swindlers and Beggars, by several contributors*, ed. by Henry Mayhew (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), pp. 210 – 272. The amateur features under the headings of 'Clandestine Prostitutes', 'Board Lodgers' and 'Soldier Women'. Generally spoken of as 'Dollymops' they include servant maids, nursemaids, shop-girls, and milliners.

⁴³ Quoted in Caslin, pp. 13-14.

where money changed hands. Gladys Mary Hall identified as an 'amateur' any girl 'ready to have promiscuous relations for gifts or pleasures, or even *for no external reward*', while Cecil Bishop, previously of C.I.D., described amateurs in *Women and Crime*, as 'an element of serious unrest', '[s]etting no price other than a 'good time' upon their favours, and putting no check to their eroticism.'⁴⁴ What emerges from these contemporary debates, and what historians and commentators have identified, is a widespread difficulty in the understanding and articulation of women's sexuality outside of discourses about prostitution at this time.⁴⁵ As Caslin notes, 'discourses about the lifestyles of 'modern' women were implicitly and sometimes explicitly conflated with those about prostitution.'⁴⁶ This difficulty in articulation was emphasised and in part caused by changes in women's sexual and social behaviour, from which arose the concern that the 'common prostitute' as she was legally termed, was becoming more difficult to distinguish from the 'ordinary woman'. Concern about these changes, and how they could be policed, was voiced at an official level during the Street Offences Committee that ran between 1927 and 1928, but spoke to a broader range of anxieties including changes within the class system. Not only was the 'amateur' a cross-class phenomenon with as Bishop alleged 'as many wealthy as poor "amateurs"', but modes of behaviour and dress that had previously acted as signifiers of prostitution were becoming increasingly widespread.⁴⁷ Women's increasing use of cosmetics, and their freedom to meet in cafes, cinemas or dance halls unburdened by chaperonage, were just some of the ways in which shifts in social and spatial boundaries were evidenced and practiced, with the consequence that it was becoming more and more difficult to tell a 'good' girl from a 'bad' one.⁴⁸

Despite this conflation of unmarried sex with prostitution, the pejorative application of the tag 'fallen' woman, which had had such a broad application in

⁴⁴ Quoted in Caslin, p.14, my emphasis; Cecil Bishop, *Women and Crime* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), p.29.

⁴⁵ Bland, 'Guardians of the Race', pp. 381-387; Marshik, pp. 167-168.

⁴⁶ Caslin, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Bishop, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Rolfe, p. 300; Caslin, p. 16; Graves and Hodge, p. 39; Stevenson, p. 173.

the nineteenth century, diminished in non-fiction literatures during the interwar period, with many of the references to 'fallen' women cited by critics appearing in texts published before, during or just after the war. One 1915 pamphlet circulated to girls' clubs and to women in factories on the dangers of 'vulgarity and loose morals', links sexual 'falls' with destitution and death: 'Often girls sink so low in their sin that they can never rise again, but sink lower and lower until they die a lonely and terrible death.'⁴⁹ Similarly, the social purity literature that Celia Marshik compares to Rhys' novels, *Why Girls Go Wrong: How the White Slave Gangs Work* (1913), and *Downward Paths: An Inquiry into the Causes which Contribute to the Making of the Prostitute* (1916), fall within this early timeframe.

These pamphlets need to be contextualised as the discourses of social purity organisations whose views found particular resonance during widespread concern about venereal disease, particularly in a time of conflict. During the First World War the spread of venereal disease was repeatedly blamed on the 'amateur', who, cast as 'a hideous disease-carrying threat to the health of the nation's manhood', found herself the subject of governmental sexual regulation and scrutiny.⁵⁰ In 1919 the Annual Report of the National Council of Public Morals repeatedly referred to the 'rescue work' carried out among amateurs as well as professional prostitutes, but as the influence of social purity organisations declined after the war the conflation of extra-marital relations with the 'fall' of women seems increasingly anachronistic.⁵¹ Writing in the mid-thirties, Mrs Neville Rolfe observed that sexual relations outside marriage 'seldom result in the girl becoming an outcast from society or pursuing commercial promiscuity as an occupation,' although 'seldom' here suggests a certain reticence to confirm the harmlessness of these relations, and Rolfe did allow that 'from this beginning some girls may occasionally drift for a

⁴⁹ Philippa Levine, "'Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War I', *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), 34-78 (p. 49).

⁵⁰ Bland, 'Guardians of the Race', pp. 381-2. Regulation 40d, under DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) made 'it an offence for a woman with VD to have, solicit or invite sexual intercourse with any member of HM forces.'

⁵¹ Quoted in Caslin, p.15; 'Health and Morals', *The Times*, 22 Feb 1919, p.7; Hunt, p.184.

time into a life of promiscuity or even prostitution.’⁵² However, while her contemporary Ada Chesterton wrote in *In Darkest London*, that ‘the premium placed upon the respectability of women’ remained such that ‘it was difficult for a “fallen” woman to regain her social status’, she denoted ‘fallen’ in quotation marks and strongly opposed the description. ‘It is often said that a girl who has “fallen” – most hideous and obscene description – once will “fall” again, and that the majority of unmarried mothers find their way into prostitution. This is contradicted alike by figures, facts and experience.’⁵³ By the thirties then, non-commercial extra-marital relations, although still largely taboo, and liable to be grouped under the heading ‘sex-delinquency’, were less likely to be considered a precursor to inevitable destitution and death. Where a link between destitution and sexuality was made, as in the observations of destitute women made by Ada Chesterton, sex work was conceived as the consequence of economic conditions rather than immorality: Chesterton wrote it was ‘the result of the will to live’, of women ‘unable to keep themselves in any other manner.’⁵⁴ What these shifts in opinion invite is a critique of the influence held by social purity literature and its construction of the fallen woman by the time that Rhys was writing. If this is over-emphasised then we run the risk of rationalising Rhys’ insistence on her characters’ inevitable ‘falls’, a trope which appears far less frequently in interwar than in Victorian literature.

In early twentieth-century and interwar literature the irrevocable nature of a ‘fall’ for women is repeatedly critiqued. A character in Rose Macaulay’s *Potterism* (1919) may note that ‘It’s a queer thing, how “fallen” in the masculine means killed in the war, and in the feminine given over to a particular kind of vice’, but in literature at this time ‘falls’ are not inextricably linked to either destitution or death, although the motif does persist in some novels.⁵⁵ In the four ‘fallen typist’ novels written from

⁵² Rolfe, pp.295, 339.

⁵³ Ada Chesterton, ‘In Darkest London’, in *Outspoken Women: An Anthology of Women’s Writing on Sex, 1870 – 1969*, ed. by Lesley A. Hall (London: Routledge, 2005) pp.121, 139.

⁵⁴ Mrs Cecil Chesterton, *In Darkest London* (London: Stanley Paul and Co Ltd., 1935), p. 61.

⁵⁵ Rose Macaulay, *Potterism: A Tragi-Farcical Tract* (London: Collins, 1950), p. 66. For later examples of sexual indiscretion leading to death see for example, Winifred Holtby, *The Crowded Street* (1924) and Elizabeth Bowen, *To the North* (1932).

1908 to 1922 that Lawrence Rainey discusses, only the earliest, *Sally Bishop* (1908) by Ernest Temple ends in the death, by suicide, of the protagonist. The other three protagonists prosper, although, as Rainey notes, two of these need perhaps improbable plot twists for this to occur: 'fairy godmother' interventions that allow their babies to survive. As Rainey notes, these novels are not entirely progressive, but in various ways they do subvert the fallen woman trajectory of 'high' Victorianism: these are working women who are not prostitutes, do not become prostitutes, and do not die. Rather, they are women capable of earning their own wages in an environment that is depicted to be less condemnatory of the unmarried mother than previously. This depiction was not universal however, and in some other early twentieth century representations of women, the sexually active remain conflated with the 'fallen' in order for them to function as emblems of what is constructed as a degraded modernity. In T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, another typist appears but in comparison to the popular novels discussed by Rainey, here she is placed as object rather than subject, a 'lovely woman' who 'stoops to folly', but is '[h]ardly aware' and allowed just 'one half formed thought'. With 'automatic hand' she is hardly more animate than the stylus she sets on the gramophone.⁵⁶ Like the painter Walter Sickert, whose Edwardian Camden Town Group of artists excluded women, and who identified the prostitute as one of the 'signs of modern life', Eliot uses his typist's sexual encounter to denote a broader sense of degradation.⁵⁷ Her fall is reflective, and one of the constitutive elements, of a culture that like London Bridge is 'falling down falling down falling down', and which Eliot draws as both sordid and quotidian.⁵⁸ Sickert encouraged painters to follow their impoverished artist models home as muse, 'into the kitchen, or better still [...] into her bedroom'. Like these models, Eliot's typist is 'stuff for a picture [...] stuff for the draughtsman': her subjectivity erased and replaced by a grubby and mundane

⁵⁶ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 39-64, ll. 251-256.

⁵⁷ Reed, p. 28; David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1845-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 194.

⁵⁸ Eliot, l.427.

sexuality.⁵⁹ Utilising the aesthetic perspective of the *flâneur*, Sickert and Eliot can appear uncomfortably predatory when compared to Jean Rhys: less like Tiresias, and more like ‘the young man, carbuncular’, in their smash-and-grab ‘assault’ on the typist’s or the model’s bedsit.⁶⁰

The Early Novels of Jean Rhys: fallen women or *flâneuses*?

Rhys’ depictions of urban modernity share an environment and a palette with Sickert and Eliot. Her protagonists inhabit boarding houses and hotel rooms, where underclothes are piled on chairs and the surroundings are repeatedly dirty and shabby. Rhys herself had worked as an artist’s model and as a mannequin however, and in stark contrast to Eliot and Sickert she presents her chorus girls, ‘tarts’ and abandoned wives as thinking and speaking subjects. For these women, morality, sexuality and economy are inextricably bound in a complex relation, which is further complicated by love. Rhys’ protagonists’ use of slang and the vernacular conveys their full immersion in the struggles they face: they are not detached observers and can turn on those who are with fury and violence. However, Rhys’ use of irony and satire, as well as the sardonic, gallows humour with which her characters admit ‘the joke’s on me this time’ (*Mackenzie* 135), show them to be fully capable of intelligent critique. Their perspective, both immersed and critical acts as a challenge to earlier depictions of the fallen woman as well as contemporary anxieties about the ‘amateur’, both of which were frequently produced from a position of assumed moral authority, and which muted any observations of the women themselves. Rhys repeatedly undermines the hypocrisy on which such perspectives rest, but she still depicts her protagonists as fallen: unable to wrest themselves from the moral and economic weight of a society under which, if they are not totally passive, they are certainly constrained.

⁵⁹ Richard Walter Sickert, ‘The Study of Drawing’, *The New Age*, 16 June 1910, pp. 156-7, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/walter-richard-sickert-the-study-of-drawing-r1104303>> [accessed 26th April, 2015].

⁶⁰ Eliot, l. 231.

Given that Rhys' protagonists can be seen as a counterpoint to the modern, urban women found in Eliot's poetry and Sickert's paintings, the question arises whether her fiction channels the perspective of the single woman as *flâneuse*. The concept sits awkwardly with the notion of Rhys' single women as fallen and prompts a revision of the question quoted earlier from Rainey: can the modern single woman be both fallen and a *flâneuse*? The vexed concept of the *flâneuse* has generated criticism on several grounds, which I will elucidate briefly here and discuss in more detail in Chapter 4. Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock have argued that as a historically specific incarnation, the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, an urban walker of the leisured classes, could have no female equivalent.⁶¹ The Victorian ideology of separate spheres, the middle- and upper-class practices of chaperonage, and the attention a lone woman would have generated in the city, they argue, would have made it impossible for her to act as a detached observer. As I mentioned in my introduction to this thesis, this view has been challenged by historians and critics who have identified women's increasing interventions in the city as consumers, social workers and paid employees, from the mid-nineteenth century. If we avoid this debate however, and turn to the *flâneur* as a theoretical concept rather than a socio-historic type we run the risk of losing the specificity and rigour of the definition and thus making the term critically bankrupt. While acknowledging this, critics including Deborah Parsons have used the term to characterise twentieth-century women writers' interventions in the city. Parsons suggests that writers including Rhys, Woolf and Dorothy Richardson all 'wrote as *flâneuses* for whom the city was irresistible'.⁶² Staking a claim for these writers' visions of modernity, Parsons suggests that 'they created an urban consciousness modelled on alternative values to those of their male counterparts.'⁶³

⁶¹ Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2 (1985), 37-46; Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, femininity and the histories of art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 70 – 127.

⁶² Parsons, p. 223.

⁶³ Parsons, pp. 15-16.

Parson's definition invites several further questions. The first is whether it is enough for the individual-as-*flâneuse* merely to be present *in* the city (as an embodiment of urban consciousness) or whether the concept of *flânerie* entails a particular relation of the individual *to* the city (i.e. as authoritative observer). The second regards the extent to which Rhys' protagonists in particular offer 'an urban consciousness modelled on alternative values to those of their male counterparts.' In relation to these questions the women writers examined in this thesis differ, and their differences invite an interrogation of the concept of the *flâneuse*. In *Summer Will Show*, Sylvia Townsend Warner's Sophia Willoughby, who I will discuss later in detail, initially appears tailor-made for the role. Her final vision, underpinned by her conversion to communism, is authoritative, holistic and an alternative to the self-serving views espoused by her husband. Sophia's consciousness in fact differs little in type from that of the *flâneur*, although Warner is clear that it is the gendered inequality that she experiences that awakens her to the injustices of the class system. In Woolf's *The Years*, the spinster cousins Eleanor and Sara Pargiter offer an alternative perspective on the city from that of their male relatives, but here it is not just the content of their visions that are different, but also the means by which they are achieved and the ways in which they are configured. Their 'urban consciousness[es]' are positioned by Woolf as the antithesis of authoritarian or establishment thought processes which they actively disrupt. In this sense her *flâneuses* destabilise the authority of the *flâneur* but their visions, which embrace rather than deny heterogeneity, are coherent nevertheless.

Rhys' single women protagonists differ again. They show the extent to which love, hunger, need, vulnerability, poverty and alcohol, among other stimuli, can explode the perspective of a single individual into a kaleidoscope of conflicting thoughts and emotions. Moreover, in Rhys' semi-autobiographical fiction the practical obstacles to realising 'alternative values' in the city are apparent. Wendy Gan, writing about women's search for privacy in the city has suggested that 'the dynamics of urban relations made the city streets an ideal place to be mentally

alone and physically undisturbed'.⁶⁴ But Gan is writing predominantly about middle- and upper-middle class women for whom she suggests the male gaze is easy to deflect by strategies including non-responsiveness, and who bear little resemblance to Rhys' protagonists. In Rhys' texts, single women are repeatedly interrupted in their urban solitude by men who proposition them. Moreover, in their need for money and for company the aim of Rhys' protagonists, particularly on their night-time walks through the city, is to elicit the male gaze on which they are entirely dependent. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* in particular, Rhys also highlights the many ways in which women's consciousness of themselves is mediated by male values and perceptions which are disseminated through media including art and literature as well as the bureaucratic interventions of the state. For Rhys' protagonists 'alternative values to those of their male counterparts' take the form of occasional bursts of intemperate rage, which they are dependent on suppressing for their economic survival. It is in Rhys' construction of her texts that she poses the greatest challenge to authority, disrupting spatial and temporal continuities, and using juxtaposition and repetition, alongside the interior monologues of her marginalised protagonists to invite readers to re-evaluate any moral highground that they may be tempted to assume. Through her representations of the fractured self, Rhys effectively conveys the early twentieth-century 'urban consciousness', but her single women tend to oblivion rather than revelation. Complex and conflicting, her protagonists and her texts actively refute any sense of the coherent vision on which the concept of the *flâneur* is based. At the same time the differences of her protagonists from the *flâneuses* of Warner and Woolf threaten to stretch the concept beyond utility.

Voyage in the Dark

In *Voyage in the Dark*, eighteen-year-old Anna moves to England from the West Indies and finds work as a chorus girl. She tours with a dance troupe until she meets a wealthy gentleman who becomes her lover, pays her rent, and gives her

⁶⁴ Gan, p. 17.

money. When he leaves her she does not re-join the troupe, but enters into a series of affairs and one night stands and becomes pregnant. Her descent, signified by the increasingly unsatisfactory and brief nature of her relationships, and their increasing resemblance to professional prostitution, echoes earlier serial depictions of the fallen woman, including Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress*, in which naïve seduction leads inevitably to prostitution and then death. Rhys explicitly gestures towards this narrative trajectory, when Anna, regaining consciousness after a botched abortion, remarks 'I fell for a hell of a long time then' (158). Anna, however, ends the novel delirious, but alive and the attending Doctor pronounces that she will be 'Ready to start again in no time' (159). The sentiment is ambiguous and highlights a tension in Rhys' work between the modern and the traditional that led her into conflict with her publishers. What appears as a modern author's intervention into a Victorian, melodramatic narrative (i.e. the replacement of a fall punishable by death, with bleak and quotidian survival) was actually the consequence of editorial intervention. Rhys' initial manuscript ended with Anna's death, a conclusion that Rhys was 'most certain of', writing that 'I *know* the ending is the only possible ending.'⁶⁵ Anna's survival, then, was the result of Michael Sadleir requesting, against Rhys' wishes, that she 'give the girl a chance,' and Rhys' response was to take the idea of a fresh start and to render it meaningless through repetition.⁶⁶ The phrase 'starting all over again' (159) is repeated three times in the final paragraph of the novel, until it evokes stasis rather than progress, not a new start, but the endless repetition of an old way of life. The ending is thus not an attempt to swerve away from literary tradition, but an authorial attempt to move back towards it.

This insistence on a dark if not punitive ending, seems strange from the author of the short story 'Vienne', in which the unnamed narrator says 'God knows, if there's one hypocrisy I loathe more than another, it's the fiction of the "good" woman and

⁶⁵ Rhys, *Letters*, p. 25.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Marshik, p. 192.

the “bad” one.’⁶⁷ Marshik, who sees the novel as a response to social purity narratives, suggests that while Rhys offers resistance to the fallen woman’s downward trajectory in her use of irony, the resistance is limited, and the novel’s conclusion is evidence that ‘irony and satire are inadequate responses to the purity movement.’⁶⁸ Rhys’ resistance is not limited to her use of irony however, and Marshik’s reading does not take a full account of the complexity of the text. This is in many ways a novel *about* narratives, and while the fallen woman narrative is certainly identified as one reading of Anna’s story, Rhys critiques this in several ways: she destabilises its moral authority by identifying the social and economic power relations on which it is founded and she details Anna’s environment. Rhys also locates Anna’s ‘fall’ as part of a broader narrative. *Voyage in the Dark*, was originally called *Two Tunes*, and Rhys wrote in a letter that the ‘big idea’ was ‘[s]omething to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists – side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was – is.’⁶⁹ While Anna’s ‘present’ is the ‘downward career of [a] girl’, Rhys uses Anna’s memories of her past in the West Indies as a competing narrative that repeatedly disrupts the present, both spatially and temporally, and offers a vivid counterpoint to the experience and values of British society.⁷⁰ I will look at each of these areas of resistance to the fallen woman narrative in turn.

Anna’s position as a chorus girl in a travelling theatre show at the beginning of the novel is one example of the kind of liminal social positions inhabited by the ‘amateur’. The chorus girls of the early twentieth century were popularly considered to occupy a “middle ground” of open yet licit sexuality; they were not quite ‘respectable’, but neither were they prostitutes and like actresses and barmaids they were credited with a certain amount of ‘sexual ‘knowingness’.⁷¹ Although Rhys is writing about Britain before the First World War in *Voyage in the*

⁶⁷ Jean Rhys, ‘Vienne’ in *Tigers are Better Looking* (London: Penguin, 1972), pp.188-220 (p.194).

⁶⁸ Marshik, p.170.

⁶⁹ Rhys, *Letters*, pp. 24, 149.

⁷⁰ Rhys, *Letters*, p. 24.

⁷¹ Walkowitz, ‘Going Public’, p. 15.

Dark, chorus girls remained a subject of concern into the nineteen twenties. In 1923 the *Manchester Guardian* reported that contrary to regulations stipulating a living wage of two pounds and ten shillings per week, some chorus girls were earning only a pound, 'a wage which compelled them either to starvation or prostitution.'⁷² These concerns ran counter to many of the rags-to-riches, or shop-girl narratives that the chorus girls performed in, and which some of them transposed into real life, as eagerly reported by the press. Rhys herself joined a chorus at the age of eighteen, and toured with *Our Miss Gibbs*, a shop-girl comedy that had debuted at the Gaiety Theatre in January 1909 with Gertie Millar, an actress who married into the aristocracy, in the lead role.⁷³ In *Voyage in the Dark* Anna notes, 'Of course, some people do get on [...] She got on didn't she? "Chorus-Girl Marries Peer's Son"' (64). However, while Peter Bailey suggests that 'actresses and chorus girls in musical comedy seem to have enjoyed higher status and higher salaries than was general within their profession', the difference in experience, social standing and wealth of the actresses and chorus girls who 'made it' in London and those who toured the provinces was vast.⁷⁴ The famous Gaiety Girls, the chorus of the Gaiety Theatre in London, 'enjoyed something of a collective star status'; they were taught dress and deportment, went to fashionable restaurants and Ascot, and consequently, some secured highly advantageous marriages.⁷⁵ In contrast, Rhys' depictions of the chorus' tour in her fiction and non-fiction are characterised by the transience, homelessness and poverty that also mark her characters' existence in the *demimonde*: '[g]oing from room to room in this cold, dark country, England'.⁷⁶

⁷² 'Chorus Girls at £1 Per Week: Actor's Defence Association Wins Case', *Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), 13 September 1923, p. 3.

⁷³ Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1981), p.106. Gertie Millar married William Humble Ward the Second Earl of Dudley in 1924. Kurt Gänzl, 'Millar, Gertrude [Gertie] married names Gertrude Monckton; Gertrude Ward, countess of Dudley' (1879-1952). *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography*. Online ed. Ed Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP, <<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/35022>> [accessed January 2015].

⁷⁴ Peter Bailey, "'Naughty but Nice": musical comedy and the rhetoric of the girl, 1892-1914', in *The Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36-60, (p.38).

⁷⁵ Bailey, pp. 38-9.

⁷⁶ Rhys, *Smile Please*, pp. 111-2.

Rhys' touring chorus girls do not share the legitimacy conferred on the 'Gaiety Girls', and as such their narratives are closer to 'starvation and prostitution' than "'Chorus Girl marries Peer's son'". One landlady says to Anna and Maudie that she does not rent to 'professionals', a euphemism for prostitutes, which simultaneously identifies concern about the liminal respectability of women working in certain sectors of the economy. Since the landlady is concerned about women "'Getting [her] house a bad name'" (8), it is tacitly understood that it is prostitution that she is concerned about. While in *Smile Please*, Rhys disagreed with the conventional view of chorus girls, 'all exactly alike, all immoral, [...] all on the make', the actions of her characters in *Voyage in the Dark*, suggest initially collusion with, rather than a critique of, this prevalent view.⁷⁷ If they are not sexual 'professionals' as implied by Anna's landlady, they certainly fall under the broad remit of 'amateurs', considered above, and when they are not working, Maudie, Laurie and Anna all live off the money given to them by men. At the beginning of *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna is reading *Nana*, by Émile Zola, a novel about the rise and fall of a notorious prostitute whose actions and name, of which Anna's is an anagram, seem to act as prophecies of Anna's story. Rainey has noted that, like Madame Bovary, women in fiction are repeatedly 'cast as literalists who wrongly restage in real life behaviour derived from fiction, so precipitating their descent into the class of fallen women.'⁷⁸ However, Maudie's rebuff to the novel, 'I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another' (9), suggests that its inclusion is more complex. Not only does Rhys offer *Voyage in the Dark* as a counter-narrative to such 'lies', which gives her own 'tart' a voice, she also locates *Nana* as just one of many cultural narratives, whose simultaneous but conflicting existence disrupts the possibility of a single interpretation of Anna's position or her life. Rhys' use of other novels to ironically reflect on Anna's situation, rather than to merely describe it, should warn against any simple reading of her allusion to *Nana*. When Vincent praises the popular novel *The Rosary* (1909) by Florence Barclay later in the novel,

⁷⁷ Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 109.

⁷⁸ Rainey, p. 286.

Rhys both demonstrates his hypocrisy and the inferiority of his reading matter to Anna's.

Anna's position within a number of conflicting narratives is emphasised by Rhys as she reveals other characters' readings of Anna's situation. After Anna's first meeting with Walter she huddles next to the fire thinking, 'Winter's coming' (14); a hard time in England for a girl from the West Indies, but more particularly for a chorus girl whose winter break means no pay. Anna's options are to save up for lodgings or to stay at the 'Cat's home' in Maple Street, and she finds the latter option less appealing 'because they make you come down to prayers each morning before breakfast' (18). This description highlights that what is primarily an economic problem (the lack of a sustainable wage, which leads to 'starvation or prostitution') is treated by society as a moral issue: that is, concern about chorus girls potentially prostituting themselves trumps any concern about their potential starvation. In more ways than one, in social responses to Anna's situation, prayers come *before* breakfast. What Anna does instead is to take up with Walter, who pays for her lodging in a good boarding house, but Rhys complicates this by refusing to reduce the relationship to either an economic or a moral reading. Walter might discreetly leave Anna with a number of five pound notes after each of their encounters, saving her from the poverty that her social position entails, but for Anna this is a romance. Anna's 'fall', from 'good' chorus girl to 'bad' kept woman, occurs simultaneously with her 'falling' in love. After all, Anna's narrative *is* the shop-girl-meets-Lord narrative of *Our Miss Gibbs* or the 'Chorus-Girl-Marries-Peer's-Son' story of Gertie Millar, right up until the point at which Walter leaves and this ending is not something that Anna is able to influence. What Anna sees as a Cinderella narrative however, her landlady views as a moral fall. Anna notes after her first date with Walter that 'It was early when I got back, not twelve o'clock' (22). But the time is later than she thinks, the magic hour is well past, and the spell broken. The clock has stopped and Anna's landlady threatens her with eviction for coming home past three. The broken clock suggests that it is Anna's reading of the situation, not her landlady's, that is an illusion, but Rhys offers a third reading.

While Anna and her landlady see her narrative as meaningful, either as a romance or a fall, for the men she meets Anna is nothing but a brief encounter, interchangeable with any of her chorus-line colleagues, a fact that is proved later in the novel when Joe takes both Laurie and Anna to his hotel room, and Carl moves from one to the other.

By juxtaposing multiple readings of Anna's narrative Rhys resists any definitive reading of Anna's story as a moral fall. Nevertheless, Rhys uses cultural and popular allusions to suggest the continued weight that this narrative has even as she subjects it to critique. Rhys' descriptions of the boarding houses in which Anna lives are key to this critique. Like the drawing room of Augustus Egg's *Past and Present*, Anna's rooms are decorated with prints that can be read as a commentary on Anna's situation. In Egg's drawing room paintings entitled 'The Fall' and 'Abandonment', set above portraits of the wife and husband respectively, parallel their positions. In Anna's boarding house rooms, a moral reading of her social shift from chorus girl to kept woman to 'tart' as a 'fall' is reflected in the prints with which she is surrounded. In one of her first boarding houses the prints on the wall include *Cherry Ripe* (1880), Millais' romanticised vision of childhood: a young girl in a white dress, with a pink sash that matches her shoes, hat bow and cheeks. In contrast to this, the prints that decorate more than one of Anna's rooms after the disintegration of her first affair are *The Cries of London*: depictions of street hawkers peddling their wares. This shift from the 'sweet presentment of English childhood' to 'the reality of lives of the dispossessed and outcast poor who sought a living on the streets' suggests a commentary on Anna's own narrative trajectory.⁷⁹ However, Rhys resists any moral reading of this 'fall' by challenging the link between beauty and goodness, suggested by *Cherry Ripe*; by highlighting the commercial value of such properties; and by emphasising the disjunction between a traditional idea of childhood and a modern context.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Laurel Bradley, 'From Eden to Empire: John Everett Millais's "Cherry Ripe"', *Victorian Studies*, 34 (1991), 179-203 (pp.179-182); The Gentle Author, 'The Cries of London' <www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-cries-of-london> [accessed 20th November, 2014].

Rhys' use of *Cherry Ripe* is, in the first place, also heavy with irony. Anna, who has left home prior to the beginning of the novel, has already embarked on her first love affair and lost any innocence that the picture might be considered to reflect. In fact, her lover is paying for the boarding house in which it is hung. Moreover, in Anna's case, the painting's conflation of beauty with goodness is inverted. While relative poverty and illness have been the consequences of Anna's chorus girl tour, her affair and the money it gives her, result in her 'looking astonishingly well' (51), to the extent that her health is read as a clue not to her goodness, but to her immorality by her stepmother. Having been previously shocked by Anna's ill health, Hester is now appalled by her fitness, and uses it as an excuse to wash her hands of her. Here Rhys inverts the Victorian literary trope that shows immorality physically marked onto the features of wrongdoers.⁸⁰ While she is with Walter, Anna prospers, eats well and buys nice clothes. While Rhys acknowledges in her description of Laurie, and particularly in Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the effect that age, lifestyle, sadness and alcohol can have on appearance, morality is removed from the equation. In *Voyage in the Dark* it is clear that it is a lack of money, not morality, which can leave one looking ill and ravaged.

Rhys' use of *Cherry Ripe* alongside other popular images also suggests a darker collusion between moral and economic discourse. Anna is in her late teens and is repeatedly referred to by her first lover as a 'child'. Moreover, both Laurie and Ethel identify her youth as a marketable property in their roles as procuress. Laurie notes "you'll go well with Carl because you look awfully young and he likes girls that look young" (100). Even in 1880 *Cherry Ripe* had been used as a marketing tool, and was specifically commissioned for the Christmas Annual of the *Graphic*, of which it helped to sell over half a million copies.⁸¹ Rhys emphasises this link between youth, goodness and saleability by interpolating into Anna's interview with Hester, in

⁸⁰ There are numerous examples of this in diverse texts including: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847); Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (1852); Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897); Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

⁸¹ Bradley, p. 179

which Hester refutes Anna's way of life, a newspaper advertisement for cocoa. 'What is Purity?' it asks, and answers 'For Thirty Five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa' (51); in other words, purity is a commodity. The modern world, Rhys suggests, literally consumes innocence and purity: it is variously devalued as a marketing tool, bought, and destroyed.⁸² The benchmark of innocence and goodness that prints including *Cherry Ripe* might be thought to convey is not a moral message but a marketable product in a modernity where youth is repeatedly sexualised and commodified.

However, Rhys does concede the social weight of the fall narrative even as she strips it of moral authority. Even while Anna dismisses the moral language used by her stepmother to judge her, she recognises that her actions do have practical consequences. 'I am bad, not good any longer, bad. That has no meaning, absolutely none. Just words. But something about the darkness of the streets has a meaning' (49). If youth and innocence are prized commodities then their consumption necessarily engenders their devaluation. Age, if not immorality, is punished economically and Rhys repeatedly indicates the brevity of the shelf-life of the kept woman. Maudie worries about the lines under her eyes, and Laurie, wiser in the amount she banks, is a grotesque approximation of youth seen close up: 'the powder, trying to fill up the lines' and her lipstick combining to give her a 'clown's face' (106). Ethel screams to Anna that "'It'll happen to you too'" (125). Through these older women Rhys acknowledges the inevitable descent of the fallen woman from respectability to the street in earlier literature, but she overwrites this trajectory as an economic rather than a moral fall, consequent on an inverse relation of age to value.

⁸² Although Rhys identifies this as a feature of the modern world it is important to note that it is not exclusive to the post-Victorian age. Just five years after the publication of *Cherry Ripe*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran an exposé of child prostitution the entitled 'The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon'. In this context the painting title reads uncomfortably like a reference to the sexual availability of a very young girl, rather than as a description of the basket of cherries beside her. For a full discussion on the 'Maiden Tribute' articles and their ramifications see Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 81-134.

Rhys conveys the liminality of Anna's social position through her physical surroundings. The "'middle ground" of open yet licit sexuality' is physically realised here.⁸³ Located somewhere between the family home of the wife and the street of the prostitute, Rhys' protagonists occupy rooms that are neither fully public nor fully private. The private hotel dining room where Walter first takes Anna to dinner has a bedroom attached, suggesting a sexual rather than a romantic reason for their meeting, and a relationship that has more in common with public rather than private encounters. This public/private hybridity is evident also in the flat that Anna shares with Ethel, which appears, despite Ethel's denials, to be a brothel. Ethel's clients are all men, and she acknowledges that her massage and manicure services are those used by others as a smokescreen for prostitution: 'That Madame Fernande, for instance – well, the things I've heard about her and the girls she's got at her place' (119). Public clients walk in and out of Ethel's flat, and lying in her room Anna is reminded of the rooms she used to stay in on tour, when 'through the window the feeling of a small street would come in' (128). While *The Cries of London*, act as an ironic counterpoint to Ethel's façade of chintz and her talk 'about how respectable she was' (114), they also suggest an uncomfortable proximity to the streets that is literal.

Helen Carr has suggested that "'homelessness" is the terrain of Jean Rhys' fiction.'⁸⁴ There is no family home in England in *Voyage*; rather, home when it is mentioned is both in the West Indies and the past. This sense of homelessness invites some interesting questions in relation to the fallen woman narrative. In the Victorian fallen woman paintings that I considered earlier, the home, and more specifically the idea that the woman must leave the home, was central to the identification of her as fallen. In Augustus Egg's *Past and Present*, the open door through which the wife must leave is at the centre of the middle painting, reflected in a mirror, around which her home is represented in minute detail. In Richard Redgrave's *The Outcast*, the family home takes up the majority of the picture, while an elderly gentleman

⁸³ Walkowitz, 'Going Public', p. 15.

⁸⁴ Carr, p. xvi.

who acts as a barrier between the fallen woman and the rest of the house, points her to an open door. Even in Walker's *The Lost Path*, the idea of a home from which the woman has been banished, or lost to, is central to the painting's meaning. The fallen woman must leave to protect the sanctity of the home. In *Voyage in the Dark*, a similar scene is enacted. Anna's landlady asks her to leave her house because of her alleged sexual immorality, explaining 'I don't want no tarts in my house' (26). What appears to be a re-enactment of an earlier literary and artistic trope however, is destabilised by Rhys in several ways. This is not the middle-class home as depicted by Egg, but a single room in Judd Street, and the morality of the 'house', is rendered questionable both by its association with physical dirt, and by its proprietor's moral relativism. The Landlady who ejects Anna washes the front steps of her establishment with 'a pail of filthy water' (24). 'This is England', thinks Anna, 'and I'm in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the bed' (28). Anna's landlady postpones her eviction after a word, and presumably a bribe, from Walter, and Rhys conveys this unstable relationship between gender, power, money and morality through the changing spatial dimensions of the room itself. Lying in her room after an unsuccessful first meeting with Walter, and having been told to move out by her landlady Anna recalls a story called 'The Iron Shroud'. The story is 'about the walls of a room getting smaller and smaller until they crush you to death' (26), a narrative that Anna transposes onto her own room, 'I believe this damned room's getting smaller and smaller,' I thought' (26). When Walter arrives however, Anna's perception of the room changes entirely, like Alice's in Wonderland. Not only does Walter pay off Anna's landlady he also arranges to see Anna the following week and simultaneously: 'The room looked different, as if it had got bigger' (29). In a single, spatial image, Rhys here equates the female position with constraint, claustrophobia, poverty, and impotence, while she relates the male position to freedom, wealth and power. She undermines the idea of moral absolutes and replaces the dichotomy of the good woman and the bad woman on which the fallen woman narrative is dependent, with a gendered division of power between men and women.

Rhys does provide a home of sorts for Anna in the West Indies of her childhood. Rhys' vivid descriptions of the West Indies frame the text, which begins with Anna's sense of culture shock as she moves to England and ends with her hallucinating the West Indies in the delirium caused by her botched abortion. The West Indies is represented as the antithesis to England: 'the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey' (7), with England a colourless, tasteless limbo, where succulent mangoes are replaced by tinned pears. The difference between the two places is such that Anna is unable to simultaneously believe in both: 'Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together' (7-8).

Rhys suggests that if the West Indies is home for Anna, then living in England is a type of exile, and in doing so she reorders the fallen woman narrative, placing the exile of her protagonist before her sexual 'fall'. The distance between the two countries is more than spatial, it is cultural, but for Anna who comes to England as a teenager, it is also representative of the rift between childhood and a particular construction not just of adulthood, but more particularly of womanhood. Rhys does not simplistically suggest that the West Indies is an Edenic paradise; rather, she distinguishes between the experiences of its African-Caribbean and white Creole inhabitants, placing the child Anna between the two. Anna wishes she is black, but finds herself viewed with understandable antipathy by her family's black servant, Francine, and also her family itself. Rhys is careful to distinguish between the living conditions of both, describing Francine's smoky kitchen where she works and sleeps, and the living room of Anna's family, decorated with roses and editions of Walter Scott. The point at which Rhys shows Anna to be inextricably bound to specifically English values is at the point of her first menstruation. Francine describes Anna's period as a natural part of life: 'so that it seemed quite all right and I thought it was all in the day's work like eating and drinking' (59). In contrast, after a talk with her English stepmother Anna 'began to feel awfully miserable, as if everything were shutting up around me and I couldn't breathe' (59), the same

feeling of claustrophobia that Rhys later associates with Anna's powerlessness over her environment. Although Anna finds more sympathy with Francine than with Hester, it is Hester's view that is dominant: 'She said [...] it would be a very good thing for me if I were to go to England' (59). Anna's first period then, serves to link Anna's entrance into womanhood with an ideological move away from West Indian culture, and her physical move to Britain. This exile from home is the mark of the fallen woman, but here Rhys suggests that Anna's 'fall' has nothing to do with Anna's actions, sexual or otherwise. Rather it is the condition of women in English society, where subject to an unequally gendered and deterministic narrative they are not only bound to fall, but are considered fallen from the outset. Women here are creatures 'whose nature it is to fall.'⁸⁵ Rhys resists this narrative throughout her text by puncturing Anna's present with her memories of the West Indies. These memories act as a counterpoint to Anna's position as an impoverished, sexually exploited, exile in England. Spatially distinct, but temporally present through Anna's mind's eye, the West Indies suggest the possibility of an 'other' perspective. The interpolation of this perspective can be troubling however. In one scene, Anna repeatedly recalls the name of a slave that she has read during her time in the West Indies, while at dinner and then in bed with Walter in England. Mailotte Boyd is a girl the same age as Anna, and their similarity in this respect invites comparison. While their juxtaposition may only be suggestive of Anna's inability to articulate her relationship with Walter in terms other than slavery, it jars as an overtly simplistic and troubling equation, particularly given Anna's background, as well as her rejoinder that 'I like it like this' (48). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to enter into the debate on Rhys as a postcolonial author, her use of the West Indies of her childhood as a position from which to explode an English cultural hegemony, is a strategy that clearly calls for a vigorous critique. ⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Auerbach, p. 155.

⁸⁶ See for example, Delia Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Quartet

Rhys' first novel, *Quartet*, was published six years before *Voyage in the Dark*, but following the life-story order of Rhys' 'composite heroine' the latter novel can be read as its prequel. *Quartet* features a protagonist a few years older than Anna, and one with a similar background: an impoverished young woman with a sexual history who has 'painfully learnt a certain amount of caution' (16). Marya, like Anna, has a background in touring shows. She too has experienced '[a] vague procession of towns all exactly alike, a vague procession of men also exactly alike' (15), but she has married. This marriage suggests that in the modern novel the curse of the Victorian fallen woman narrative has been broken, or at the very least that in Paris, where the novel is set, the ineluctable consequences of death or exile do not apply. However, Marya's trajectory bears similarities to Anna's in Rhys' construction of it as a descent. Shortly after the beginning of the novel, Marya's husband Stephan is arrested and imprisoned, and Marya is taken in by the Heidlereys, an influential couple at the centre of the Anglo-Saxon ex-pat set. This arrangement is complicated almost immediately when Marya's relationship with Heidler evolves into an affair, and the novel ends in crisis. Marya's relationships, like Anna's, become increasingly less stable and end with an anonymous sexual encounter. Finally, abandoned by both her husband and Heidler, she ends the novel prone on the floor of a deserted apartment, unconscious or dead, both literally and metaphorically 'fallen'. Again, what begins as a modern novel bears similarities to a Victorian moral tale, with the final scene resembling, in the relative positions of husband and wife, Egg's *Past and Present*. However, as in *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys offers a more complex reading of these respective roles and resists the apparent familiarity of Marya's narrative trajectory by avoiding a moral reading of her 'fall'.

The similarity of Anna and Marya's descents invites a comparison between women of different marital status, separated by almost two decades. Michael Sadleir's injunction to 'give [Anna] a chance' is indicative of the decreasingly punitive

response to the 'amateur' by the thirties, but Marya's situation highlights the continued existence of the double standard. While Marya is punished for her infidelity, Heidler's adultery is taken for granted. This is particularly interesting in *Quartet*, because here Rhys is describing not Edwardian England, as in *Voyage*, but the allegedly bohemian, literary and artistic Anglo-Saxon set in Paris in the nineteen twenties: 'The Beautiful Young Men, the Dazzlers, The Middle Westerners, the Down-and-Outs, the Freaks who never would do anything, the Freaks who just possibly might' (48). Among these urbane sophisticates, Heidler suggests to Marya, an affair is nothing to worry about: 'You will persist in judging us by the standards of the awful life you've lived. Can't you understand that you are in a different world now? [...] You won't be let down' (70). This 'different world', Rhys suggests, is actually much closer to the world of the establishment than Marya is accustomed to. It is much more English and this proves more dangerous than life on the verge of the *demimonde*. Rhys conveys the differences between these worlds in her depiction of two very different marriages: that of Marya and her Polish husband Stephan Zelli and that of the English Heidlers. While marriage for the Zellis is depicted as largely indistinguishable from singleness, in her portrait of the Heidlers Rhys uses marriage as a key means to critique hypocrisy and respectability.

Rhys explicitly compares Marya's experience of singleness and marriage through repeated phrases used to describe both, and by deploying a sense of spatial continuity suggestive of similarity rather than difference. Marya's past as a chorus girl has left her used to 'a lack of solidity and of fixed backgrounds' (14), and this remains unchanged in her marriage which does not confer upon Marya either emotional or economic security but is similarly marked by seasonal impoverishment and a sense of transience:

there were moments when she realized that her existence, though delightful, was haphazard. It lacked, as it were the necessary fixed background. A bedroom, balcony and *cabinette de toilette* in a cheap Montmartre hotel cannot possibly be called a solid background. (10)

Marya and her marriage are described in similar terms; while she is 'reckless, lazy, a vagabond by nature' (14), her marriage is characterised by 'vagabond nights [...]

fresh mornings [...] long sleepy afternoons' (48). Vagabond is a carefully chosen word here, as is haphazard: they romanticise a nomadic and impoverished existence; they are anti-establishment and suggest living on just the wrong side of the law, but resist an outright association with organised criminality. Attention to Rhys' choice of words here reveals how she uses the same environments to different ends in *Quartet* and in *Voyage*. Anna's transience and proximity to the streets in *Voyage* are indicative of a socially marginal position in which she is economically and sexually vulnerable to exploitation. In *Quartet*, Marya's similar position is used by Rhys to also suggest a more positive freedom from bourgeois constraints: a life 'between two extremes, avoiding the soul-destroying middle' (20). Marya's ambiguous marital status is emphasised when Stephan is removed to prison and spends the majority of the text away from Marya, but doubts about the marriage are voiced prior to this when Miss de Solla wonders 'Is she really married to the Zelli man' (8)? Without the traditional signifiers of home or family the Zelli's marriage is hard to quantify, but this ambiguity is not wholly construed as negative. Rather, the Zellis' life is positioned as the authentic bohemian antithesis to the pseudo-bohemian set, epitomised by the Heidlrs. Rhys emphasises this dichotomy through her location of both couples in the different physical and social spaces of Paris.

The Zellis' bohemian credentials are conveyed through their poverty and their proximity to Montmartre and the Moulin Rouge, social and geographical coordinates which combine to offer an alternative perspective to that of official or establishment Paris, and more specifically, to England. Marya in particular is associated with the streets: she can 'walk for hours' through Paris, and gets a 'melancholy pleasure [...] walking along the shadowed side of one of those narrow streets full of shabby *perfumeries*, second-hand book-stalls, cheap hat shops' (9). Rhys associates these 'dingy streets' with the *demimonde* and as Marya walks through them she sees men made up as women, and 'bars haunted by gaily dressed little prostitutes' (129). Shari Benstock has written about Rhys' own time in Paris less romantically, describing as 'mean and uninteresting' the thirteenth

arrondissement in which she lived apart from English and American ex-pats, in 'a part of the Left Bank unknown to other of its residents.'⁸⁷ Identified as a 'striking act of Anglo-American imperialism' by Helen Carr, Benstock here appears to equate 'residents' not with locals but with the ex-pat set, and it is specifically this kind of territorialising that Rhys writes against in *Quartet*.⁸⁸ However, it should be noted Rhys chooses a locality of Paris within sight of famous landmarks associated with alternative art movements in order to do so. Nevertheless, through Marya's negotiation of Paris' back streets, Rhys identifies her with the real Paris, in contrast to the Paris inhabited by the Anglo-Saxon ex-patriates. What is therefore an essentially geographical distinction is used by Rhys to denote a distinction between authenticity and spectacle, which in turn is used to critique the hypocrisy of conservative modes of behaviour. Marya's wanderings place her in contradistinction to the Heidlars, but also as more free-spirited than her husband, who 'objected with violence to these wanderings in sordid streets' (9). Even within less traditional couples, Rhys suggests, the balance of power is not equal.

Rhys positions the Heidlars, the second half of the *Quartet* of the title, in both social and physical contrast to the Zellis. If Marya and Stephan lack solidity, then the Heidlars are 'fresh, sturdy people' (11), 'well-fed' people (14). 'Mr Heidler, indeed, was so very sturdy [...] He looked as if nothing could break him down' (11). Despite his reputation as a patron of the arts, Rhys depicts Heidler as a typical member of the English establishment, conservative, and hypocritical: he wears a bowler hat, and absurdly reminds Marya of a picture of Queen Victoria, a resemblance that feminises as well as formalises him. In contrast to the 'vagabond nights' (48), of Marya's life with Stephan, her life with the Heidlars is ordered and domestic, and Heidler himself patriarchal. Rhys undermines his artistic credentials by attention to bourgeois detail: Heidler's dressing-gown and his paper, his morning routine and their daily lunch at Lefranc's - a restaurant with the 'decent restraint' (32) Rhys identifies as favoured by the English abroad. Paris indeed, for

⁸⁷ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 449.

⁸⁸ Carr, p. 13.

Heidler is shown to be little more than England transplanted. It is for him as Rhys suggested it was for many of her literary contemporaries:

The 'Paris' all these people write about, Henry Miller, even Hemingway etc was not 'Paris' at all – it was 'America in Paris' or 'England in Paris'. The real Paris had nothing to do with that lot – As soon as the tourists came the *real* Montparnos packed up and left.⁸⁹

Paris functions in *Quartet* in a similar way to the West Indies in *Voyage*. It disrupts the cultural hegemony of the English, which Marya finds herself pitted against, and resists their colonising strategies; it offers Rhys an alternate ideological space from which to write about the English. The Heidlers and their set are not the '*real* Montparnos,' rather their coterie is made up of 'Anglo-Saxon inhabitants', who are 'spiteful and attractive and talented, and could be little English gentlemen when they liked' (49). While Marya is associated with the streets of the 'real' Paris and truth, the Heidlers are confined by their Englishness to spectacle rather than authentic experience. They are not 'vagabonds', and Marya dismisses their parties, complete with door police and dress codes as 'a family ball' (55). In contrast, through her intimate grounding in Paris, she knows that 'if you want something *louche* you walk further on and turn twice to the left' (55). In the Paris of *Quartet*, Marya's association with the streets suggests not a sense of having fallen, but rather, a sense of belonging, and her wanderings are evidence of a limited but perceptible autonomy. Again, this is in contrast to Rhys' use of the streets in both *Voyage* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, where Rhys' protagonists' placement on the (largely English) streets denotes their position as social as well as literal outsiders.

The Heidlers' marriage is differently constructed to the Zellis' marriage: Rhys uses it to further emphasise their 'sturdiness' and position within the establishment, just as she uses the ambiguous marriage of the Zellis to convey their unconventionality. Rhys' use of marriage here is illuminated if we consider the autobiographical details on which *Quartet* was loosely based: Rhys' affair with Ford, while she was married to the imprisoned Jean Lenglet, and the brief time she spent living with Ford and

⁸⁹ Rhys, *Letters*, p. 280.

his partner Stella Bowen. Ford and Bowen were not married, although they spent ten years living together and had a child. Rhys' decision to make their fictional alter-egos married works to diminish their bohemian credibility and enhances the established nature of their social position, in comparison to the marginal position shared by Marya and Stephan. By conflating them as a couple she also eradicates any sympathy for Lois either as a wife, or as a woman with a less secure social standing than her husband, a fact that Bowen complained about in her autobiography: 'Life with Ford had always felt pretty insecure [...] Yet here I was cast for the role of the fortunate wife who held all the cards.'⁹⁰ In Rhys' description, the Heidlers merge into one another. Seated next to each other in a railway carriage, Lois and Heidler are 'so obviously husband and wife, so suited to each other' (76) that they are 'like the same chord repeated in a lower key' (76). This identification with each other also works to taint the 'good' wife Lois, by associating her with her philandering husband. It underlines Lois' position as Heidler's procuress (who facilitates his affair with Marya, and turns a blind eye when it occurs) rather than his victim. Conversely this pairing renders Marya's designation as 'bad' questionable.

At the same time, Rhys manages to convey that the Heidlers' marriage is a sham: as based on spectacle as their position in the avant-garde. Marya might transgress the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour in her affair with Heidler, but Rhys depicts her as honest in her open confessions to Lois and to Stephan, and her initial desire to get away. In contrast, Heidler, who repeatedly berates Marya for not 'playing the game' (50, 70, 83), is conveyed as a hypocrite. The game, for Heidler, is to have an affair without it being known, and thus without any consequences to his social standing or his wife's. He repeats the formula 'we must keep up appearances, we must play the game', in various guises until it becomes absurd, and Heidler himself begins to resemble a monomaniac games master urging on an establishment side. This is a game that Marya 'can't play' and doesn't 'know how to play' (70), not only because, as Rhys described herself in a letter, 'as a well trained social animal

⁹⁰ Quoted in Angier, p. 143.

[she's] certainly not the goods', but because to use Stella Bowen's phrase, Heidler 'h[olds] all the cards.'⁹¹ Established and economically secure, Heidler has the power not only to send Marya where he will (to send her to Nice and refuse to give her money for her return, to set her up as a *petite femme* in a dingy hotel) but also to arbitrarily denote 'good' or 'bad' according to his whim. In a drugged and drunken stupor, Marya imagines Heidler saying 'God's a pal of mine [...] I'm in his image, or He's in mine. It's all one' and serving judgement on his wife and his lover: 'Lois is a good woman and you are a bad one; it's quite simple. [...] Nobody owes a fair deal to a prostitute' (125).

Rhys' use of the word 'prostitute' here, rather than 'mistress', highlights the complexity of Marya's situation. Marya is economically dependent on Heidler, but by emphasising Marya's love for him, Rhys demonstrates that her protagonist's actions are not economically motivated. Marya, like Anna, 'falls' because she falls in love, and the term describes her emotional dependency as much as it does her steadily decreasing social status. When Heidler removes her from the studio to a hotel she feels 'as if I'd fallen down a precipice' (88), and later, when he treats her callously by showing her letter to Lois she feels 'She was going to fall. She was falling' (126). What Rhys suggests here is that Marya's 'fallen' status in both senses of the term is a consequence of Heidler's emotional withdrawal, and not of any 'immoral' actions on the part of Marya. Here, as in *Voyage in the Dark* the judgements 'good' and 'bad' are shown to have no real moral meaning. They are imposed on Marya by Heidler, whose philandering undermines his moral position, and by Stephan, a criminal, who is juxtaposed with Heidler despite their differences when he also dismisses Marya, his own wife, as a prostitute. "*Encore une grue*" (143) he thinks, as he leaves her and picks up another woman at the end of the novel. The suggestion is that all men, including the poor and the flawed, assume the power to morally label women, but that their labels have no moral weight.

⁹¹ Rhys, *Letters*, p. 30.

Marya ends *Quartet* lying on the floor in the traditional pose of the fallen woman but the signifiers that make sense of this position in *Past and Present* are entirely missing. Marya is not in a drawing room or surrounded by the trappings of a middle class existence; instead she is in the anonymous and deserted apartment of an acquaintance, and the man who assumes moral authority over her has just been released from prison. Rhys has literally stripped back the scene to its bare boards. The difference between the end of Rhys' novel and Victorian depictions of the fallen woman as physically prone is that while they look similar in their portrayal of gender relations, Rhys resists the idea of moral centre in her work. In *Quartet* as in *Voyage*, there are no consistent markers of morality, or even entirely trustworthy individuals against whom 'good' and 'bad' can be measured. Even Marya's 'truths' ebb and flow with her passions. As she notes at the beginning of the novel, 'Everybody pretends' (9).

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie

V.S. Naipaul called *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* 'the most brutal' of Rhys' novels.⁹² While it follows the same narrative shape as *Voyage in the Dark* and *Quartet*, it is entirely stripped of what little hope or personal recognition that these novels have to offer. *Mackenzie* follows Julia, a woman who has been 'principally living off the money given to her by various men' (20), on a visit from Paris to England after her eponymous former lover ends her weekly stipend. With no affair to speak of, Julia's 'fall' in this novel has nothing to do with falling in love. Rather, it is entirely determined by her increasing impoverishment as her few remaining acquaintances and family members sever their relationships with her. *Mackenzie*, Naipaul noted 'doesn't dissect a passion. It examines solitude and the void'.⁹³ In this novel, as in both of the others, Rhys' protagonist expresses the wish to walk straight ahead. In *Voyage*, Anna 'walk[s] straight ahead' after she has been left by Walter, thinking 'Anywhere will do, so long as it's somewhere that nobody knows' (*Voyage*, 86). In

⁹² V.S. Naipaul, 'Without a Dog's Chance: After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie', in Frickey, pp. 54-58 (p. 56).

⁹³ Naipaul, p. 56.

Quartet, Marya 'walk[s] straight ahead' after Heidler tries to pension her off to the South, looking for 'the friendly dark where she could let her heart burst' (*Quartet* 117). In *Mackenzie*, Julia 'only want[s] to walk straight ahead' (135), but as in both of the other novels she finds herself back where she began, only in a less advantageous position, determined by social and economic forces beyond her control. Anna finds herself with an allowance from Walter, but no romantic attachment; Marya is reunited with her husband, only for him to assault her and dismiss her as a prostitute. Julia, having torn up Mackenzie's severance cheque of fifteen hundred francs in a gesture of defiance at the beginning of the novel is reduced to begging him for one hundred francs at the end. 'La vie' as Julia reads on a painting, 'est un spiral' (*Mackenzie* 13). What occurs over a period of years in *Voyage* however, and over nine months in *Quartet*, is reduced to just ten days in *Mackenzie*. Each journey or meeting in this novel is in the first place a return, but Rhys emphasises the speed and finality of Julia's more tightly spiralling descent by repeating each meeting within the novel itself. By accompanying this with a description of Julia's rapid physical disintegration, Rhys implicitly suggests that the cause for this rapid descent is Julia's age. At just thirty-six, Julia is finished. By the end of the novel Julia knows that she has 'gone too far' and the reader is aware that 'the final stage of her descent in the social scale' (21) has been reached. The brutal nature of Julia's situation is conveyed in the novel both through the speed of Julia's descent and through its fractured narrative, which repeatedly counters Julia's perspective.

Like *Quartet*, *Mackenzie* is written in the third person, but the narrative is both imbricated with Julia's mind, and repeatedly broken up by forays into the thoughts of people who surround her. Rhys juxtaposes Julia's own, frequently delusional, thoughts with the perceptions of the men she solicits for money, and the views of her 'good' sister Norah. It is a book filled with the unexplained sidelong glances of strangers that prompt the reader to a critique of Julia's person and her actions, but do not diminish the increasing sense of desperation in the text. The effect is to weave doubt into the fabric of the book, so that the reader, who inevitably sides with Julia at the beginning of the novel, repeatedly finds herself questioning Julia's

version of events. It is as if Rhys, who Ford claimed had 'a terrific – an almost lurid! – passion for stating the case of the underdog' remains unconvinced of the willingness of her public to do the same, and continually tests their commitment.⁹⁴ Julia has been married, but this relationship is so obscured by time and successive affairs that the veracity of both her marriage and her separation are thrown into doubt. Mackenzie, unable to gather whether Julia has divorced, or been divorced by her husband concludes 'perhaps she had never been married at all' (19-20), and Uncle Griffiths rubbishes Julia's account of leaving her husband with 'I never heard such nonsense in my life' (60). Neither Griffiths nor Mr James – an ex-lover who Julia visits in London – can believe that she does not know where her husband is. Their insistence on discussing Julia's husband in the present, suggests that it is in part Julia's ambiguous marital status (neither spinster, wife, nor widow) that these men find difficult to believe, but also that it is her singleness that renders what she says unbelievable. Although the narrative is set in the late twenties, the incredulity of Julia's male interlocutors suggests the survival of the Victorian legal attitude towards 'fallen' women. One Victorian head of CID summarised the validity of evidence taken from even assaulted women thus: 'who would believe her? A woman who has lost her chastity is always a discredited witness.'⁹⁵ Not only does Julia's separation strain credibility in their eyes, and thus cast doubt on the validity of her narrative as a whole, but as a lone individual she has no-one to corroborate the details of her past. In another scene Julia recalls telling her life-story to a woman, Ruth, who 'didn't believe a word' (40), and Rhys uses this anecdote, which Julia tells to Horsfield, to show that disbelief is cumulative. Mr Horsfield too does not believe her. He is 'irritated by her vagueness' (38), because 'your life is your life, and you must be pretty definite about it. Or if it's a story you are making up, you ought at least to have it pat' (39). At the same time, the reader, surrounded by mounting evidence that Julia is, at the very least, an unreliable narrator of her own past, is drawn by Rhys into collusion with this disbelieving audience.

⁹⁴ Ford Madox Ford, 'Preface to the Left Bank', in Rhys, *Tigers are Better Looking*, pp. 137-139 (p. 138).

⁹⁵ Quoted in Watt, p. 8.

Genevieve Abravanel sees in this inability of Julia to tell her own story and to have it believed a prefiguration of the modern philosophical dilemmas addressed by the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre.⁹⁶ Julia's existential crisis however, is not shared by anyone else in the novel, except her sister Norah: it is not therefore a broadly modern problem, but is, as Abravanel does note, a clearly gendered one. Like *Voyage in the Dark*, *Mackenzie* is a novel concerned with narratives, and other characters seem both secure in their social roles and happy to provide a narrative to explain Julia's. Mr Mackenzie does not understand why she treats her story like a tragedy when he reads it as one 'consecrated as comical by ten thousand farces and a thousand comedies' (24). Mr Horsfield, similarly, finds himself unable to practically realise her situation, and so characterises it as 'fantastic as a fairy tale' (124). At the same time as these men narrativise but fail to understand Julia's story, Julia finds herself unable to articulate any sense of self through official narratives. Looking for her marriage-book, her passport and papers regarding her baby who died, Julia finds 'it had all gone, as if it had never been. And I was there, like a ghost' (41). Julia's lack of official documentation paradoxically identifies her as an individual outside 'organized society, in which she had no place and against which she had not a dog's chance' (17), but more than this it suggests the impossibility of such documentation to describe her position in the first place. Julia has been married, but her experience of marriage in the novel is indistinguishable from singleness. Julia briefly has been a mother, but her baby has died. Her nationality, which would be linked to her husband's if she was married, is similarly uncertain. Like Woolf, who described the movable feast of women's nationality in *Three Guineas* through their position as 'step-daughters of England', Rhys highlights the 'no place' of the lone woman in an organized society that categorically fails (and fails categorically) to recognize her.⁹⁷

An outsider and a ghost as far as official or 'organized society' is concerned, Julia and also Norah, look to understand themselves through cultural constructions

⁹⁶ Genevieve Abravanel, 'Intertextual Indentifications: Modigliani, Conrad and 'After Leaving Mr Mackenzie', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), Jean Rhys, 91-98.

⁹⁷ Woolf, 'Three Guineas', p. 129.

offered by literature and art. Norah reads her own servitude in the description of a slave in Conrad's *Almayer's Folly*, while Julia sees herself in 'a reproduction of a picture by a man called Modigliani.' The picture is described by Julia as 'a woman lying on a couch, a woman with a lovely, lovely body' (40), and she addresses it during her conversation with Ruth. At the same time as this woman fails to believe Julia's life-story, Julia feels as if the painting says to her 'I am more real than you. But at the same time I *am* you. I'm all that matters of you' (41). In *Mackenzie*, then, Rhys goes further in her commentary on the relationship between women and the cultural narratives with which they are surrounded, than she does in *Voyage in the Dark*. In *Voyage*, while she suggests the collusion of art in the commodification of 'morality', she retains a distance between her protagonist and these conflicting narratives. Anna does not see herself in the pictures *Cherry Ripe* or *The Cries of London*, while Maudie describes books as 'just somebody stuffing you up' (*Voyage*, 9). In contrast, in *Mackenzie*, through Julia's interaction with the painting, and Norah's with Conrad's novel, 'Rhys is able to suggest the extent to which women are produced by citation, by narratives that come from others rather than from themselves.'⁹⁸ Unable to articulate themselves, Julia and Norah turn to male narratives that consolidate rather than counteract their subservient positions.

While Rhys' text repeatedly highlights the inadequacy of these narratives, and in so doing acts as a limited counterpoint to them, it shows no acknowledgement of other counter-narratives offered by women, either in terms of writing and painting, or by the time that *Mackenzie* was published in 1930, in the number of women achieving economic independence through employment. Moreover, like *Voyage* and *Quartet*, it appears to conform in a number of respects to the tropes of 'high' Victorian fall narratives.⁹⁹ Julia's swift physical degeneration as described by Rhys, seems to gesture towards the kind of conflation of sin with disease, or physical corruption, that marked Victorian literature, the rhetoric behind the Contagious Diseases Acts and the vilification of the 'amateur' during the First World War. Horsfield, a

⁹⁸ Abravanel, p. 96.

⁹⁹ Marshik also notes this: Marshik, p. 175.

willing, if not ardent lover in Paris, finds that Julia 'looked older and less pretty' (65) when, after a brief gap, he meets her in London, but then is 'shocked to see how old she looked' (123), just days later. Indeed, 'shocked', is a word that is repeated in Horsfield, Norah and Mackenzie's encounters with Julia. Mackenzie who encounters her after her return to Paris notes, 'Women go phut quite suddenly' (138). In addition to this, death makes several appearances in the novel. It appears innocuously between the more mundane destinations of Acton and Golders Green in the list of chapter headings, and takes human form to lead Julia through a modern *danse macabre*. Under a red light, that says 'dancing', Julia takes to the floor with a 'rather sinister' 'cadaverous man', who while she moves 'like [...] a clockwork toy that has nearly run down', hangs over her 'pervading her as it were, and smiling' (107). Given the modern setting of *Mackenzie*, and Julia's own amoral dismissal of living on money given to her by men as 'a very easy habit to acquire' (20), the idea of a moral fall which leads to death appears anachronistic. To paraphrase Lawrence Rainey once more, the question, 'can women be modern and be fallen?' seems appropriate here.¹⁰⁰

The difference between Rhys' novels and the novels that Rainey examines to answer his question, lies in employment. Seemingly unable to make meaningful money in employment distinguished from sex work, Rhys' protagonists are not modern in this sense. As a result, while Rhys repeatedly recasts the nature of their fall from a moral to an economic one, their narratives remain tied firmly to a descent. Rhys's description of Julia's physical degeneration is thus not punitive, but is used to illustrate Julia's impending economic ruin. Rhys highlights this in two encounters with anonymous men that frame the novel. After the first encounter, when Julia rebuffs her pursuer, she feels 'strangely elated', and reads the approach as evidence that she is 'not finished' (45). On the second occasion she is made the object of ridicule, as a young man, after seeing her properly, laughs in her face. To an extent these encounters prove the truth that Julia reads in Modigliani's painting: her body is 'all that matters', and without a saleable one, she is finished. But this

¹⁰⁰ Rainey, p. 273.

logic only works within the narrow confines of Rhys' own paradigm. By the end of *Mackenzie*, Julia is finished because the only way she knows how to earn money is to charm men. The anachronism of this view is hinted at by the presence of Wyatt, the professional nurse who helps Norah with her mother, but Rhys chooses to stereotype Wyatt as an unwomanly woman: Wyatt rolls cigarettes with 'the gestures of a man' (68) and wears a tie. The consequence is that Wyatt is positioned not as a possible role model for Julia, or as emblematic of an alternative narrative, but as another man-like individual that she needs to charm, and another equation of masculinity with social aptitude. Naipaul's commentary on Wyatt is subsequently apt, in that it identifies correctly Rhys' positioning of Wyatt, even though its assumption of the primacy of marriage for women is couched in an uncomfortably misogynist and homophobic rhetoric: 'Julia's unmarried sister, passions unspent, her life all but wasted, is about to pass into the greater aridity of a liaison with a mannish woman nurse.'¹⁰¹

Rhys does offer a limited subversive power to Julia's position by briefly recasting her position as an outsider or a ghost to 'organised society'. This is a novel in which men are predators but they are also prey. Waiting for Mackenzie outside his apartment building after receiving her cheque of dismissal, Julia is positioned less as a disenfranchised ghost and more as an avenging angel. When she stalks him to his restaurant, a restaurant in which she has previously made a scene, and walks in 'pale as a ghost' (22) to remind him of his past misdemeanours, Mackenzie is clearly terrified, regarding her as a 'dangerous person' (26). Auerbach has suggested that women's 'most vibrant role is that of the outsider', but as with Rhys' romantic use of the term 'vagabond' in *Quartet*, this needs to be vigorously examined.¹⁰² In her analysis of Rhys and the figure of the migrant, Carr cautions against any 'easy romanticism' that celebrates a non-establishment figure while ignoring the 'deprivation, discrimination and loneliness which are so often the migrant's lot.'¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Naipaul, p. 57.

¹⁰² Nina Auerbach 'Foreword', in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, ed. by Doan, pp. ix-xv (p. xiii).

¹⁰³ Carr, p. 29.

Rhys acknowledges the theoretically subversive potential of the single woman on the margins of society, through the brief, but discernible shiver of fear Julia occasions in the establishment figures of Mackenzie and Uncle Griffiths, but Rhys also acknowledges the practical reality of 'deprivation, discrimination and loneliness' through her detailed descriptions of Julia's boarding house, with its 'torn and very dirty' (47) lace curtains and tin slop-pail, as well as Julia's constant anxiety about money. In this vein, women's mobility in interwar fiction also needs to be contextualised. Julia moves constantly throughout *Mackenzie*, across national borders and through Paris and London. This mobility however, cannot be equated either with freedom or with progress. Rhys' description of Julia's journeys, especially through London 'a labyrinth of streets, all exactly alike' (84), where '[e]ach house she passed was exactly like the last' (61) convey no real sense of movement, but rather the desperation of a woman running purely in order to stand still.

More resistance to Julia's narrative as a, particularly moral, 'fall' is found in Rhys' critique of the family as an institution, and in her comparison of the relative positions of Julia and Norah. In *Mackenzie* the threshold, which holds such a powerful central position in the fallen woman paintings *Past and Present*, and *The Outcast*, is a repeated motif. Not only is Julia contrasted to her family and acquaintances by her homelessness, her exile from the home is emphasised by Rhys who shows Julia as physically unable to enter these spaces without mediation. At Uncle Griffith's boarding house and Mr James' home she is made to wait by a servant. The homeliness of both of these spaces is conveyed through their large fires that contrast to the penny-in-the-slot gas fire at Julia's hotel, and Julia's marginality is conveyed as she sits 'outside the sacred circle of warmth' (57). Access to Julia's mother's home is also controlled by a series of thresholds. A young boy lets Julia into the hall of the main building and Wyatt allows Julia to access her mother's flat. Even once inside, Julia is further detained from seeing her mother, while her sister checks and decides whether the patient is fit to be seen.

The moral authority of the threshold is diminished however. Uncle Griffiths feels no more responsible for Julia than her ex-lover Mr James, with whom she has an almost identical encounter. Seeing only her need for money, both Griffiths and James fail to see her humanity; rather, each assesses the amount that he is willing to give: Mr James, twenty pounds; Uncle Griffiths, one. Julia's disappointment in these encounters, ('She had hoped that he would say something or look something that would make her feel less lonely.' (84)) suggest that despite her need she is less mercenary than the moneyed men with whom she is surrounded. In pointed contrast to them Julia is liberal with money, spending the last of hers on roses for her mother's funeral: her profligacy a pointedly heretical act in a society where morality and money are conflated, where Mr James is a 'god' because he has money, and because Julia has none she's 'a kind of worm' (81). Rhys' depiction of Norah's social position further emphasises the gendered nature of this dynamic. Spatially and socially Julia and Norah occupy what appear to be opposing positions. Norah, who has stayed at home to nurse her mother, is unmarried, and 'approved' of: she is on the right side of the threshold. In contrast Julia, married but without a husband, occupies a position outside the family home consonant with the family's disapproval of her. When Griffiths refuses to give money to Julia he holds up her sister as an exemplar of correct behaviour. 'He said that he had not got any money and that if he had he would not give it to Julia, certainly not, but to her sister Norah [...] because she was a kind girl and she deserved it' (60). The key point here, however, is that Norah, despite the approbation that she receives, receives no real money either. 'Everybody had said, "You're wonderful, Norah." But they did not help. They just stood around watching her youth die, and her beauty die, and her soft heart grow hard and bitter' (76). The *real* social position of the good and the bad woman therefore is revealed to be identical: reliant on the economic handouts of male relatives. Here again Rhys replaces the dichotomy between the fallen and the pure woman with the economic divide between women and men. Moreover, in Rhys' description of Norah's position the family home is revealed less as a bastion of goodness and morality, and more a site that must be escaped in order to ensure survival. The price that Norah pays for 'goodness' is a life of deathlike servitude

'like being buried alive' (75). Death here, then, is as much the narrative conclusion for women who are pure, as for women who are fallen, and Julia's limited resistance is positioned as a counterpoint to the sacrificial and deathly altruism demanded by the family. She arouses in her sister a 'spirit of rebellion' that engenders a feeling of life: Norah may hate Julia, 'but she felt more alive when her sister was with her' (77).

Conclusion

In a late interview given by Jean Rhys, the interviewer, Mary Cantwell, interrupts her subject abruptly to interject, 'Your characters never kill themselves do they? [...] They're always standing by the river but they never jump.'¹⁰⁴ The river, that symbol of utter desperation in Victorian art and literature about the fallen woman, is a constant feature of Rhys' fiction. In *Quartet*, a passer-by, seeing Marya looking at the Seine, helpfully calls: "'Hé little one. Is it tonight for the suicide?'" (25). Again by the Seine, Julia, at the end of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, sees herself observed by a policeman and asserts "'I haven't the slightest intention of committing suicide, I assure you'" (132). To observe that Rhys' protagonists never jump however, is to miss the point. When Sasha, Rhys' final interwar protagonist and the oldest version of her 'composite heroine', begins *Good Morning, Midnight*, 'Saved, rescued, fished-up, half drowned, out of the deep, dark, river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set', Rhys implies that her characters have been in the river all along.¹⁰⁵ For her fallen women the river is more than a final destination, it is the condition of their lives; the struggle of the individual to stay afloat and her helplessness against forces beyond her control: 'a dark river that swept you on you didn't know where – nobody knew where' (*Quartet*, 112).

The reason why Sasha has been 'fished up' is that she has been given a stipend, this time from a family member and a woman, with the implication that it will last and

¹⁰⁴ Cantwell, p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 10.

is not dependent on Sasha's ability to charm. This breaks the connection between age, sexuality, and capital that has marked Rhys' three early novels. These novels embody the hybridity of the interwar period as regards the changing perceptions of gender relations, sex and marriage, but they are coloured by a sensibility that is entirely Rhys' own.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, this was a period in which concerns about prostitution, and particularly about 'amateur' prostitution were circulating. In popular opinion the distinction was made between the two categories in terms of need: where the professional prostitute engaged in sex-work for her livelihood, the 'amateur' was thought to perform sexual acts to facilitate her insatiable desire for treats and luxuries. Since the term 'amateur' was also used to refer to women who had sex 'for no rewards at all' it could be applied to all women who participated in pre- or extra-marital sex. This label was in some ways the death-rattle of Victorian morality, and the very fact of its repeated usage in social purity literature and newspapers suggests the waning of its influence (and the increased amount of women to whom it could apply) as much as its continued presence.

Rhys' fiction is so interesting in this context because her protagonists convey an approach to sex that is simultaneously entirely modern in its freedom from moral constraint and capacity for pleasure, and traditional in its objective of marriage and/or economic security. In her fiction Rhys highlights the complexity of men and women's relationships where money is involved, but she refutes any easy equation of sex for money with immorality. Women's economic dependence she suggests means that money is only ever doled out to them for good behaviour, whether in the form of their sexual favours, their household drudgery, or their charming demeanour. In this sense, the moneys given to Julia by Mr Mackenzie, Mr James, Mr Horsfield and Uncle Griffiths are all the rewards of various gradations of sex-work. This can be characterised as an astute modern critique of the gendered nature of economic power relations, but where Rhys is idiosyncratic is in her explanation of 'the whole business of money and sex' in relation to romantic love.

Here, her distinction is made not by the absence of money changing hands but rather the meaning with which the money given is invested. Rhys explained in her autobiography:

When you take money directly from someone you love it becomes not money but a symbol. The bond is now there. The bond has been established. I am sure the woman's deep-down feeling is 'I belong to this man, I want to belong to him completely'. It is at once humiliating and exciting.¹⁰⁶

It is this equation of a monetary transaction with a duty of care, and the happy assumption of passivity and dependence in love by both Rhys and her protagonists that make Rhys' texts uncomfortable reading for feminists. Rhys' fiction challenges any easy division of women into categories and her texts refute any simplistic labelling of women's behaviour as moral or immoral, inviting instead a contextualisation of their actions against their social and economic status. In *Voyage in the Dark* her chorus girls are not prostitutes but they engage in sex-work. At the same time their 'amateur' status is belied by their proximity to poverty and starvation. In other novels her wives are 'amateurs' involved in extra-marital affairs and her apparently single women are wives. Despite these acute observations of the complexity of modern relations however, the passivity and dependence of Rhys' protagonists mean that they are easily tethered to the earlier literary conventions of the fallen woman narrative. While their falls do highlight the continued disparity between the social positions and opportunities afforded to men and women they appear anachronistic given the increased opportunities available for single women in the early twentieth century.

Women's paid employment (beyond sex-work) is just visible in Rhys' fiction, as she briefly indicates the positions as shop-girls, tour-guides, and ghost-writers that her protagonists momentarily inhabit, but crucially, given the semi-autobiographical nature of her fiction, she occludes the means of her own personal resistance to powerlessness and impoverishment as a writer. *Voyage in the Dark* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, in particular, are filled with references to paintings and to writing in

¹⁰⁶ Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 121.

which women's position in the status quo is upheld rather than critiqued. There is no suggestion however that women like Rhys were writing and drawing their own visions of modernity at this time. While Rhys' greatest challenge to the inequalities that she highlights comes in her vocalisation of the single-woman's plight, an objective that she achieves through literary experimentation and repeated textual disruptions, these strategies offer no succour to her protagonists themselves. Women's narratives, she insists, remain largely unchanged, even as her texts offer modern literary perspectives from which they can be re-read and strategies through which they can be re-envisioned.

2. 'Where is my place?' Single Women, Romantic Idealism and the Sexual Imperative in Rosamond Lehmann's interwar fiction

Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other's eyes that romance was killed?

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1928)¹

In Rhys' fiction there is a sense of a world irrevocably lost. In *Voyage in the Dark* this is explicitly linked to Anna's journey from the West Indies to England, and her move from childhood to adulthood. In England Anna experiences 'a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy.'² It is a shift in perception common to the writing of many of Rhys' contemporaries, where it is located in a different experience: that of the First World War. In Rhys' fiction one protagonist remembers the war as '[a] funny time. A mad reckless time', but Anna's pre-war life in *Voyage* differs from the post-war life of Rhys' later protagonists only in so far as their personal circumstances have changed with age; pre-war England is as ubiquitously grey as its post-war counterpart.³ For many other women writers the war created an unbridgeable fissure between the past and the present, but one that was understood similarly to the divide between childhood and adulthood as described by Rhys. Rosamond Lehmann described the young students who returned to Cambridge after the war as 'young-old survivors,' and Woolf stated that '[e]verything was different.'⁴ The same things were being said, but they 'sounded different'. Something had been lost 'which changed the value of the words themselves.'⁵

¹ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 16-17.

² Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 7.

³ Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, p. 49.

⁴ Rosamond Lehmann, 'My First Novel', *Listener*, 26 March 1953, pp. 513-514 (p.513); Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 13.

⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 13.

In the works of Rosamond Lehmann that I now turn to consider, this sense of the profound effect of the war is central, as is the sense that the pre-war world constitutes a golden age. Lehmann does indeed 'lay the blame on the war' for a perceptible shift in, if not the ideal of romance, then certainly its reality. Mikhail Bakhtin characterised this kind of looking-backwards in literature as 'historical inversion': a process through which ideal qualities including perfection and harmony which have never yet existed but could potentially be achieved in the future are transposed onto a past age.⁶ For Bakhtin this is a process that 'empties out the future, dissects and bleeds it white', and certainly, in the works of Lehmann the modern world is one in which romance and traditional values need to be actively renegotiated if they are to be brought into the present.⁷ Lehmann attended Girton College after the First World War and her texts inhabit the shifting world experienced by her generation of the upper-middle class: women's colleges; the traditional, wealthy homes of parents and parents' aristocratic friends; as well as the new apartments of the younger more bohemian generation of artists and writers. Lehmann utilises these spaces as a means to interrogate the interwar social position of a variety of single women, who ask in a variety of guises, 'where is my place?' This is therefore a different kind of modernity to that portrayed by Rhys. The educated and comfortably middle-class protagonists of Lehmann are afforded entrance into the spaces of the establishment; they hold a position there which however precarious, is not only unattainable for Rhys' protagonists, but so remote as to be unthinkable. Conversely, while the streets of *The Weather in the Streets* might be used to convey a *frisson* of the fate of the fallen woman, a hint of the narrative retribution that traditionally befalls the unchaste, Lehmann's protagonists, unlike Rhys', are never in the position of becoming street-walkers in any more than a strictly literal sense. This is not to say however, that these incursions into spaces

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Towards a Historical Poetics', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. and trans. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Carly Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258, (pp. 146-7).

⁷ Bakhtin, p. 148

traditionally reserved for men are necessarily viewed as positive, or as part of a broader expansion of women's roles. In Lehmann's novels the women's college, a potential throughway to a more permanent, public role, is contained firmly as a transient, adolescent phase, a deviation on the journey whose ideal end is marriage and a family home.

In her interwar novels, *Dusty Answer* (1927), *Invitation to the Waltz* (1932), and *The Weather in the Streets* (1936), Lehmann depicts diverse single women who differ in age and class and who range from the sexually uninitiated to the promiscuous.⁸ Lehmann's readership would have recognised some of the fictional 'types' of single women in her novels, seeing in the virginal seamstress and the abandoned pregnant mistress the legacy of earlier canonical literature. They would have been less familiar however with the bi-curious undergraduate, the androgynous flapper, and the separated wife, all of whom posed a challenge to the traditional sexual and social boundaries imposed on women's behaviour and status. Lehmann's diverse single women reflect the shifts that occurred in the early twentieth century regarding sex and marriage that I noted in the previous chapter. These shifts were echoed in the expansion in literature of women's narrative positions from the repeated Victorian triad of wife, spinster, and prostitute. However, this new taxonomy of women continued to be shot through with moral and social judgements including the notions that pre- and extra-marital sex for women remained taboo, and marriage defined social success.⁹ Katherine Holden has reconceptualised the states of marriage and singleness to suggest that rather than being antithetical, they are both incorporated as parts of a 'continuum that places some women as more married than others.'¹⁰ This model is useful to describe the increased variety of heterosexual relationships in evidence in interwar literature as well as the continued evaluation of women according to their proximity to

⁸ Rosamond Lehmann, *Dusty Answer* (London: Penguin, 1936); Rosamond Lehmann, *Invitation to the Waltz* (London: Virago, 2006); Rosamond Lehmann, *The Weather in the Streets* (London: Virago, 2006). All further references will be made in the text.

⁹ Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*, p. 99.

¹⁰ Holden, 'Imaginary Widows', p. 389.

marriage. Moreover, as Holden notes, it is a particularly appropriate model to describe the period following the First World War when the deaths of so many men gave rise to the idea that many spinsters, rather than being 'left on the shelf', *could* have married had it not been for the death of their sweethearts. This meant that the spinster, previously seen as the polar opposite to the wife and mother, could be reconceptualised within the marital field as an 'imaginary widow'.¹¹

This was not the only change to the conceptualisation of spinsterhood that occurred after the war. During the interwar period notions about sexuality that had begun to be developed in the late nineteenth century were expanded upon and circulated through a variety of distributaries to the general populace. Many of these theories suggested a very different view of the spinster, who in certain quarters became viewed as a potential bogey-woman whose chastity promised not only physical and mental deterioration, but a sexual instability that rendered her an unhealthy influence on the young. At the same time the figure of the lesbian also came to popular attention, most prominently in the 1928 trial for obscenity of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, but also, as I will note, in a number of novels that predated this. These two figures of the spinster and the lesbian, taken alongside fears about the rise of the 'amateur' considered in the previous chapter, combined to render the unmarried woman (whether or not she was sexually active) a source of sexual concern. In Lehmann's fiction spinsters and lesbians show a marked similarity to their depictions in circulating sexological and psychological theories, and in this her approach to single women is noticeably different to that of Rhys. While the extent of the influence of sexual psychology on the popular imagination is a subject that has been widely debated, Lehmann's novels show clearly how certain concepts from these discourses, often misread and conflated, were developed into a popular shorthand that was intelligible to a broad readership.

These theories of the interwar period thus caught the single woman in a complex and apparently contradictory set of social and sexual dictates. Sex outside of

¹¹ Holden, 'Imaginary Widows', p. 388 onwards.

marriage remained taboo, but marriage itself was considered more unlikely because of the increased ratio of women to men following the war and moreover, as denuded of romance, since the 'best' of a generation had been killed. Surrounded by concerns about the psychological consequences of remaining chaste, the interwar single woman thus found herself caught between psychopathology and social condemnation. Lehmann's intervention in this conundrum is a radical renegotiation of romance that sacrifices the virginal spinster and the wife to the sexually experienced, newly single woman, and in doing so shows a paradigmatic shift from Victorian values while managing to uphold the ideal, if not the reality, of marriage.

In order to find a place for these modern single women in her narratives that is not beyond the pale Lehmann adopts a number of strategies, which I will examine in turn. Firstly, she surrounds her protagonists with women who are depicted as sexually and/or romantically suspect in accordance with contemporary anxieties, and these act as foils to normalise the position of her protagonists. In *Dusty Answer*, this sexual periphery is constructed through Mabel Fuller, a college student with 'repressions', and Geraldine Manners who conforms to the contemporary masculine stereotype of the lesbian. In a similar fashion, in *The Weather in the Streets*, Olivia Curtis is valorised through weighted comparisons with Miss Robinson, another repressed spinster, Etty, an aging flapper and Nicola, the unhappy wife of Olivia's lover. Secondly, in both novels Lehmann offers a detailed critique of the post-war romantic environment: modern marriages are portrayed as poor imitations of those of the older generation, while any remaining bachelors are deemed unsuitable. By suggesting the impossibility of modern marriage to conform to the romantic ideal, Lehmann reconceptualises the failure of Olivia's marriage in *The Weather in the Streets* as a victory for idealism, and her protagonist as romantically unimpeachable. Finally, through the parallel narrative structures that run through *Invitation to the Waltz* and *The Weather in the Streets*, Lehmann manages to reposition Olivia as an 'imaginary widow', a woman whose romantic potential could only have been realised had it not been for the war. Distanced from the spinster by romantic passion and from the modern wife by romantic idealism, Lehmann thus effectively

normalises the behaviour of the heterosexual single woman and presents a sympathetic portrayal of sexually active unmarried women and separated wives, figures conservative sections of society would have viewed with distaste. Nevertheless, to do this she remains reliant to a certain extent on the ideal concept of marriage.

Constructing a sexual periphery: Lehmann's repressed spinsters and college lesbians

Lehmann's first novel, *Dusty Answer*, was published in 1927. It was 'reviewed in certain quarters as the outpourings of a sex maniac', and earned Lehmann immediate notoriety.¹² The majority of the novel is concerned with Judith's relationship with the Fyfes, five cousins who come periodically to live in the house next-door. Four of these cousins are men, and by the end of the novel Judith has been in some way or other romantically attached to each. It is in the middle section of the novel however, significantly the section in which Judith attends Cambridge University, that her lesbian and spinster foils appear. In the nineteen-twenties university education for women was still a debated subject even though the first college for women's Higher Education had opened in 1848.¹³ Oxford awarded its first full degrees to women in 1920, but Cambridge, where Lehmann studied, waited until 1948 to do so. Resistance to women at university was experienced first hand by Lehmann, when Girton had to be 'locked and barred and bolted' following the 1921 defeat of the resolution to accept women as full members of Cambridge.¹⁴ Arguments against Higher Education for women were various and included their alleged intellectual inferiority and the idea that university would render women unfit for marriage. The writer and headmistress Charlotte Cowdroy wrote that

¹² Rosamond Lehmann, *The Swan in the Evening: Fragments of an Inner Life* (London: Virago, 1982), p. 67.

¹³ Vicinus, p. 123.

¹⁴ Hastings, p. 53. While there was no trouble at Girton, male undergraduates smashed the memorial gates at Newnham and caused seven hundred pounds worth of damage. Lehmann, quoted in Hastings, p.53; Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939* (London: UCL Press, 1995), p. 239.

universities 'cannot produce womanly women,' and Vera Brittain noted the consternation that resulted from her own acceptance to Oxford among her mother's friends, "'How *can* you send your daughter to college, Mrs Brittain!'" asked one, "'don't you want her ever to get *married*?"'¹⁵ Lehmann incorporates this view of university in *Dusty Answer* through Judith's mother who dismisses her daughter's successful university career and equates stupidity with marriage potential: "'If you were a little more stupid," said Mamma, "You might make a success of a London season even at this late date. You've got the looks"' (*Dusty Answer*, 259).

In this context, Lehmann's stereotypical portraits of Mabel and Geraldine fulfil a specific function. They position Judith as a 'womanly woman': one whose intellectualism, as signified by her time at university, has not made her unfit for marriage, and one whose passionate relationship with a fellow student conveys her emotional capacity but does not render her sexually suspect. In doing this however, Lehmann actively utilises the sexual stereotypes that were circulating in the interwar period about women students and teachers as 'embittered, sexless or homosexual hoydens', and implicitly colludes with the idea that all-women institutions were potentially, however unconsciously, the sites of sexual impropriety.¹⁶ From the late nineteenth century, sexologists had warned that in addition to women who were congenital 'inverts', women and girls in single-sex environments were at risk of acquiring inversion. Richard Krafft-Ebing considered lesbianism to flourish in 'the harem, in female prisons, the brothel and young ladies' seminaries', thus colouring the new educational establishments with shades of sexual subjugation and criminality through association.¹⁷

¹⁵ Charlotte Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1933), p.133; Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago, 2004), p.56.

¹⁶ Quoted in Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics 1900 – 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) p. 190. Oram also cites Annabel Faraday's study of interwar novels with lesbian characters which found that out of forty nine novels fourteen were set in a school. Oram, *Women Teachers*, p. 188.

¹⁷ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, 'Psychopathia Sexualis', in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds) *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 45-4, (p. 45).

Critics and historians have debated the extent to which the sexological ideas of theorists including Havelock Ellis and the new psychological theories of Freud entered popular discourse during the interwar period.¹⁸ While both types of theory had been circulated in medical and legal texts from the end of the nineteenth century, the sale of these had been regulated, and limited largely to purchase by professionals. Before the war writers including feminists, sex reformers and equal rights campaigners, anxious to discuss sexual morality and gender inequality, referenced theories from Ellis and Freud, but it was not until after the war that they became popularly discussed.¹⁹ Freudian treatment of shell-shock sufferers during the First World War brought concepts including repression into the wider public consciousness and in the early 1920s the Woolfs' Hogarth Press began to publish translations of the International Psychoanalytical Library series, including James and Alix Strachey's *Freud*.²⁰ Although Freud and Ellis offered two different approaches to sexuality, one which prioritised the mind and the other the body, both suggested that heterosexual sexual fulfilment was desirable, but also necessary, for the health of the individual: repression of the sexual instincts, in contrast, was linked to 'anxiety, neuroses and even mental illness.'²¹ In the conservative atmosphere of the interwar period, this inevitably meant prioritising marriage and the family. Despite broad distinctions between the work of the two theorists they were often conflated in the popular imagination of the nineteen twenties and thirties. Not only did Freud's work become 'encrusted with the immensely strong, biologically orientated theories of sexuality' of Ellis, but popularised versions of psycho-sexual theory cherry-picked the more glamorous and exciting aspects: dreams became of immense interest and terms including

¹⁸ Dean Rapp, 'The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920-1925', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 24 (1988), 191-201; R.A. Gekoski, 'Freud and English Literature 1900-1930', in *1900 – 1930*, ed. by Michael Bell (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 186-217; Hall, *Sex Gender and Social Change*, p.101; Lesley A. Hall, 'Feminist Reconfigurations of Heterosexuality in the 1920s', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology in Culture*, pp. 135-149. Hall critiques the extent of the intervention made by sexology in interwar feminism in particular, as identified by Jeffreys in *The Spinster and Her Enemies*.

¹⁹ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 257-258.

²⁰ Weeks, p. 142; Graves and Hodge, p. 98; Lee, p. 372.

²¹ Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p. 187.

repression, sublimation and the unconscious entered common currency.²² By the early nineteen twenties a reviewer in the *Daily News* claimed '[w]e are all psychoanalysts now' but any rigorous understanding of these concepts was limited.²³ 'The first requirement for mental health is an uninhibited sex-life. To be well and happy, one must obey one's sexual urge [...].'²⁴ It was this idea that had a real effect on how the spinster became represented in fiction.

In Graves' and Hodge's explanation the 'Freudian gospel [...] filtered down into people's minds, through translations, interpretations, glosses, popularizations, and general loose discussion,' and this was true also of sexological ideas, among them a particular construction of lesbianism.²⁵ Frequently the discrete areas of psychosexual discourse, journalism and novel writing were cross-fertilised through personal connections and individuals working across the fields. The novelist Radclyffe Hall not only developed Krafft-Ebing's model of female sexual inversion, or lesbianism, in her portrayal of Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness*, she mentioned him by name and prefaced her book with an introduction by Havelock Ellis. Dean Rapp notes that during the interwar years the majority of essays on psychoanalysis were written by non-medical essayists and journalists, and in forums like the journal *Time and Tide* pieces by novelists including Vera Brittain (who reviewed *The Well of Loneliness* for the journal), Leonora Eyles and Margery Allingham appeared alongside articles on the 'popular craze' of psychoanalysis and 'The Sex Instinct and Society'.²⁶ In addition to this some of Ellis' ideas were widely circulated through their incorporation into Marie Stopes' hugely successful marriage manuals. *Married Love* (1918), for example, cited Ellis on the 'numerous nervous and other diseases [...] associated with the lack of physiological relief for natural or stimulated sex feelings in women.'²⁷ Lesley A. Hall has noted the

²² Weeks, p. 156; Graves and Hodge, p. 103.

²³ Quoted in Graves and Hodge, p. 103.

²⁴ Graves and Hodge, p. 103

²⁵ Graves and Hodge, p. 103

²⁶ Rapp, pp. 191, 197.

²⁷ Marie Stopes, *Married Love*, 6th edition (1919), Chapter VI 'Sleep', Project Gutenberg, Ebook, released November 30, 2014 <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/47501/47501-h/47501->

importance of acknowledging the different fields through which sexual theory was disseminated, and has questioned whether an intellectually rigorous analysis is appropriate for Stopes' manuals, which were not scholarly works and which 'rather than aiming to make people think' were 'intended to make people act.'²⁸ Nevertheless, Stopes' descriptions of sexual acts were clearly ideologically nuanced: 'In all young people', she wrote, 'unless they have inherited depraved or diseased tendencies, the old desire of our race springs up.'²⁹ The genre in which Stopes wrote and her objective to appeal to a non-specialised audience, thus made her manuals an important means through which certain sexological ideas and the assumptions that they rested on were both popularised, and also strictly contained: as the title of *Married Love* suggested, this was sex advice intended for married couples only.

What is clear from reading interwar fiction is that it both reflected general interest in the increasingly popular field of sex theory and contributed to the mass circulation of these ideas, and that it did so throughout the interwar period. Rose Macaulay's *Potterism* published just after the war refers to 'a suppressed psychological complex', and in a dinner party described in E.M.Delafield's *The Way Things Are* (1927) '[w]ords, hitherto met with by Laura only in the works of Havelock Ellis, hurtled enthusiastically through the room'.³⁰ By the end of the era, these ideas are no longer represented as the province of the middle-classes and the eponymous Mrs Miniver finds cause to laugh in 1939 at 'a very fat taxi-driver with a bottle nose saying to a very old taxi-driver with a rheumy eye: "They say it's all a question of your subconscious mind."³¹ As Nicola Humble has noted, however, the quantity of references to Ellis and Freud in fiction was no guarantee of their quality:

h.htm >. *Married Love* sold two thousand copies in the first fortnight and over four hundred thousand copies by the end of 1923. Weeks, p. 188

²⁸ Hall, 'Feminist Reconfigurations', pp. 139-140

²⁹ Stopes, *Married Love*.

³⁰ Macaulay, *Potterism*, p. 66. Interestingly in the Project Gutenberg ebook of the American edition this is referred to more specifically as a 'suppressed Freudian complex'; Delafield, quoted in Humble, p. 230.

³¹ Struther, p. 86. The chapter was initially published as a column in *The Times* on March 27, 1939.

'Freudianism without Freud informed a great deal of middlebrow women's fiction between the wars'.³²

In *Dusty Answer* Lehmann offers a textbook portrait of the sexually thwarted spinster in her portrayal of Mabel, and through Geraldine, and her relationship with Jennifer, a cautionary tale on lesbianism. Critics, including Andrea Lewis have identified *Dusty Answer* as a lesbian novel, but in doing so they enhance the importance of Judith's relationship with Jennifer at the expense of Judith's other platonic and romantic relationships in the novel.³³ Judith meets Jennifer on her first day at university, immediately after meeting Mabel. The importance of these two girls (alongside Geraldine, a visitor) is signified by the fact that they are the only students named by Judith during her time at college. Connected through their relationship to Judith, Mabel and Jennifer are diametrically opposed in terms of class, physical appearance and work ethic. Judith and Jennifer are distinguished from the mass of college students, described as 'ugly and noisy and crude and smelly' (110), by their beauty and their class, in an equation of attractiveness and wealth that is repeated in Lehmann's texts. Judith's family photographs look 'divinely aristocratic' (118) and Jennifer has just returned from stalking in Scotland with her family. In contrast, as Mabel explains, "'Most girls who come here have got to depend on their brains for a livelihood'" (114). Mabel herself wants to teach, and is portrayed in contradistinction to Judith and Jennifer as superlatively unattractive; she is 'greasy [...] and her lank hair smelt; and when she talked she spat' (113).

Jennifer is distinguished from Judith in other ways and their relationship has been the subject of critical debate. Lewis reads it as a lesbian relationship and suggests that the novel escaped the furore directed towards Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, because it bypasses the masculine stereotypes and heterosexual dynamic that she identifies as common to representations of lesbianism in literature at the time. Lewis suggests that this recasting of a lesbian

³² Humble, p. 228; Gekoski, p. 206.

³³ Andrea Lewis, 'Glorious pagan that I adore'? Resisting the National Reproductive Imperative in Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*, *Studies in the Novel*, 31 (1999), 357-371.

relationship not only made the novel easier to accept as a tale of female friendship but that it also worked to subvert a post-war national imperative to reproduction in a way that other lesbian novels, reliant on a heterosexual model, failed to do. This reading fails to acknowledge Lehmann's nuanced characterisation of Judith and Jennifer, and by concentrating on their relationship to the detriment of others it over-emphasises Jennifer's role in the text. While Lewis notes the masculine stereotyping that Lehmann employs in her characterisation of Geraldine, she fails to note a similar, but less obvious colouring to her portrait of Jennifer. Geraldine wears her hair short, her jaw is 'heavy and masculine' (161), she smokes 'like a man' (164), and has 'course and masculine features' (171). She is, in short, a 'mannish woman', a stereotype that was in circulation in interwar fiction prior to Radclyffe Hall's *Stephen Gordon*, and which had its foundation in the sexological typologies produced by Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁴ Jennifer, in contrast, is strikingly pretty, but nevertheless Lehmann repeatedly uses her as a foil to highlight Judith's femininity. Jennifer is tomboyish: she smokes, swears and whistles, shows little regard for work and is knowledgeable about sex. She has 'overdeveloped her muscles' (120) through exercise, lifts Judith up when she is tired, and when boating refuses to let Judith row, replying to her friend's offer of help that 'a woman should never depart from her type' (137). She stands, therefore, midway between Geraldine and Judith on a continuum of sexuality. The *TLS* identified Jennifer as a 'border-line' type, and Lehmann locates her on the boundary of sexual acceptability not to encourage Judith to transgress, but rather to position her firmly within hetero-normative bounds.³⁵

During her years at Cambridge, Lehmann herself had 'a very emotional friendship' with Grizel Buchanan (her surname suggesting a possible inspiration for Jennifer's Scottish heritage), whose effect she described in a letter as 'a particularly heady

³⁴ Havelock Ellis, 'Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol II: Sexual Inversion', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science*, pp. 52-57; Krafft-Ebing, pp. 45-47.

³⁵ 'Dusty Answer', *Times Literary Supplement*, Thursday 19 May, 1927, p. 352.

wine'.³⁶ Martha Vicinus has noted the important role played by such relationships, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, describing women's colleges as both nourishing and 'nourished by the homoerotic friendships of women': friendships that were certainly characterised by '[s]exual passion, if not physical sexuality.'³⁷ Lehmann's juxtaposition of Judith and Jennifer's relationship with that of Jennifer and Geraldine, works to position the former as just this kind of passionate friendship and to circumvent any censure that might attach to a relationship between women by offering a clearly weighted comparison to a more explicitly lesbian relationship. Significantly, Judith's relationship with Jennifer evokes no censure from her peers, unlike Jennifer's relationship with Geraldine, and Judith's attachment is contextualised against Jennifer's popularity among a year-group of whom 'everyone fell madly in love with her' (132). While Judith's relationship with Jennifer is described as healthy: 'each day was a fresh adventure in the open air' (136), Jennifer's relationship with Geraldine is characterised by darkness and claustrophobia, and precipitates Jennifer's nervous breakdown and her removal from the college.

Judith and Jennifer's homoerotic friendship is fully contained by Lehmann as a discrete episode, framed by Judith's heterosexual relationships and cut off from the preceding and subsequent narrative. Like the Cambridge education Judith receives, it has little weight within the narrative at all. It is preceded by Judith saying goodbye to Martin Fyfe, and ends with Martin driving her away from the university to continue her main narrative of obsession with the Fyfes virtually without a break. Thus Cambridge is relegated to a discrete phase, its spatial and temporal enclosure experienced by Judith as stasis: 'I don't *feel* as if there'd been any step forward. Everything – what's the word? – static. Or else just making circles' (188). Lehmann further trivialises Judith's experiences through her description of the women's college itself as 'a terrible place for getting overwrought' (170). This description compares to other more melodramatic depictions in novels

³⁶ Hastings, p. 43.

³⁷ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 158.

including Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women* (1917) and G.E.Trevelyan's aptly named *Hot-house* (1933), in which the girls' school and the women's college respectively, are characterised as places of such dangerous emotionalism that they act as the catalyst to suicide. The phrase also emphasises Lehmann's use of a woman's college primarily as a setting for emotional experimentation and angst, with little mention of education at all. Lehmann's college and the education that occurs within it are shown to have no relevance for the future narratives of the women who attend it. Judith leaves university to embark on a purely social career, travelling with her mother and searching for suitors; her 'odd education sank into disreputable insignificance: best not to refer to it. She was adequately equipped in other ways' (259). While Lehmann's tone here is clearly ironic, her novel itself does little to suggest an alternative narrative path.

While Judith is 'swept into new life' (188) on her departure from Cambridge, the hapless Mabel Fuller remains within the college gates: what is a contained episode for Judith entirely contains Mabel. The failure of her final examinations renders any form of forward progress impossible for her and acts as a final signifier of the arrested development with which she is associated. Like Geraldine, who is described as looking in her thirties, Mabel is older than the average undergraduate, and it is significant that Lehmann depicts her two sexual 'deviants' as past the age of adolescent emotional whim. In contrast to Judith and Jennifer who discuss the probability that they will get engaged during their time at college, Mabel is twenty-seven, an age at which her single status would have been assumed to be permanent rather than the result of a youthful lack of proposals.

As mentioned above, one concept widely circulated in the interwar period, and advocated by both psychologists and sexologists, was the danger of sexual repression. In her essay on the sexual variety and variability of women, Stella Browne, an advocate of Ellis, claimed that repression could be identified as the cause of tiredness, nervous irritation, fussiness, anaemia and was at least as much of the cause of 'the comparative intellectual barrenness of woman' as poor education

was.³⁸ Browne, who was a campaigner for sex reform who advocated women's right to birth control and abortion, as well as their equal rights, should be seen within the context of a social reformer who thought sex should not be confined to marriage. Nevertheless, these words, coming from a prominent – if radical – feminist, should alert us to the fact of a paradigmatic shift regarding sexuality that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. Celibacy, which had been laid down as a moral absolute for women prior to marriage in the Victorian era, and which had been advocated as a political tool by suffragists including Christabel Pankhurst, was regarded ambivalently by the nineteen-twenties, despite continuing social prohibitions on pre- and extra-marital sex.³⁹ The ubiquity of the ambivalence, and the wide range of media through which the 'dangers' of celibacy were circulated, led Winifred Holtby to identify what she termed 'the persecution of the virgins':

Today, there is a far worse crime than promiscuity: it is chastity. On all sides the unmarried woman today is surrounded by doubts cast not only upon her attractiveness or her common sense, but upon her decency, her normality, even her sanity.⁴⁰

The Edwardian stereotype of the spinster, devoted to the parish and 'made of the same stuff as parsons are made of' became viewed as a façade under which a tumult of uncontrollable passion was but loosely controlled.⁴¹ As a consequence, representations of the virginal spinster repeatedly, and paradoxically, became sexualised.

Lehmann's characterisation of Mabel Fuller as thwarted incorporates this sexualisation of the spinster, as well as Browne's notions of chastity being detrimental to health and intelligence, and causing neurosis. Jennifer believes that Mabel has 'sex-repression' (118) but repression here is signified not through inhibition, but rather, through the notion of Mabel as a predator. Jennifer describes Mabel as 'a vampire bat' (117): a 'brain-sucker probing for new full-blooded life,'

³⁸ Browne, 'Sexual Variety and Variability among Women', p. 96.

³⁹ Liggins, p. 82.

⁴⁰ Winifred Holtby, 'King George V Jubilee Celebrations,' in Berry and Bishop, pp. 89-93, (pp.91-92). Holtby identified the 'campaign' against spinsters to include 'popular women's magazines, short story writers and lecturers'.

⁴¹ E.M.Forster, *A Room with a View* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 226.

(114). This image of the vampire was used elsewhere in fiction of the interwar period, where it was variously used to signify both repression, the idea that the repressed woman would need her passions to be sated or fed in some way if they were not released, and lesbianism. In Clemence Dane's *The Regiment of Women*, Clare Harthill a teacher of similar age to Mabel, is described vampirically as both feeding and fed on 'the supply of child-life [that] never slackened.'⁴² Lehmann flirts with this cross-over in her characterisation of Mabel. Jennifer asks Judith if Mabel, 'Has [...] pounced on you already? [...] she makes straight for the pretty ones' (117). Oram has suggested that following the 1928 trial for *The Well of Loneliness* spinsters were increasingly vilified as potential lesbians.⁴³ This depiction of Mabel suggests that even in novels that predated the *Well* trial, spinsters and lesbians were depicted using a shared pool of imagery, a point I will discuss further in the next chapter. What is interesting is that despite the strategies that Lehmann adopts to dissociate Judith from both Jennifer and Mabel, one contemporary commentator identified in Judith this same vampiric nature, describing her as 'an intellectual and emotional vampire.'⁴⁴ Nicola Humble has suggested that in a period in which middlebrow fiction rated the briskly efficient 'Judith's mistake is not [...] to give herself to a man, but to try to talk about it afterwards. Emotional outpourings, rather than sexual experience, are the new taboo.'⁴⁵ What the *TLS* review suggests is something slightly different; it suggests the ease with which, even by the late nineteen-twenties in an era of Freud, the actively desirous woman (whether desirous of friendship, advancement, or heterosexual or lesbian sex) could be labelled as dangerously voracious. Lehmann's collusion in this idea, in her depiction of Mabel is thus not a simple conflation of the spinster with the lesbian, but one example of what is a broader and more complex trope.

In Lehmann's depiction of Mabel, Mabel's sexual repression and her ill-health are also inextricably linked to her lower middle class status. These factors are all

⁴² Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women* (London: Virago, 1995), p. 99.

⁴³ Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p. 187.

⁴⁴ *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 May 1927, p. 352.

⁴⁵ Humble, p. 212.

imbricated in Lehmann's presentation of Mabel's college room, to which she invites an unwilling Judith for cocoa.

[Mabel] busied herself with a saucepan over the fire and breathed stertorously through her nose. Her skin glistened unhealthily in the firelight. The room was very close, full of pink casement cloth and china ornaments. (114)

The pink casement cloth and china ornaments encode Mabel's room as identifiably feminine, but they also position her in contradistinction to Jennifer and Judith, whose own room furnishings signify the 'taste' of the upper middle-class. Mabel herself occupies a position at the stove that is one of domestic parody. Her wish to 'nourish' Judith is ostensibly maternal, but both misplaced and sexually threatening. Her room is 'very close' and the claustrophobia experienced by Judith appears to be caused by these very feminine elements, the heat of the stove and the cloth and ornaments, which make the small room full. Mabel herself is unhealthy, shown by the sheen of her skin and the nature of her breathing, which pollute the already close atmosphere, and this is compounded by the unwholesome fare that she serves to Judith: sickly syrupy cocoa and fatty doughnuts which are to be ingested by her along with the stuffiness of the room. Colouring the scene is a hint of sexual impropriety. Lehmann juxtaposes the formative nature of Judith and Mabel's acquaintance with the forced intimacy of the small room. Mabel still refers to Judith as 'Miss Earle', but she conducts the meeting in her dressing gown. Alongside Lehmann's comparison with elderly male strangers, this informal attire hints at an imminent threat of indecent exposure: '[Mabel's] eyes yearned at Judith. It was curious: they had in them a sort of avid glint – almost like the eyes of old men in railway carriages' (115).

These elements of Mabel's characterisation: her sexual repression and singleness, her ill-health and her lower middle class status emerge again in what the *TLS* considered as Lehmann's 'rather morbid presentment' of Miss Robinson, Olivia's

dressmaker in *Invitation to the Waltz* and *The Weather in the Streets*.⁴⁶ Like Mabel, Miss Robinson is only of peripheral importance to the narrative and appears to exist largely in order to serve as a warning of the consequences of virginity. In *Invitation to the Waltz* she makes up Olivia's dress for the party of the title, but in *The Weather in the Streets* her inclusion is only anecdotal: a report of her increasingly unstable behaviour is given by Olivia's mother during dinner and acts to counterpoint Olivia's own singleness. Miss Robinson lives with her mother, and their home, like Mabel's room, exudes ill-health and a sense of specifically feminine suffocation: '[t]he air in the house [is] heavy, lugubrious with their minor afflictions' (*Invitation* 31), and pervaded by an 'odour of complacent dejection and sanctified decay' (33). Here however, virginity is explicitly identified as the cause of physical decay and mental instability, and not just juxtaposed with it: 'virginity, like a malignant growth, gnawed at [Miss Robinson's] mind and body' (33). Far from being a cherished maiden aunt, the spinster as incarnated in Miss Robinson is diseased, antithetical to domesticity and sexually disruptive. In *The Weather in the Streets* she is reported to have destroyed the dresses that she has been commissioned to create, an act of vandalism that appears to be specifically targeted at femininity. Even in *Invitation to the Waltz* she is 'increasingly volatile' (99), and showing symptoms of '[t]he repressed sex-impulse', which Browne described to 'often break[...] out irresistibly at the change of life, sometimes undermining sanity and control, throughout the remaining years.'⁴⁷

Lehmann conveys Miss Robinson's 'repressed sex-impulse' in her description of a secondary internal Miss Robinson, whose barely suppressed bawdiness suggests the incorrigible efforts to escape of the id. Olivia watches with horror as:

An inner Miss Robinson seemed to peer out suddenly, give a lewd nudge, whisper: Come on now! How much d'you know? And for a moment a whole train of surreptitious words (such as fornication, and White Slave Traffic) [...] seemed – horrors! – about to become pieced together into the Facts of Life and slipped furtively into her hand by Miss Robinson. But the

⁴⁶ *Times Literary Supplement*, 06 October 1932, p. 712.

⁴⁷ Browne, 'Sexual Variety and Variability of Women', pp. 99-100.

next moment she had turned her attention outward, the lid was safely on.
(37-38)

What appears as a description of repression however, an 'inner Miss Robinson', a 'lid safely on', is conflated with Lehmann's presentation of Miss Robinson's class. Miss Robinson's sexual knowledge conveyed through innuendo, is inextricable from the rest of her gossip and patter, which Lehmann writes idiomatically and phonetically to convey her class status: 'oo, it's parky in here', she says to Olivia and 'no one could call you a bewtee' (34). While the kindly Olivia applauds Miss Robinson for her piano playing, as an accomplishment that befits a lady, the reader is made aware of the ironic distance between Miss Robinson and a higher social position by her caterwauling and her vowel sounds. What is repeatedly revealed in their encounter is that any idea that Miss Robinson is a genteel seamstress is a façade and it is equally the 'real' nature of her class as well as her sexual instincts that her social position requires her to repress. What we see in Lehmann's characters Mabel and Miss Robinson, therefore, are repeated examples of class anxiety that are conflated with sexual anxiety. In these characterisations it is aspects of lower class identity that are revealed through slips of the tongue, and are at least as uncontrollable and irrepressible as the thwarted sexual desires that the individuals are purported to have.

The Modern Spinster

'Poor Mabel,' 'poor' Miss Robinson; throughout Lehmann's novels single women are described as both literally and figuratively poor. Even Ety Somers, Olivia's aristocratic cousin is referred to by Olivia as "'Poor little Ett,'" before she corrects herself, "'Though I don't know why I say poor. She seems quite safe and happy..." she had her own money, and people with a bit of money were all right' (*Weather* 73). This distinction highlights the cross-class social stigma attached to spinsterhood in contradistinction to virginity; a stigma that Lehmann emphasises despite Ety's wealth, in her description of Ety's London townhouse. Unlike Mabel and Miss Robinson, Ety is most emphatically not a virgin, and she is not poor, but what

Lehmann suggests in her description is that despite the sexological imperative that sex is necessary for a fulfilling life, sex on its own, socially unsanctioned by marriage is not enough either.

In *Invitation to the Waltz*, Etty is a flapper, a glamorous socialite who educates her 'country-mouse' cousins in the subject of underwear ("Etty wears practically nothing in the evenings – just her belt and knickers. She says no one *dreams* of wearing any more", 72) and emphasises her words in the manner characteristic of literary representations of the Bright Young Things. The term 'flapper' had been around for centuries before the interwar period; in the eighteen-nineties it had referred to 'a very young prostitute', but by 1912 it had come to refer to 'any girl in her teens with a boyish figure.'⁴⁸ After the war it came to mean 'a comradely, sporting, active young woman', as embodied in the heroine of the 1919 film *The Irresistible Flapper*, 'a high-spirited girl who shocked her old-fashioned parents with her free behaviour and boyish slimness, yet was in truth a "brick".'⁴⁹ What Graves and Hodge considered 'high spirits' however was interpreted in other circles as 'childishness, [...] inanity, fickleness and inconsistency.'⁵⁰ These pejorative connotations were used by some elements of the press who regularly undermined the idea that women over the age of twenty-one should be given the franchise by christening it 'the flapper vote'.⁵¹ Lehmann's descriptions of Etty, which alter from her initial appearance in *Invitation to the Waltz* to her position in *The Weather in the Streets*, convey changing social opinion regarding the flapper and her consequent reduction in social status. Although their publication dates are separated by only four years, the gap represented in the novels is over a decade. While Etty's flirtations and sense of romantic adventurousness appear very much *à la mode* in the years immediately after the war, by the thirties, when *The Weather in the Streets* is set she is made to seem anachronistic. These are the years after the flapper received the franchise and so assumed a position of responsibility in the nation, as well as years

⁴⁸ Melman, p. 1; Graves and Hodge, p. 39.

⁴⁹ Graves and Hodge, pp. 39-40

⁵⁰ Melman, p. 29

⁵¹ Graves and Hodge, pp.39-40; Melman, p.1

fraught with concern about war, the Spanish Civil War and the possibility of another war with Germany. Etty is depicted as out of place in the 'earnest down-to-bedrock' (73) family-orientated years of this decade, and grotesque in her continued impersonation of her younger self.

Etty then, is a modern spinster, and a comparison of her to other characters in *The Weather in the Streets* reveals how Lehmann negotiates the conflicting sexual and social precepts of the interwar period. Etty is an identifiably post-war character and the comparisons that Lehmann draws between her and Olivia, a woman separated from her husband and so also a relatively new kind of literary figure, highlight the increasingly permeable boundary between marriage and singleness. Both share a house, with Olivia, the less wealthy of the two acting as a paying guest, and both are fashionably modern, with cardinal red nail varnish and vermilion lipstick. Etty's sexuality and decadence are born witness to by her cocktails, the 'wisp of flowered chiffon' she wears to bed, and the aroma of 'powder, scent, toilet creams and chocolate truffles' (4) that pervades from her bedroom. These, and talk of her love affairs, distance her from Lehmann's characterisation of her 'repressed' spinsters, and Lehmann's treatment of her is very different. Miss Robinson and Mabel, women stamped as 'unmarriageable' and who have much in common with earlier literary incarnations of the spinster are pervaded with an air of dangerous sexuality. Paradoxically, the sexually active modern spinster is treated as a pitiable subject worthy of empathy; a harmless and eccentric aristocrat stuck in a time-warp as surely as Dickens' Miss Havisham. By *The Weather in the Streets* we are long past 'the far days when Etty had dazzled her cousins' (221) and professed that 'She never wanted to marry. [Although s]he could have a dozen times over' (73). She now refers to herself 'in the new line of tart self-mockery that was growing on her' as one of the 'superfluous women' (221), and her once fashionable androgyny has become sexless and skeletal: she has 'brittle white legs and bony knees' and her face is 'pale, extinct, ludicrously diminished without her makeup and the frame of her hair' (4). When Etty confesses a previous abortion to Olivia, Olivia is most surprised by the fact that the 'narrow miniature body' (226) can have become pregnant at all.

The termination of ETTY's pregnancy conveys the idea that the modern single girl is equally, though differently, sterile as the traditional spinster.

Lehmann's caricatured depiction of ETTY suggests what Humble has identified in middlebrow literature as a 'tendency to patronize the aristocracy: to view its remnants as entertaining misfits, social dinosaurs whose time has passed.'⁵² It casts ETTY, alongside Mabel, as a character who not only provides a foil to Lehmann's central protagonist by her marital status or sexuality, but also by her class. However, in Lehmann this tendency is clearly gendered. While ETTY, who is described as both sexually normative and wealthy, is relegated to the social periphery on account of her spinster status, her aristocratic cousin, Rollo, retains a position of social and narrative significance. Lehmann uses a Rabelasian scale of proportion where bigger is better to show the difference between the two.⁵³ Rollo, described by Olivia, is of a size commensurate with his social standing as heir to the Spencer estate: 'In the aura of cap-touching recognition and prompt service surrounding him, he appeared as with a spotlight on him, larger than life-size' (18). In contrast, ETTY has 'got a bit teeny-looking – shrunken' (73). Just as the size of Meldon Towers, the Spencer estate, both reflects and perpetuates the social ascendancy of the Spencers, so ETTY's house, repeatedly described in diminutive terms, is used by Lehmann to reflect the tiny social standing given to even a wealthy spinster. Lehmann forces the comparison in Rollo's visit to ETTY's house, where he fills the room like a gargantuan Alice in Wonderland. As he steps into 'the midget hall, his voice sounded so loud in it, sonorous, his shoulders blocked it, his head grazed ETTY's phony little chandelier' (141). Olivia describes society's view of her own husbandless status as 'ambiguous...anonymous' (7) indicating that social status is conferred on women by their husbands, and ETTY's house embodies this view. Despite her own career as a wealthy socialite, ETTY's house conveys a comparative social anonymity. Rollo, the embodiment of leisured and privileged

⁵² Humble, p. 70

⁵³ See Mikhail Bakhtin's 'Rabelais', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp.167-206.

society, cannot find it and declares, 'I've been up and down half a dozen little streets *I've never heard of*' (141 my emphasis).

Everything in Etty's 'doll's-house' is little or miniature, from her 'little chairs' to the 'miniature writing-table', and these descriptions reflect both her limited purchase on society and the social opinion of the life that she leads. Etty has 'curly doll's lashes' and a 'marionette surface' (226). Her house lacks any nurturing qualities: it never contains any food, is dense with cigarette smoke and fails to protect from the smog outside. The impression given by Lehmann's references to dolls and the internal disarray is of a child playing house, and this notion of the unmarried woman as a child is repeated throughout the novel. Childishness here does not imply any kind of sexual arrested development, but rather a social arrested development. Without having taken on the responsibilities of a husband and children, Etty is relegated to the status of a child herself. As I will show in regards to Lehmann's portrayal of Olivia, this is also a state that can be re-entered if a marriage fails; when Olivia, who is estranged from her husband is treated as a child Lehmann suggests that the social recognition of adulthood in women is closely related to their marital status. Lehmann firmly distinguishes between Etty and Olivia nevertheless, and despite the similar way in which they are socially positioned, she clearly encourages empathy with the latter and not the former, resisting caricature in her depiction of Olivia, and repeatedly overlapping the narrative with her stream of consciousness.

The Separated Wife as Single Woman

Lehmann's spinsters embody the sexual theories that were in popular circulation at the time that she wrote. Their unmarried status is key to their marginal social position, relative to their class, and despite Lehmann's acknowledgement of this, they are not treated with any real degree of sympathy. Their position is a reflection of the continued social belief in the centrality of wife- and motherhood to women's lives in the interwar period, and also suggests that any sympathy for virginal

unmarried women as 'unclaimed treasures' had waned by the late twenties and early thirties.⁵⁴ The rise in divorce rates following the First World War, however, meant that increasing numbers of women could not be subsumed into the traditional single women categories of spinster or widow. The position of these women, either separated or divorced from their husbands, posed a potential challenge to the ideal of marriage and the romantic narrative that Lehmann addresses through Olivia in *The Weather in the Streets*.

In her autobiography, Lehmann described the conflict that arose from the beliefs inculcated through her traditional upbringing and the disintegration of her own first marriage:

Girls should be pretty, modest, cultivated, home-loving, spirited but also docile; they should chastely await the coming of the right man, and then return his love and marry him and live as faithful, happy wives and mothers, ever after. All this I knew and was by temperament and upbringing fervently disposed towards [...] But I seemed already to be losing grip of on the dual responsibilities of my destiny. Unhappily married, childless, separated, wishing for a divorce.⁵⁵

The ideas conveyed here, that wife- and motherhood are the 'dual responsibilities of [women's] destiny', are at the centre of Lehmann's narratives, even as they are offset by the notion that either spinsterhood or unhappy marriage and separation are the reality in the post-war era. For Lehmann then, as for Rhys, marriage no longer provides the definitive happy ending to women's narratives, but Lehmann's intervention in the romance genre is to renegotiate the romantic paradigm, in such a way as to reincorporate the separated wife and to retain a belief in the ideal, if not the reality, of marriage. To do this, Lehmann distinguishes between the marriages of the older and the younger generation, and provides an ambivalent critique of the latter. By locating the distinction between them in the temporal fissure of the First World War she both divorces marriage, in its ideal and traditional incarnations from its unhappy modern variations and she removes the responsibility for failed marriages, to an extent, from her protagonists.

⁵⁴ For the phrase 'unclaimed treasures' see: Holden, 'Imaginary Widows', p. 391.

⁵⁵ Lehmann *The Swan in the Evening*, p. 68.

Lehmann contextualised her own sense of private failure following the end of her first marriage within the broader framework of a widespread sense of social failure following the war, when she asked herself what her new place in the social order was: 'What with the general post-war fissuring and crack-up of all social and moral structures, coupled with the abject collapse of my private world, it was easy to fear I was nowhere'.⁵⁶ In *The Weather in the Streets*, the similarly situated Olivia Curtis asks the same question: 'Where is my place? What is this travesty I am fixed in? How do I get out? Is this, after all, what was always going to be?' (72), and Lehmann's text functions as a response. It resituates the failure of Olivia's marriage away from her as an individual and locates it as part of 'the crack up of all social and moral structures', and in addition seeks to resolve the question of her 'place'. In middle-class tradition, the woman's trajectory from spinster to wife was marked by a journey from the parental to the marital home, as well as an ascent in the social hierarchy. In an era in which the rates of employment for middle-class women were increasing but still low, marriage thus frequently determined women's physical and figurative placement in society. In *The Weather in the Streets* Lehmann suggests that for the modern, and particularly urban-dwelling, generation marriage was of less relevance, but the full force of its continued significance is experienced by Olivia when she travels to the village community of her childhood to visit her parents. It is when thinking of this community, 'on Tulverton platform, in the Little Compton bus, walking down to the post office' (7), that the thought of introducing herself as a woman separated from her husband, plunges Olivia into an existential as well as a social panic: 'At once her mind started to scurry and scramble, looking for footholds, for crannies to hide in: because my position is ambiguous, because I'm anonymous' (7). A number of critics have suggested that the positions of housewife and mother were held up to be the definitive roles for women, during the interwar period. This view has been queried, and initially seems arguable even within this novel, given Olivia's briefly mentioned Cambridge education. Lehmann's equation of Olivia's marital status with a sense of placelessness and voicelessness however,

⁵⁶ Lehmann, *The Swan in the Evening*, p.69.

does causally link marriage, and not education, with women's ability to define themselves. It confirms the central importance of wife- and motherhood to Lehmann's texts, even if these roles were juxtaposed with other opportunities in reality.

Lehmann's response to this social placelessness is, in the style of a fairy tale or fable, to offer three houses for Olivia to live in, each of which embodies a particular narrative, and social position. Like Rhys' novels then, Lehmann's examine a certain feeling of homelessness on the part of her protagonists, but here it is differently articulated. Not only do Lehmann's women exist within a different class to those written about by Rhys, they are also much less socially marginal: there *are* homes in Lehmann's texts, but unhappily for her protagonists, none of them are quite right. This sense of homelessness is not literal, but is described in Lehmann's *A Note in Music* through the German word 'Heimweh', or 'homesickness'.⁵⁷ *A Note in Music* is for the most part an examination of unhappy marriages, but it is worth considering here in regard to Lehmann's use of this term. In this novel, Lehmann's second, Grace Fairfax's life is divided in two by the First World War, and although the actions that occur on either side of this divide are not entirely the consequences of the war, they are broadly coloured by pre-war optimism, and post-war defeat. Singleness, the countryside and life with her father characterise Grace's happy pre-war days, while her post-war ones are marked by marriage, life in an industrial northern town, and depression. Talking about her youth in a tiny country village, she comments, 'I'm still homesick' (134), and another character summarises her with the words 'nostalgia' and 'Heimweh' (98). Crucially, this nostalgia and homesickness are not for a life that was, but for one that prior to the war she hoped would be: her 'life with the person who was going to mean so much to me' (251). Homesickness here then, is founded on nostalgia for a life that has never been, a life that has been projected on to the past; it is a type of historical inversion. In this sense, in *The Weather in the Streets*, which is also pervaded by a sense of 'Heimweh',

⁵⁷ Rosamond Lehmann, *A Note in Music* (London: Virago, 1982), p. 98. All further references will be made in the text.

the homes that Olivia visits are all doomed to be failures: situated in the present, none can live up to the golden age of a projected pre-war past.

What Lehmann does effectively convey through her detailed descriptions of these homes however, is the difference between a pre- and a post-war way of life. Virginia Woolf suggested that 'It is always an adventure to enter a new room; for the lives and characters of its owners have distilled their atmosphere into it, and directly we enter it we breast some new wave of emotion,' and Lehmann's rooms convey the ideologies of their inhabitants as well as the economic and moral shifts of the interwar years as they affected, and were affected by, changes to the domestic home.⁵⁸ In these rooms, 'time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible' and 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.'⁵⁹ Through Olivia's negotiation of these spaces Lehmann conveys the complexities of the separated woman's social position in Britain between the wars. The first house, the house of the spinster, has been considered above. Spatially confined and temporally stunted (as we have seen, life cannot be perpetuated here), Ety's house conveys the impression that the life of the unmarried woman, however sexually active, is 'dry, stranded, sterile' (71): it is a narrative that cannot extend into the future, but is rather, a full stop. The second house in which Lehmann places Olivia is the house of the married couple, the traditional destination of the romantic narrative. This is described by Lehmann in a number of manifestations, which I will consider fully below. The third and final house offers a midway point between both. It is a kind of Charleston, the country home of Vanessa Bell, and a place that has become synonymous with a kind of interwar bohemianism. In her description of the studio and country house of Olivia's artistic friend Simon, Lehmann offers an alternative position for the unmarried woman in society that includes artistic freedom and non-traditional romantic attachments. Here there is the potential to be artistically creative, but in

⁵⁸ Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1961), pp. 22-36 (p.34)..

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', p. 84.

contradistinction to Bell's life at Charleston, Lehmann offers this as an alternative to childbearing, and not a space in which children and art can co-exist.

Olivia's parents' home and Meldon Towers, the estate of their friends, the Spencers, embody the values of the English upper middle and upper classes respectively. They are distinguished from Olivia's 'unhealthy London life' (197) by their rural location and traditional values. In a striking image at the beginning of *The Weather in the Streets*, Olivia leaves an internally and externally befogged London, Eddy's house 'dense [...] with yesterday's cigarettes' (1), and the city itself in a regular 'pea-souper'. On the train journey to her parents' house the air clears both literally and figuratively. This journey takes Olivia away from her modern, urban, single life to the values of the recent past: her adolescence prior to her marriage, a time described in *Invitation to the Waltz*, when country life and family were central, and romance still a hoped for possibility. The Curtis and Spencer homes are decorated and furnished in the Victorian style and permeated with the values of the era. In *Invitation to the Waltz*, Lehmann describes the Curtis house at length, appealing to each of the reader's senses until the upper middle-class English tradition pervading the atmosphere is palpable: 'You see a room crowded with ponderous cupboards, sideboards, tables [...] worn leather armchairs pulled up to hot coal fires: you smell pot-pourri and lavender in china bowls; you taste roast beef and apple tart on Sundays' (*Invitation* 4). Over all shines the 'uncompromising glare of the enormous central light,' a light that provides an absolute clarity of vision that is shared by Mrs Curtis and Lady Spencer the women of the older generation who run these respective homes and act 'as a sort of standard for suitable behaviour' (*Weather* 22) for Olivia throughout the novel. These country homes, however, do not purely exist in the past; Lehmann uses them as an index of the changing times. In the ten years' interval between *Invitation* and *The Weather in the Streets*, things have changed; the elements of economic decline that were barely perceptible in the first novel are now made obvious by Lehmann, while the emotional toll of the First World War is sustained. Olivia and Kate have substituted the omniscient central light with candles, and the resulting 'enormous areas of shade where anything might be

happening' (55), work well to convey both the move from the clarity of adolescence to the ambiguity of adulthood on the part of Olivia, but also the limited light shed by an ageing generation whose values their children find impossible to transpose onto modernity.

Through Olivia's return to her parents' home and her visit to Meldon Towers, Lehmann portrays the higher social position that is conferred on the wife in comparison to the single woman. In comparison to Olivia, her sister, 'Kate, bless her, had slipped with no trouble into a suitable marriage within easy motoring distance. [...] [A]s the mother of four fine healthy children she had established herself beyond all question in all eyes' (52). This marital hierarchy is conveyed by Lehmann in the physical positions occupied by married and single women in the home, where Kate, Olivia's similarly aged sister is shown to be more on a par with their mother than with Olivia. Kate's established social position as a wife with children is shown by her synchronicity with her own mother, 'the two pairs of hands [in] their busy conspiracy,' (32) knit simultaneously while Olivia's lower position on the floor is suggestive of an infant playing. Olivia has returned home but without the symbols of female maturity, a husband or children of her own, she is not afforded the position of an adult. Instead, similarly to Etty, she is described as 'like an old child' (40), by her married sister; she is given Bovril, and repeatedly positioned in the nursery. At the Spencers' home after dinner she is positioned among the women in exactly the same way. While the others discuss their children, and seated, perform the domestic tasks of knitting and sewing, Olivia sits on a low stool at the feet of Blanche, playing with a ball of wool. However, as in Holden's continuum where social approbation is directly proportional to proximity to marriage, Lehmann makes clear that Olivia, by virtue of her dissolved marriage, inhabits a higher position than her never-married cousin Etty. When Olivia's mother refers to her previously favoured niece, '[t]he special indulgent Etty voice was no longer used. Etty had not married – not even unfortunately' (27).

While Lehmann's positioning of Olivia conveys the marital hierarchy that continued to exist in the interwar period, she undercuts this with an irony directed at the disjunction between traditional social values and modern realities. Lehmann embodies the erosion of a traditional way of life and 'post-war fissuring and crack up of all social and moral structures' in the perceptible disintegration of the Curtis and Spencer houses, and she critiques the nature of modern marriage. *The Weather in the Streets* begins with Olivia's father invalidated through illness, and with this event her parental home is 'narrowed down to an inalterable invalid routine' (197). As the patriarchal heads of the Spencer and Curtis families shuffle towards death, debilitated variously by dementia and illness, their physical homes are fractured. There is no money to entail on the Curtis children and the Spencers are forced to sell off some of their priceless paintings. The pervasive feeling is that for the older generation it is 'the end of a chapter': a feeling that renders conversation at a Meldon Towers' dinner party 'like reading a *Times* obituary notice' (79). While Wendy Pollard identifies the 'high comedy and social satire, shot through with a sexual *frisson*' that characterises Olivia's arch and performative response to the grumbling older generation during this dinner, it is not, as she suggests, irreconcilable with Lehmann's 'obvious admiration for a declining way of life'.⁶⁰ Feeling like an 'alien upon this hearth' (67) in the 'pillared spaces' and 'dulled splendour' (60) of Meldon Towers, Olivia plays up, but this does not diminish her envious respect for a '[b]irthright of leisure and privilege, of deputed washing and mending' (67).

Gaston Bachelard has suggested that 'the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting'.⁶¹ Conversely, Lehmann's depiction of the physical degeneration of Meldon Towers and the Spencer household, and their inmates, is suggestive, not just of the end of an era, but of the disappearance of an entire template for living. The blueprint of marriage

⁶⁰ Wendy Pollard, 'Rosamond Lehmann's Political Philosophy', in *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender Politics and History*, ed. and intro. by Maroula Joannou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 87-99 (p. 93); John Atkins, quoted in Pollard, p.93.

⁶¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), p. 15.

and motherhood, embodied in Olivia's parents' home through the space of the nursery, and also the relative financial ease that the houses of the older generation gesture towards, are shown by Lehmann to be inaccessible to the younger generation of Olivia's class. Implicit in this image of the disintegration of the traditional family home, is the idea that the romantic narrative, with its drive towards the happily-ever-after marriage in the family home, can no longer come to fruition, and yet to use Bachelard's terms this is a way of inhabiting, or of being, that Olivia has 'engraved within' her. As Judy Simons notes the world that Lehmann depicts in *The Weather in the Streets* is one that 'creates insoluble problems for women whose imaginations are determined by a romantic inheritance.'⁶² The phrase is significant, and recalls Vera Brittain's description of the post-war world as one 'in which second-rate masculine ability would struggle helplessly with almost insoluble problems because the first-rate were gone from a whole generation.'⁶³ In *Invitation* and *Weather*, Lehmann clearly 'lay[s] the blame on the war', for the 'insoluble problems' of interwar romance. While the breaking down of the Curtis and Spencer houses conveys the consequences of an era of economic uncertainty, it more broadly suggests that the romantic dream of home, husband and family can no longer be realised, and the reason implicitly given is the war. Early in *Invitation*, the question is asked: 'where are the young men?' (4). Lehmann's answer is conveyed through her division of male characters into two categories that echo Brittain: 'the first rate [are] gone', and the men who remain are necessarily 'second-rate'.

The valorisation of the war dead, not only as heroes, but as the best and brightest of their generation, was understandably widespread in the interwar period, where it combined with many other 'mourning strategies' undertaken by a traumatised nation.⁶⁴ In *Dusty Answer* it is Charlie, 'beautiful as a prince' (13) and 'a romantic

⁶² Judy Simons, 'The Vanishing Hero: Men and Modernity in Rosamond Lehmann's 'The Weather in the Streets'', *Critical Survey*, 10 (1998), 95-104 (p. 97).

⁶³ Brittain, p. 232.

⁶⁴ Stacey Gillis, 'Consoling Fictions: Mourning, World War One and Dorothy L Sayers', in *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. by Patricia Rae (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 185-197 (p. 186).

illusion' (46) who is killed in the war. In *Weather*, it is Rollo's older brother, Guy, who has been killed, a 'gay, brilliant, winning, virtuous, brave [...] pattern of the eldest son,' who 'died for England: going over the top, at the head of his men, shot through the heart...All as it should be' (80-81). The portrait of Guy in Meldon Towers depicts him as 'an Edwardian dream-child with romantic hair' and this picture reflects the unchanging, immortalised image of youth and heroism through which the war dead were portrayed as part of a past that 'c[a]me to stand in relation to the present as an ossified and dreadful but unavoidable memorial to lost possibility.'⁶⁵

Lehmann's depiction of the war dead as impossibly good, which reflects widespread practice in the interwar years, has consequences for her depiction both of the men who remain, and the romantic relationships of which they are a part. The pre-war period, which I discussed above in relation to *A Note in Music*, becomes understood as a golden age: one in which a different, happier, romantic, future was not only possible but assured. Lehmann, whose late adolescence coincided with the end of the war wrote of the time that she 'had it lodged in my subconscious mind that the wonderful unknown man I *should* have married had been killed in France', a notion that meant by extension, that the men she did meet were ones that she was not meant to marry.⁶⁶ In *Dusty Answer*, *Invitation* and *Weather*, Lehmann portrays the remaining men of Olivia and Judith's generation as almost necessarily 'second-rate'. Some, who have fought, and so should be considered heroes are diminished through trauma and injury like the blind and dependent Timmy. Others are depicted as unsuitable for marriage for a variety of reasons: some are nihilistic or feckless, and like Archie, Rollo's renegade cousin, have 'no part of the pink sunset glow of the past' (*Weather* 81). While Rollo gently mocks the belief that 'any one dead is automatically superior to any one alive' (81) it is a belief that pervades the text's romantic narrative, and he characterises himself in relation to his brother as an example of 'the inferior article's aptitude for survival' (82). Repeatedly, Lehmann

⁶⁵ Hinds, p. 305

⁶⁶ Hastings, p. 61 my emphasis.

also uses homosexuality as a means to denote the impossibility of heterosexual romance. In *Dusty Answer*, *A Note in Music* and in *Weather*, Judith, Grace and Olivia all identify a potential love interest who is gay. In *Note*, this strategy is made clear. Hugh Miller clearly embodies Lehmann's 'wonderful unknown man' (251); Grace recognises him as the image of her pre-war ideal 'the person who was going to mean so much to me,' but he is distanced from her by both his much younger age, and his love for a male university colleague.

Lehmann's depiction of post-war marriage as a degraded institution is a direct consequence of this idea that survivors of the war are necessarily 'second-rate'. Again, this appears to have been a widespread belief. *The Times* considered Lehmann's depiction of marriage in *The Weather in the Streets* 'completely typical of the day; here we have the old generation, ill or dying, nursed with tenderness and self-restraint by their wives; the new generation, loosening the bonds of marriage or making marriage the excuse for selfishness and tyranny.'⁶⁷ Certainly, modern marriage as described by Lehmann, is rotten: pockmarked by affairs and disillusionment, and distinguished from the ideal romantic narrative, which in Lehmann's construction is both emotionally and economically transformative. Rollo Spencer is both hero and anti-hero, since he is Olivia's lover, but one whose infidelity to his wife is the basis for the novel's action. His sister Marigold, is similarly adulterous: a mother of two whose children are never seen, and who is described by Olivia as a drunken tart. Even Kate's marriage is acknowledged as a disappointing second choice, and while she is pictured surrounded by her children, her husband is never seen. Kate it seems has chosen social validation over romance; she 'isn't wasted. But there should have been something else' (246). Olivia's own marriage has collapsed before the beginning of the novel, and describing it in retrospect she does so with the same lexicon used to describe her life with Etty. Both experiences leave her childless, and are marked by 'the everlasting war on grubbiness' (71), loneliness and relative poverty. Summarising their relationship to

⁶⁷ 'New Novels', *The Times*, 07 July 1936, p. 11.

her estranged husband she notes, 'there is no health in us' (294), a description that could be applied to all of the romantic relationships in the novel.

This lack of health, it should be noted, is attributed by Lehmann only to the middle and upper classes, of the younger generation, where it is repeatedly conveyed through the inability of her protagonists to have children, whether for social reasons or reasons of health. Etty and Olivia both have abortions after extra-marital affairs. Grace, who is unhappily married, has a baby and also buys a puppy, which both die. Even a young injured swallow that she tries to help, thinking that 'for the first time [...] she had touched something to save not to destroy it' (*Note* 192), does not survive. In contrast, Grace's servant Annie becomes pregnant after a brief affair with a salesman, and also nurses a stray kitten. Comparing Grace with Annie, Holden notes the fecundity of the working class woman in comparison to the sterility of the middle class wife, but if we compare this novel to *The Weather in the Streets* a larger pattern seems to emerge.⁶⁸ After all, Rollo's wife Nicola becomes pregnant, and Kate and Marigold despite disappointing marriages are both mothers. Lehmann deploys childlessness here to demonstrate the failure of the romantic ideal and to indicate the sterility of a life in which this is not achieved. Grace is married, but unhappily so; she is economically secure, but lives in what is portrayed as a grim northern town. Olivia is married but separated and also living in an urban environment; the man she loves is married to someone else, and she is relatively poor. In the gaps in these women's lives we can read Lehmann's romantic ideal through its absence: passionate love, marriage, economic security, a country home. These elements are inextricable in *The Weather in the Streets* to the extent that the failure of the ideal in Olivia's first marriage is related almost entirely in terms of economic paucity and urban environment, rather than as a failure of love: 'The smutty window, the brown street blighted with noise and rain [...] the sheets are dirty [...] my shoes are shabby. I shall never have a child in the country' (71). Grace and Olivia are childless in different ways: one has had a baby who has died, and the

⁶⁸ Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage*, p. 123.

other has had an abortion, but read together their experiences suggest the unhealthy condition of modern relationships.

In contrast to the thwarted life of the spinster and the inaccessible romantic ideal of a traditional marriage, forever locked in the past, Lehmann offers one further narrative possibility and home to Olivia. In contradistinction to the excluding domestic ideology offered by the parental homes and the domestic vacuum of ETTY's townhouse, she offers the bohemian, artistic and intellectual environment of her coterie of friends, which centres round Olivia's friend Simon in his studio and country house. In these spaces the creativity of the artists within is represented as another form of reproduction, one which potentially counters the childlessness of the group, and thus also of Olivia. Simon's house and studio are distinguished both from ETTY's house, where childlessness is envisaged as a temporal halt, and Meldon Towers, the home of the Spencers, which Olivia considers 'dead, full of dead objects' (140). In contrast, in Simon's rooms artistic creativity is presented as an alternative form of temporal continuity, and the spaces themselves described, 'like a being with its own life and idiosyncracies' (198).

Wherever the eye fell some mark of liveliness, some kind of wit, selection, invention – the vitality of shape, pattern, colour making an aesthetic unity – the creative hand, the individual mind mattering – the dirt, untidiness, poor materials not mattering at all. Thinking: the room lives. (140)

It is this bohemian set of people to whom Olivia repairs after the end of her relationship with Rollo, and with whom the narrative finally 'places' her. However, this resolution is not unambiguous. Simon's death from typhoid appears to be another dispiriting instance of the disintegration inherent to Lehmann's depiction of modernity, especially since Olivia has placed her faith for the future in him: 'He would shift this dead-lock, this meaninglessness. After he comes, I shall see what to do' (306). However, through his death Simon effectively secures Olivia's future, by providing her with a competency of two hundred pounds a year as well as a shared home in the country. His death thus affects a narrative ending very similar to the function of marriage in the traditional romance plot, and it is this correlation that I will explore further below.

The single woman as mistress and 'imaginary widow'

In *The Weather in the Streets* none of the three narrative 'homes' that Lehmann offers to Olivia are presented to the reader as being wholly fulfilling and Lehmann undermines each at the point of presentation. The life of the spinster is presented as unhealthy and sterile and modern marriage is conveyed as a largely degraded institution. Even the artistic bohemian home is not wholly convincing. While the creative life it embodies gestures towards a future that the other narratives deny, within it Olivia remains bound to a romantic ideal, dreaming of a life as a wife and mother, while remaining creatively frustrated, and unable to write. In contrast to these 'housed' and thus socially acceptable possibilities, Lehmann offers the story of Rollo and Olivia's affair. Through this Lehmann renegotiates the 'insoluble problems' of romance by positioning the single woman as mistress. The role of mistress allows Lehmann to sidestep any perceived psychological or biological consequences of sexual abstinence, as seen in Mabel and Miss Robinson, but also to recast the refusal to remain married as a positive act of romantic idealism. Lynne Pearce suggests that there are parallels between the wartime romance and the extra-marital affair highlighting that both bear 'the same death penalty [...] the probability that, at some yet unspecified point in the future, it will be brought to an abrupt and violent end.'⁶⁹ As a relationship therefore that is bound to fail for reasons beyond the female protagonist's control, Rollo and Olivia's affair bears narrative similarity from Olivia's perspective to pre-war romances involving soldiers sent to the front. Lehmann encourages this reading in several ways. She recasts Olivia's contentious role of mistress to one of 'imaginary widow' through repeated comparisons of Olivia and Nicola, Rollo's wife, and confers legitimacy on Olivia by centralising her narrative voice. She also uses the strands of the narrative to create a ghostly composite of a relationship that could have been. I will discuss these below.

⁶⁹ Lynne Pearce, *Romance Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 129.

The different social positions occupied by Nicola and Olivia are conveyed spatially by Lehmann. Nicola's legitimacy is twofold: she is married, but moreover she has married into the aristocracy, where her position is couched 'warm, rich and snug' in the 'first-class comfortable home' that houses the couple's marriage. In contrast to this Olivia is 'outside and [has] nothing' (182): she is separated from her husband, is having an affair, and has no money. Visiting Rollo at his home she is forced to lean over the railings and knock on the window rather than going to the door. This position of outsider is never presented as being subversive however; firstly because Olivia never threatens Rollo's marriage, and secondly because their affair is contextualised against others with more at stake. Olivia speculates 'I wonder how many women in England in such a situation [...] nobody ever knows. They go to work, they cut up the children's dinner, [...] and go to movies with their husbands' (153) and by comparison her own situation appears less hypocritical. Olivia's childlessness in this context and her separation, make her less culpable than the mothers and wives who do the same. Even her abortion upholds rather than threatens the status quo, allowing Rollo's marriage to continue unthreatened. As Olivia notes at the end of the relationship, the events of the affair have not affected Rollo's marriage, but rather have been entirely constrained and dictated by it 'never once, not even in the joyful, grateful, amazing beginning days, had he...no, not once...put her second - broken a plan made for, by, with her to stay with me...Not once' (184). Nevertheless, Lehmann suggests Olivia's romantic legitimacy in a number of ways. Olivia's voice dominates the narrative, while Nicola's is entirely muted. Moreover, Lehmann refers back to the events of *Invitation to the Waltz*, ten years previously, to suggest that Olivia, rather than Nicola, is the natural candidate for Rollo's wife.

Invitation ends when, after an intimate conversation between Olivia and Rollo, Rollo is called over by Nicola, who is resplendent in a white dress that prefigures their eventual marriage. Olivia, on the brink of maturity, ends the novel both scared and excited that 'everything is about to begin' (*Invitation* 231), a feeling that stems in part from her encounter with Rollo. Ten years later, in *Weather* Lehmann brings

Olivia back to the same physical spot, for a dinner at Meldon Towers, where this time it is Olivia who is wearing a white dress. Despite Olivia's failed marriage, and Rollo's still existent one, Lehmann allows their affair to begin almost as a romance, by emphasising this continuity. 'Now I am back at the beginning,' Olivia comments, 'now begins what I dreamed was to be' (127). The affair itself is presented as a simulacrum of marriage, and in this sense Olivia's status as a separated wife, is central to Lehmann's depiction of her. It allows Lehmann to convey her as attractive and sexually experienced (i.e. not 'left on the shelf'), but chaste in the sense that she is not someone who has previously had sex outside of marriage. One of the reasons given for the failure of her first relationship is that Olivia was too 'good' to consider living with Ivor beforehand: 'We were in love so we must be married. I never thought of anything else. I suppose one never gets away from a good upbringing' (39). Moreover, her separation distances her from any accusations of adultery in relation to her own marriage. At the same time, Olivia's first marriage also allows Lehmann to show that Olivia has the domestic qualities of a wife. Olivia fries sausages for Rollo which 'delight[s] him' with her domesticity: "'You are a domestic little creature aren't you?'" (159). Her experience of being a wife herself, and moreover, one without servants, depicts her as having more in common with middle-class interwar domestic reality than the privileged Nicola does. Even when she does 'get away' from her 'good upbringing' during her affair, she prepares a proxy house for Rollo in the vacant flat of her friend Jocelyn, preferring it to the more obviously tawdry spaces of hotels: 'I didn't want even the shadow of a situation the world recognises and tolerates as long as it's sub rosa' (157). For Olivia then this is a romance rather than an affair, and Lehmann further highlights the similarities between wife and mistress through their simultaneous pregnancies although Olivia's, existing 'outside' respectable society, is not allowed to come to term.

Olivia's affair can be seen, alongside the disillusioned marriages that pervade *Weather*, as an example that modern relationships can only be conducted on a 'rotten knavish level' (290), and her abortion, a consequence of this, but this

diminishes what is written in the main as a very real romance. By a sleight of hand, Lehmann depicts the affair as both present and absent in the text, and in this way she creates it as a relationship that should have been, but isn't. Rollo's marriage in this context stands as a proxy for the war: it prevents his relationship with Olivia coming to fruition and renders him both the handsome and moneyed romantic hero that Olivia cannot marry, and the post-war married philanderer. Olivia's abortion can thus be read alongside a number of descriptions that create this illusion of both presence and absence and disperse any sense that the relationship is actively subversive. Lehmann locates the affair in what Bakhtin terms 'empty time.'⁷⁰ It is 'not in the world at all' but in a spatio-temporal hiatus, 'a pause without even a breath' (211). When Olivia describes its beginning she says: 'It was then that the time began when there wasn't any time. The journey was in the dark, going on without end or beginning, without landmarks, bearings lost' (137). Moreover, 'in this time there was no sequence, no development,' each moment is both instantaneous 'existing without relation to the time before and after' (138), and without effect. Describing her room after the first time that she and Rollo have been intimate, Olivia notes that the ephemerality of their relationship is such that it leaves no worldly trace: 'I smoothed out the bed clothes and pillow [...] and tidied everything, opened the window to let out the smell of his cigarettes – to blow it all away. Turn down the fire, switch off the lamp. There! He's vanished' (147). Furthermore, the affair, related almost entirely in the second part of the narrative is imbued, even at the moment of telling, with nostalgia. Olivia relates the events in the past tense even while the affair is still in progress. As such Lehmann contains the entire affair through its narrative tense, suggesting that even as it evolves, its end has already been determined.

The sense of Olivia as an 'imaginary widow', rather than as a mistress, is emphasised by Lehmann who juxtaposes her relationships with Rollo and Simon, to create a composite romantic ideal that contrasts to Olivia's first marriage, and gestures towards the idea of widowhood. Rollo and Simon are diametrically

⁷⁰ Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', p. 91.

opposed: Rollo is wholly corporeal, aristocratic and ignorant about literature and art, while Simon, a bohemian artist is given an other-worldly presence throughout. He is a 'mystical touchstone' (157), 'compassion itself', and 'as patient as Christ on the Cross.' Neither is fully available to Olivia; Rollo is married, and although Olivia is close to Simon, their love is not physical, and there is a suggestion that he is gay: 'I love Simon, but that's different again, never to sleep together that's certain' (146). While Simon and Rollo are juxtaposed throughout the text they never meet, and the implication that they form two halves of a romantic ideal is emphasised when Simon's death occurs simultaneously with the end of Olivia and Rollo's affair. Olivia receives letters from Anna about Simon, and from Rollo in the same post, and her letter to Anna about Rollo's accident crosses Anna's letter about Simon's death. Olivia's grief over the end of her relationship is therefore inextricable from her mourning for the death of Simon. Moreover, despite the differences between Simon and the 'lost generation', Simon's death gestures towards the death of Lehmann's 'unknown soldier'. While Simon dies of tuberculosis more than a decade after the war, he crucially dies in France, and he leaves behind a legacy of guilt for those who survive: 'all the guilt and corruption, the sickness...Dad, Rollo...me...We didn't die – not us: it was Simon, the innocent one' (362). Nevertheless, it is through Simon's death that Lehmann effects a resolution to Olivia's narrative that bears the hallmark of romantic closure even while the romantic ideal is absent. Simon's will provides Olivia with an income and a home, crucially located in the country, in the stead of the marriage that traditionally ends the romance plot. Both of Olivia's relationships therefore are given an other-worldly dimension by Lehmann. Her affair with Rollo approximates to a marriage that could have been, but cannot exist because of factors beyond Olivia's control, while her relationship with Simon affects the worldly marital resolution of economic security through his death, despite a lack of any kind of consummation. It is only by giving more attention to Olivia's heretofore largely unacknowledged relationship with Simon that Lehmann's portmanteau romantic resolution is made evident. In this composite of the spiritual and physical, the aristocratic and bohemian,

Lehmann's romantic ideal is made whole, and is existent within her text as an exemplar while she simultaneously deplors its absence in the world.

Conclusion

Lehmann's depictions of single women initially appear to follow the pattern of the prevailing discourses of her day. Her derisory portraits of virginal spinsters and her presentation of 'border-line types' incorporate into her narratives the concerns about the consequences of sexual repression and the increasing public knowledge of, but ambivalence towards, homosexuality. Moreover, she retains and promotes the conservative ideal of the primacy of wife and motherhood as an objective for women. However, her adherence to a romantic ideal, and her deep rooted disappointment at the conditions of modern life that render it incapable of being fulfilled lead her to a position where she opposes the prevailing social hierarchy of women, as well as the conservative moral code. Lehmann presents her single women protagonists more sympathetically than she does the wives of the younger generation, and while she acknowledges the social primacy of the latter group, the former are given a moral high-ground to occupy despite their transgression of moral boundaries. In *The Weather in the Steets*, Lehmann stretches this approbation further, reconfiguring the boundaries of the romance genre to enfold the single woman, and presenting Olivia not as a mistress, but as a wife that could have been. Olivia reflects the increasing visibility of divorcees and women separated from their husbands, and her new ambiguous social position is central to Lehmann's manipulation of the romance. It allows Lehmann to distance Olivia from the sexual pathology of the spinster, to identify that she has the qualities desirable in a wife, but also to retain the ideal of marriage while commenting on its spoiled modern state.

In many ways Lehmann shares ground with Rhys. Both writers retain a respect for marriage and romance in their novels, which is not borne out by the experiences of their protagonists, but which is allowed to exist in attenuated form nonetheless.

Their differences can be found in the class of woman of whom they write, as well as in the form of their writing, but they share a certain 'structure of feeling' which invites a comparison of texts across the divide between the middlebrow and modernism, or rather, suggests the artificial nature of such a divide.⁷¹ While Rhys' fiction is more textually challenging than Lehmann's, Lehmann herself uses shifts in tense, as well as strategies including free indirect discourse, which suggest she is more aesthetically experimental than the 'popular educated novelist' Queenie Leavis disparaged her as.⁷² Rhys' novels retain their resemblance to earlier Victorian fall narratives while they disrupt their coherence from within. In contrast, in *The Weather in the Streets*, Lehmann both pushes the limits of acceptable middle-class morality while restructuring the romance narrative. Her conclusion, which gestures towards fantasy in its portmanteau construction, may be dismissed as an, albeit dark, 'fairy-tale ending', but its response to the disappointments of modernity is innovative. Where the difficulty comes in Lehmann's renditions of single women is in their fundamental passivity. Again, like Rhys, she denies to her protagonists any outlet or self-expression other than that offered through romance and marriage. In regard to Rhys' fiction, critics have argued that the social position of her impoverished, if literate, ex-chorus girls, is reason enough for this.⁷³ In Lehmann's fiction, the Cambridge education of her protagonists, as much as the coterie of bohemian artists who surround Olivia, jars in this respect. It is as if, while paying lip service to the idea of women's capabilities, Lehmann reserves the right to view women's higher education and the possibility of life outside of marriage as 'odd' 'disreputable' and 'insignifican[t]', something that it is 'best not to refer to' (*Dusty*, 259): descriptions coloured with an irony in *Dusty Answer* that seems less convincing when read against Lehmann's narratives as a whole. In the writing of another 'popular educated novelist' however, who I now turn to, the spaces of

⁷¹ 'Structure of feeling' is Raymond Williams' term for the lived experience of the culture of any given period. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), pp. 41-71.

⁷² Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', p. 334.

⁷³ Carr, pp. 6-7.

women's higher education are used to provide not only a home for the spinster, but a valued position within the community.

3. Dangerous Women: Detecting Deviance in the Professional and Domestic Worlds of Dorothy L Sayers.

Women are dangerous. Especially women after ten o'clock at night. All women who go about the streets alone at this hour may be suspected, in spite of the growing army of women doctors, political secretaries, programme sellers, office cleaners, midwives, actresses, members of Parliament, rescue workers, night-school teachers, journalists, hospital nurses, and all those other workers [...] to say nothing about the millions of ordinary people who sometimes stay up late.

(Winifred Holtby, 'Ladies in Restaurants', 1930)¹

In March 1930, Winifred Holtby wrote in support of a public protest that was to take place the following week at Kensington Town Hall. The meeting had been called to protest against 'the refusal of certain restaurants, cafes, and other places of refreshment to admit women, unaccompanied by men, after certain hours,' in order to 'safeguard public morality' because it was assumed that they were prostitutes. Holtby herself had been refused service under the regulations, and in her article she implies how outdated they are by providing an extensive list of women's public roles. In the novels of Rhys and Lehmann, despite their critiques and interventions into traditional narratives for women, this sense of the broader opportunities open to women is largely absent. Unmarried women or women separated from their husbands, in these novels, remain largely constrained by their marital status, which variously denotes romantic, social and/or economic failure. In this chapter on Dorothy L. Sayers, I now turn to a writer who offers to the unmarried woman a wide variety of roles, and a genre that enables her to do so. In Sayers' novels, unmarried women are writers, artists, copywriters, typists, and university dons; they are also victims, sleuths, and murderers.

The legislation identified by Holtby as anachronistic, was by no means the only form of spatial control that applied to women during the interwar period. Nor were

¹ Winifred Holtby, 'Ladies in Restaurants: Are we so dangerous?', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 March 1930, p. 8.

these regulations purely existing relics from the past, that modernity was slowly but surely reforming. In *Unnatural Death*, published in 1927, Dorothy L. Sayers conveys the passing of time by briefly describing the events of that summer:

Foxlaw won the Gold Cup and the earth opened at Oxhey and swallowed up somebody's front garden. *Oxford decided that women were dangerous*, and the electric hare consented to run at White City. England's supremacy was challenged at Wimbledon [...].²

Sayers' reference to the danger posed by women to Oxford alludes to a statute agreed by the University in June 1927 to cap the number of women students to a proportion of not more than one woman to four men, and to prevent the formation of more all-women 'societies', as they were known prior to being given the status of colleges.³ The statute was reported in several articles in *The Times* and through letters to its editor, and *The Times* listed arguments in favour of the cap to include the inferior intellectual ability of women and the declining moral standards at the university, for which, it was suggested, women students were responsible.

In *Unnatural Death* Sayers renders the idea of women at university as dangerous supremely ironic through context. At the centre of the novel, which is not set in Oxford, is a woman who really is dangerous: responsible for three deaths, three attempted murders and the framing of an innocent man. Moreover, this is a woman of ambiguous sexuality, whose seduction of a young woman prior to her murder seems to suggest an inextricable link between a thinly veiled lesbianism and her criminality. In this chapter I consider how Sayers negotiates these very different ideas of women as dangerous within a genre that demands each character be allotted the role of sleuth, criminal, victim or onlooker. In my examination of *Unnatural Death*, *The Documents in the Case* (1930) and *Gaudy Night* (1935), I suggest that while Sayers is progressive in her portrayal of certain kinds of modern women, negating the threat of women in higher education for example, Sayers' views on sexuality and her own class bias are repeatedly transposed onto the generic

² Dorothy L. Sayers, *Unnatural Death* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), p. 227, my emphasis. All further references will be made in the text.

³ Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?*, p. 240.

character positions of her narratives.⁴ So, for example, while her single women sleuths are either chaste or contained within romantic sub-plots, Sayers' dangerous single women villains are repeatedly identified as sexually deviant or as guilty of overstepping the boundaries of their class. Some recent literary criticism of Sayers' novels has embraced Sayers' texts as offering alternative sexualities and narratives, however coded, in opposition to heteronormative fiction.⁵ However, these conclusions have sometimes been made without detailed reference to the multiple narrative strands of Sayers' texts, and the variety of single women that she depicts. I suggest that concentration on the figure of the lesbian in Sayers' fiction has led to the erasure of the figure of the spinster, and argue that while both were sometimes conflated in popular interwar discourse, they were nevertheless considered as separate and discrete social threats during the period.

Golden Age Detective Fiction

Sayers was writing during what is now popularly termed the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction, a period typically designated as beginning with Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and ending with Sayers' *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937).⁶ 'Golden Age' here has been used to refer both to the interwar period in which detective fiction altered and achieved immense popularity, and to the settings of the novels themselves, 'in a mythic time, 'a golden age' apparently outside history [...] an idealised picture of the 'long summers' of the English upper middle class in a tightly bound society.'⁷ While the popularity of the genre is not in question (by 1939 one in four books sold was a detective novel) the question of how

⁴ Dorothy L. Sayers and Robert Eustace, *The Documents in the Case* (London: New English Library, 1984). All further references will be made in the text.

⁵ English, pp. 138-166; Marya McFadden, 'Queerness at Shrewsbury: Homoerotic Desire in *Gaudy Night*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46 (2000), 358-378.

⁶ Stephen Knight, 'The Golden Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.77-91 (p. 77); This timeframe for 'golden age' detective fiction is also given by Gillis, p. 185. Alison Light notes that some characters did cross the pre to post war divide, including John Buchan's 'Sapper', and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who was detecting until 1927: Light, p. 65.

⁷ Light, p. 61.

'golden' the age conveyed by interwar detective fiction really was is more contentious.⁸ Both of these senses of the golden age are worth looking at briefly, in order to contextualise Sayers' writing.

While Raymond Chandler complained that British interwar detective fiction was based on 'exactly what time the second gardener potted the prize-winning tea-rose begonia', and commended instead Dashiell Hammett's 'mean streets', critics have been divided on the extent to which British detective fiction engaged with the ideological and practical anxieties of the period.⁹ Julian Symons has suggested that both British and American crime fiction was detached from reality, noting that '[i]n the British stories, the General Strike of 1926 never took place, trade unions did not exist, and when sympathy was expressed for the poor it was [...] for those struggling along on a fixed inherited income.'¹⁰ However, both Alison Light and Stephen Knight note the inclusion within this fiction of 'types of social and personal unease which would contradict a notion of an idyllic "golden" period.'¹¹ Certainly a cursory look at the works of Sayers reveals that contemporary concerns including drug-taking, extra-marital sex, shell-shock, gender equality, and shifting class paradigms, as well as the pathological spinster permeate her work.¹² In addition to this, critics have suggested that the popularity of the entire genre owed much to the war, although their construction of this is very different. Stacey Gillis identifies the genre as a 'mourning strategy' and locates detective fiction of the period as deeply embedded in post-war trauma: 'Golden Age detective novels were concerned with the ways in which families (biological or surrogate) struggled to come to terms with

⁸ Light, p. 65.

⁹ Raymond Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', in *The Art of the Mystery Story* ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947), pp. 222-237 (p. 230).

¹⁰ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History* (London: Viking, 1985), p. 96.

¹¹ Knight, p. 77

¹² For example: drug-taking in Sayers, *Murder Must Advertise* (1933), Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), *Peril at End House* (1932); extra-marital sex in Sayers, *Clouds of Witness* (1926), *Strong Poison* (1930), *The Documents in the Case* (1930); Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), *Death on the Nile* (1937); shell shock in Sayers, *Whose Body?* (1923), *Clouds of Witness* (1926), *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928), *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937). Gender relations and the servant question are ubiquitous.

death; more specifically, with the intrusion of a body into their domestic situations.¹³ In contrast, Light characterises the detective fiction of Christie, in particular, as a 'literature of convalescence.'¹⁴ This was of course another reaction to war, but it was characterised not by coming to terms with death, but largely by making fun of it. Light, writing on Christie, has denied that detective fiction results in the kind of closure for the reader perceived by Gillis: '[t]he fiction may work in the end to offer "reassurance" but since [...] communities always thrive on suspicion their insecurities can never be resolved.'¹⁵ Nevertheless, even if we accept that the nature of detective fiction is such that the next book will necessarily uncover another body what fiction of this kind does offer is a solution that reaches beyond the answer to an individual crime; it offers a methodology for dealing with crime and modernity *per se*. Golden age detective novels suggest that the anxiety-ridden, shifting environment of the post-war world can *always* be read and understood, however traumatic the events that take place within it are. Moreover, it can be read and understood by the amateur, specifically, the detective-novel enthusiast, who is interpolated into the heart of the text, and positioned as detective, through the 'puzzle element' of the narrative.¹⁶ Whereas pre-war detective stories had frequently withheld evidence from the readers, 'golden age' fiction put the reader 'on an equal footing with the detective himself, as regards all clues and discoveries'.¹⁷ The reader was thus actively encouraged to participate in detection, to weigh the evidence and to identify the guilty character from among the innocent.

These twin ideas, that the detective story is nostalgic, and that it deals with contemporary issues, are not incompatible, and both can be seen at work in Sayers' fiction. The modernity of her texts is located in her references to modern anxieties,

¹³ Gillis, p. 185.

¹⁴ Light, p. 69

¹⁵ Light, p. 97.

¹⁶ 'Puzzle element' is Charles Rzepka's phrase: Charles Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005), first used p. 11.

¹⁷ Dorothy L Sayers, 'Introduction to Great Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, London: 1928', reprinted in Howard Haycraft (ed. and intro.), *The Art of the Mystery Story* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947), pp. 71-109 (p. 98).

and particularly, in her progressive views about the employment and education of women. These are framed however, within a distinctly traditional ideology, as embodied in her detective, Lord Peter Wimsey, whose aristocratic standing, respect for tradition, intellectual superiority and moral clarity act as yardsticks for the values of her novels, as well as a source of amusement for Sayers' critics. 'Whatever he does he does better than anyone else and he is one of those universal geniuses like Leonardo', sneered Queenie Leavis in her review of *Gaudy Night*, while W.H. Auden dismissed him as a 'priggish superm[a]n'.¹⁸ Lord Peter Wimsey embodies the values of a golden age and it is as values, via his person and the traditional institutions of which he is a part, that the golden age is allowed to permeate into the less than ideal present. The result is a compromise between tradition and modernity, to which Sayers' single women are held in thrall. While Sayers allows her single women access to the traditional spaces of male privilege including the University, she does not allow them to change these spaces in any way. This is a 'romantic conservatism', to use Light's phrase, 'cleaving to the aristocratic as a mark of a better past or a model for the good life.'¹⁹ It distinguishes Sayers firmly from contemporaries including Christie, and highlights the importance of a rigorous approach to terms like the 'golden age' and the homogeneity that they might imply.

Phrases like a 'literature of convalescence' can give the impression of detective fiction as unchallenging and they invite the question of where the genre should be critically located. Sayers used the terms 'highbrow' and 'middlebrow' to refer to individual detective-story writers in her reviews, and Victoria Stewart has identified a qualitative range in the 'broad church' of the genre between the wars.²⁰ During the interwar period debates about the status of the genre circulated with writers considered highbrow entering the fray. Auden confessed himself to be a detective story 'addict' and T.S. Eliot expressed his preference for nineteenth-

¹⁸ Q.D. Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', p.335; W.H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the detective story, by an addict', *Harper's Magazine*, May 1948, 406-412, (p. 410).

¹⁹ Light, p. 81

²⁰ Victoria Stewart, 'Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain', *The Space Between*, 9 (2013), 101-118 (pp. 108, 103).

century writers of the genre including Wilkie Collins, writing that 'the best detective fiction has relied less on the mathematical problem and much more on the intangible human element.'²¹ Sayers, like Eliot, favoured the Victorians. Seeking to broaden the remit of the detective novel so that it resembled a 'novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle', she also looked to Wilkie Collins as well as Sheridan Le Fanu.²² University educated, with a First in Modern French from Oxford, Sayers wrote on the genre as well as in it: reviewing for the *Sunday Times*, editing *Great short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Crime*, and writing essays including 'Aristotle on Detective Fiction'. Her own intellectual pedigree is evident within her work: conversations in *Busman's Honeymoon* are written in French and the epigraphs that begin each chapter in novels including *Have His Carcase* and *Gaudy Night* reveal Sayers' familiarity with sixteenth-century manuscripts. Contemporary writers did not see this as a mark of highbrow literature however. C. Day-Lewis, another Oxford graduate who wrote detective fiction under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake, wrote comparing her to a doyenne of the music halls citing 'a puritan twinge at seeing so much erudition, sensibility and humour devoted exclusively to this kind of fiction. Still, if Miss Sayers prefers the halls to the legitimate stage that is her business.'²³ For Leavis too, literary allusions were not enough to elevate writing above the popular level. In *Fiction and the Reading Public* she wrote that 'the literary novel, arranged not to disturb the prejudices of the educated, is providing him only with a variety of the bestseller.'²⁴ In her review of *Gaudy Night* itself she was more acerbic describing the book not as highbrow, or even as 'middlebrow read as literature' but instead 'a bundle of best-selling old clothes', which she refused to distinguish from the works of the popular writers Edgar Wallace or Ethel M. Dell.²⁵

²¹ T.S. Eliot, 'Wilkie Collins and Dickens', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 460-470 (p. 464).

²² Dorothy L. Sayers, 'Gaudy Night', in *Titles to Fame*, ed. by Denys Kilham Roberts (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937), pp.73-95 (p. 76).

²³ Quoted in Stewart, 'Defining Detective Fiction', p. 109.

²⁴ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 76.

²⁵ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 45; Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', p. 335.

Sayers herself wrote that detective stories were ‘part of the literature of escape, and not expression’, and her own digs at modernist art and middlebrow fiction permeate her writing, implicitly distancing her own work from both.²⁶ In *Strong Poison*, Lord Peter Wimsey is subjected to the atonal modernist music of a pianist who has spent five days travelling on an escalator at Piccadilly Tube Station to absorb its tone values, while in *Gaudy Night*, Harriet finds herself bored to death during a more middlebrow discussion on the ‘Book of the Moment’ and the ‘Book of the Fortnight’. Harriet’s own detective fiction is widely applauded by the dons at her alma mater Shrewsbury College, but even so her short return to academic work hints at a need for Sayers to prove the intellectual capacity of her heroine which remains unverified by her status as a detective-fiction author.

Alison Light has made a compelling argument for the ‘popular modernism’ of Agatha Christie’s writing, identifying in the ‘emptying of moral and social effect, the evacuating of notions of “character”, [and] the transparency of the prose’ an approach to popular culture that echoes the fragmentation of high culture by modernism.²⁷ This fruitfully severs any necessary connection between modernism and the highbrow, while it retains the sense of modernist writing as in some way experimental. This kind of argument is not applicable to Sayers however, with her conscious turn to the Victorians and her wish to avoid the genre’s evolution to ‘a polished and heartless mechanism’.²⁸ Instead, Sayers offers the racy and accessible prose, imaginative descriptions and social engagement that Kristen Ewins has identified as key characteristics of the solidly middlebrow fiction of Winifred Holtby and Storm Jameson. It is in this social engagement and Sayers’ repeatedly didactic elucidation of moral points, that she least resembles Christie, but this is also what makes her writing on the single woman of particular interest for this study.

²⁶ Sayers, ‘Introduction’, p. 109.

²⁷ Light, p. 66.

²⁸ Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘Flesh and Blood in Crime Stories’, *Sunday Times*, 05 November 1933, p. 7.

Sayers repeatedly destabilised the boundaries between fact and fiction in her texts: firstly by interpolating real life-cases into her narratives and secondly by embedding her novels in the social climate and anxieties of her day. This meant that in their allocation of guilt or innocence, readers of Sayers' fiction were actively engaging in contemporary discourses, rather than solving a purely logical puzzle. Victoria Stewart and Shani D'Cruze have both noted the cross fertilisation between real and fictional crime narratives in the interwar period, which both 'circulated in the middlebrow "interpretive community"'.²⁹ During the interwar period, as now, reports of crimes proliferated in newspapers, but they were also marketed in collectable series including George Bles' *Famous Trials* and W.T.Hodge's *Notable Trials*, the latter of which was priced for a specifically middle-class readership.³⁰ Hodge's series included accounts of the Madeleine Smith case, the Brides in the Bath murders and the Seddon case, all of which Sayers references in her novels, adding cachet to her image as an expert in crime and encouraging her readers to assess her characters and plots as if real. But it was not just criminal discourses that Sayers interpolated into her narratives. Like Lehmann, Sayers refers to the circulating popularised theories of sexology and the new psychology and their readings of the single woman. In *Unnatural Death*, *The Documents in the Case* and *Gaudy Night* Sayers interrogates the notion of 'superfluous' women; she considers the fact of women at work, and debates the mental effects of celibacy, in more detail than is necessary for these issues to function merely as background setting or to provide a plot twist. In the readings that follow I consider how Sayers uses these details variously to direct as well as to misdirect the reader and the extent to which she contributes to, as well as reflects, the increased popular belief of a relationship between criminality, sexuality and the single woman in the interwar period.

²⁹ Victoria Stewart, 'True-crime narratives and Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 29 (2011), pp. 16-29; Shani D'Cruze, 'That damned place was haunted': The Gothic, Middlebrow Culture and Inter-War 'Notable Trials', *Literature and History*, 15 (2006), pp. 37-58.

³⁰ Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, p. 2; Stewart, 'True-crime narratives', p. 18; D'Cruze, p. 39.

Unnatural Death: Distinguishing the superfluous from the unnatural woman.

In Sayers' third novel, *Unnatural Death*, Lord Peter Wimsey undertakes to establish the cause of death of the elderly Agatha Dawson, whose suspicious demise has been attributed by a coroner to natural causes. Wimsey's investigations set in motion a chain of events that will include two more deaths, three attempted murders and the framing of an innocent man, making the murderer of *Unnatural Death*, one of Sayers' most villainous.³¹ An early title for the novel was *The Case of the Three Spinsters*, and in this narrative single women fulfil the roles of murderer, sleuth and all three of the victims. Miss Mary Whittaker is matched in her evil machinations by the meddling inquisitiveness of Miss Climpson, an associate of Wimsey, who he dispatches to an unlikely underworld of parish meetings and the boarding houses of elderly women in diminished circumstances. As Elizabeth English has noted, Sayers' criminal and her sleuth in this novel share certain characteristics beyond their marital status including a legal mind, a fondness for disguise and the ability to inhabit both the city and the parish.³² However, they crucially differ in the matter of their sexuality. Sayers uses the implication of sexual otherness as a key indicator of the corrupting presence and criminality of her villain, whose relationship with one of the female victims essentially convicts her prior to her exposure as a murderer. Mary Whittaker is an 'unnatural' woman, in whose characterisation Sayers deploys some of the prevailing stereotypes about lesbians that I identified in Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*. In contrast, Sayers' elderly spinster sleuth, Miss Climpson is a 'superfluous' but 'womanly woman' (186). While depictions of spinsters and lesbians often drew on a shared pool of imagery during the interwar period, Sayers uses the pejorative detective fiction format to firmly distinguish between the two. She exposes the 'unnatural' lesbian as a

³¹ Only in *Murder Must Advertise* (1933), does Sayers have a higher body count, and these murders are not committed by a single person but by several individuals working for a drugs gang.

³² English, pp. 146-150.

criminal and expels her from the community, aided by the 'superfluous' but womanly spinster who she identifies as a pillar of society.

Miss Climpson and the 'superfluous' woman

Miss Climpson appears in two of Sayers' Peter Wimsey novels: *Unnatural Death* and *Strong Poison* (1930), and is also referred to in *Gaudy Night*. Although not the most famous of the interwar spinster sleuths, an accolade that belongs to Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, she is one of a number of idiosyncratic elderly ladies who emerged during the period to face crime and corpses without dropping a stitch in their knitting. The first women detectives had appeared in literature from the mid-nineteenth century, and by 1901 at least twenty of various ages were detecting crime in England and America, but Sayers disapproved of many aspects of their characterisation:

on the whole, they have not been very successful. In order to justify their choice of sex, they are obliged to be so irritatingly intuitive as to destroy that quiet enjoyment of the logical which we look for in our detective reading. Or else they are active and courageous, and insist on walking into physical danger and hampering the men engaged on the job. Marriage, also, looms too large in their view of life; which is not surprising, for they are all young and beautiful.³³

Miss Climpson can be seen in part as Sayers' response to these 'young and beautiful' interlopers. Well past marrying age, and working under the auspices of Wimsey, Miss Climpson avoids 'hampering the men engaged on the job', either practically or romantically. Nevertheless, she is both a product of, as well as a reaction against, a literary tradition of women detectives, and in Miss Climpson Sayers combines two earlier types of sleuth. The first type, exemplified in the earliest literary apparitions of the female detective, fight crime as 'an escape from the dreadful alternative of female poverty.'³⁴ These women, who first emerge in W.S.Hayward's *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1861) and Andrew Forester Junior's *The Female Detective* (1864), appeared concurrently with the first wave of

³³ Sayers, 'Introduction', p. 79

³⁴ Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women detectives and spies in fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 15.

descriptions about the 'surplus' population of single women. As with Miss Climpson, their detective work solves two aspects of the 'problem' of the surplus woman: it renders them socially useful and it prevents them from being an economic burden on society. The second type of sleuth finds her first incarnation in Miss Amelia Butterworth, a well-to-do amateur sleuth and 'the forerunner of all the old-maid detectives'.³⁵ In Anna Katherine Green's *That Affair Next Door* (1897), Miss Butterworth appropriates for herself a field of investigation summarised by the presiding detective as 'women's eyes for women's matters'.³⁶ By discovering that the murder in question has been committed using a hat pin, and by using her knowledge of social etiquette and women's clothing, Miss Butterworth establishes the domestic as a specialised field of knowledge more accessible to women than to men. In doing this, Green establishes a space in the detective novel for women's knowledge without reducing their capacity for logical thinking or rational deduction to feminine intuition, and without necessitating their entrance into inappropriate milieu. Sayers draws on both of these types of female detective in her creation of Miss Climpson who she distinguishes from other contemporary sleuths by having a foot in both the domestic and the professional worlds. Unlike Miss Marple, Miss Climpson is a paid professional, and unlike Patricia Wentworth's Miss Silver, who tracks down criminal gangs to unlikely deserted locations, her remit is largely domestic.³⁷

The claims about the superfluity or surplus-ness of single women that began to circulate after the end of the First World War, were of a slightly different nature to those that circulated during the mid nineteenth century. While for many the role of wife and mother continued to be the prime social function of, particularly middle-class women, concerns that surplus unmarried women would not have the opportunity to fulfil this feminine 'duty' were cast alongside worries that, let loose beyond the family home, they posed a significant threat. Concerns about

³⁵ Craig and Cadogan, p. 39.

³⁶ Anna Katharine Green, *That Affair Next Door*, 1897, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, ebook).

³⁷ See for example: Patricia Wentworth, *Grey Mask* (London: Coronet, 1979).

unemployment that spiked at certain points during the interwar period meant that unmarried women were vilified both for taking men's jobs and for undercutting men's wages. At the same time as I have discussed in previous chapters, increasing concerns about amateur prostitution, lesbianism, and the sexual and psychological instability of the spinster occasioned by repression, cast the unmarried woman as a potential sexual threat. Sayers' characterisation of Miss Climpson addresses both of these fears. Although Miss Climpson occupies a paid position in the public and predominantly male world of detection she does not threaten male authority in any way. By utilising the stereotype of the old maid as gossip, Sayers shows Miss Climpson to be 'providentially fitted' for detective tasks that may be 'inefficiently carried out by ill-equipped policemen', but which do not threaten their masculine role. 'She asks questions which a young man could not put without a blush' (31), and in so doing occupies a position that complements but does not rival that of male professionals. Miss Climpson investigates only women and unlike Green's Miss Butterworth, who withholds evidence and sets herself up in competition with the police, Miss Climpson remains under the watchful eye of Wimsey, acting not as a subversive, but as a proxy for the male establishment.

The idea of the single woman as a sexual threat to heterosexual marriage is addressed in both of the novels in which Miss Climpson features. In *Unnatural Death*, the threat is of lesbian sexuality while in *Strong Poison*, a young woman is assumed guilty of murder partially because she has lived with the male victim without being married to him. In both of these cases Miss Climpson is quick to correctly identify the respective guilt or innocence of the accused and her judgement simultaneously addresses both the sexuality and criminality of each. These judgements, which are borne out by the conclusions of each novel, suggest a certain engagement with modern sexuality: they equate lesbianism with murder, putting it beyond the pale, but excuse pre-marital sex on the grounds of youthful naivety, a response that was increasingly widespread. In order to have the moral authority to do this, however, it is necessary for Miss Climpson herself to be above suspicion and Sayers explicitly addresses the question of her sleuth's own sexuality.

Catherine Kenney has suggested that it is her age that protects Miss Climpson from sexual scrutiny, but although Miss Climpson is described as elderly in *Strong Poison*, she is considered 'middle-aged' in *Unnatural Death*.³⁸ Old age, in any case, was not definitively considered as a mitigating factor as regards repression in either theoretical writing on the subject or popular fiction. Stella Browne suggested that while '[t]he repressed sex-impulse in women often breaks out irresistibly at the change of life' the consequences were ongoing, 'sometimes undermining sanity and control, *throughout the remaining years*', and this opinion circulated in fiction also.³⁹ In Richard Oke's popular novel *Frolic Wind* (1929), which was also made into a play, it was pushed to its logical conclusion in his 'repressed' spinster Lady Athalia, a connoisseur of explicit pornography and sexually obsessed octogenarian.⁴⁰ This opinion was widespread enough for Sayers herself to utilise it as a red herring in *Gaudy Night*, where concern about the mental health of 'elderly virgins' leads the Senior Common Room of Shrewsbury College to suspect one another of violent lunacy, a misdirection amplified by Sayers' reference to *Frolic Wind*.

In *Unnatural Death* Sayers resolves any concerns about the sexuality of her spinster, both through her work which provides an 'outlet' for the 'energies' of 'women [...] of the class unkindly known as "superfluous"' (54), and through explicit comparisons to a lesbian criminal. Miss Climpson is therefore distanced by sublimation and heterosexuality respectively from the two threats posed by the unmarried woman: sexual and psychological instability consequent on thwarted passions, and lesbianism. Miss Climpson runs what is apparently a typing bureau, but which is actually a crime agency dedicated largely to answering small advertisements designed to hoodwink vulnerable women, and funded by Wimsey.

'Miss Climpson,' said Lord Peter, 'is a manifestation of the wasteful way in which this country is run. [...] Thousands of old maids simply bursting with useful energy, forced by our stupid social system into hydros and hotels and communities and hostels and posts as companions, where their magnificent

³⁸ Catherine Kenney, 'Detecting a Novel Use for Spinsters in Sayers's Fiction', in Doan, *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, pp. 123-138 (p.129).

³⁹ Browne, 'Sexual Variability among Women', pp. 99-100 my emphasis.

⁴⁰ Richard Oke, *Frolic Wind* (New York: Payson and Clark, 1930).

gossip-powers and units of inquisitiveness are allowed to dissipate themselves or even become harmful to the community. (31)

Here, Sayers recasts the notions of repression and 'surplus-ness' to suggest that women are socially rather than sexually repressed: 'wasted' not because they remain unmarried or childless, but because they are treated wastefully by society.⁴¹ The suggestion that the spinster may become 'harmful to the community' is acknowledged, but this harm is not specifically acknowledged to be sexual, rather, juxtaposed with descriptions of the spinster's 'gossip-powers' and 'inquisitiveness', it is more suggestive of the meddling qualities with which they were, and still are, frequently stereotyped.

Elizabeth English offers a useful examination of the lesbian criminal in detective fiction, but her failure to distinguish between the sexuality of Miss Climpson and Mary Whittaker calls for a more nuanced approach to the spinster in literature. English does not differentiate between the figures of the thwarted spinster and the lesbian on the premise that 'the spinster was often conflated with the lesbian around this time, at least in the public imagination,' and concludes that 'for Sayers this term (as well as other indicators of gender independence) operates as a coded synonym for women who love women.'⁴² This position is critically contentious for a number of reasons. It transposes generalisations made in the public imagination of the past onto critical discourse in the present, as well as suggesting that a conflation between the lesbian and the spinster which was 'often' made, can operate as a 'coded synonym'. English is not alone in her conflation of the spinster and the lesbian, a position that has also been stated notably by Sheila Jeffreys, but it is a position that erases the construction of the heterosexual spinster as a discrete threat herself during the interwar period.⁴³ In relation to *Unnatural Death* this generalization leads English to identify each of the three major subject positions of the crime novel: murderer, victim, and sleuth as lesbian, a reading that severs any

⁴¹ For the former sense of wasted see for example, Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood*.

⁴² English, p. 146.

⁴³ Jeffreys, p. 100.

relationship between their narrative positions and their sexuality, and which does not address key differences in characterisation.

'A Dash of the Masculine'? Mary Whittaker and the 'Unnatural' Woman

In several ways, Sayers' sleuth Miss Climpson and her murderess, Mary Whittaker are undoubtedly similar. Both are unmarried and childless although, at around twenty-five years of age, Mary is considerably the younger of the two, and at an age only on the brink of sexual suspicion. Mary is a trained nurse and described by a doctor as 'quite the modern type. The sort of woman one can trust to keep her head and not forget things' (7). As Miss Climpson notes, Mary is 'of the type that does well in city offices' (49) and as discussed above, Miss Climpson is shown to be similarly professional: she runs a bureau in the city and 'produce[s] a business like notebook' (27) to take directions from Wimsey. If Mary has 'an almost masculine understanding of the law' (208), then Miss Climpson too notes that 'A dear old friend of mine used to say I should have made a very good lawyer' (29). However, Mary in contradistinction to Miss Climpson, poses a threat to the male establishment, a threat that is demonstrated in her attempt to murder Wimsey, who acts as its modern and liberal embodiment. As niece and carer to, as well as murderer of, the first victim, Mary shares a dependent position with a number of spinster companions who were cast as criminal or accomplice in interwar narratives. In novels including Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and *The Thirteen Problems* (1932) the destructive potential of the spinster is enhanced by her position at the heart of the domestic family home from which she is doubly distanced by her marital and class or economic status.⁴⁴ In *Unnatural Death* however, Sayers firmly distinguishes her villain from her spinster sleuth by shading

⁴⁴ The spinster companion is cast as murderer or accomplice in Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), *The Thirteen Problems* (1932) and *Death on the Nile* (1937). In Sayers' *The Documents in the Case* (1930), she acts as a catalyst to murder. Although she only kills herself, the obsessive, insidious, and finally pyromaniac Mrs Danvers in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), for whom Mrs is a courtesy title, is a further addition to the list.

Mary as 'unnatural', and implying that she is the locus for a different set of emerging anxieties.

Although the word 'unnatural' appears only in the title of *Unnatural Death*, and not once in the body of the text, the entire narrative is premised on an investigation of what is natural and what is not. This begins with an examination of an elderly lady's death, but moves on to a consideration of the woman who may have been its cause. The death of Agatha Dawson is unnatural because it cannot be 'naturally' accounted for; it is for this reason that a postmortem examination is requested and Wimsey's curiosity aroused, but both the death and the murderer are cast as unnatural in a number of other ways. From the outset of the narrative, Wimsey supposes that Agatha Dawson's death is caused by a member of her family: an act against kin that renders both the deed and its executor 'foul, strange and unnatural.'⁴⁵ The murder is also found to have been performed by a woman, and as such transgresses the boundaries not just of the law but, in its violence and its criminality, of acceptable notions of femininity. As Lisa Duggan notes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century expectations of women: 'By definition, violent women criminals had crossed the line of gender to engage in "masculine" activity.'⁴⁶ Moreover, in *Unnatural Death* the woman who is suspected of murder is involved in what Miss Climpson characterizes as an 'unhealthy' relationship with a woman in her early twenties. As Miss Climpson expresses it to Vera Findlater: 'I cannot help feeling that it is more *natural* – more proper, in a sense – for a man and a woman to be all in all to one another than for two persons of the same sex' (191, my emphasis). 'Unnatural' had been used as a euphemism for lesbian in the press since the end of the nineteenth century. Lisa Duggan notes that the murder of Freda Ward by her 'girl lover' Alice Mitchell in 1892 was reported in the Memphis Press as 'A Very Unnatural Crime' because 'the murderess claimed to have loved and wanted to marry her victim.'⁴⁷ In Britain this use of 'unnatural' was certainly in

⁴⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 5, l. 28.

⁴⁶ Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 23.

⁴⁷ Duggan, pp. 2, 11.

popular circulation by 1918, when ‘the trial of the century’, Maud Allan’s libel case against Noel Pemberton Billing was widely reported in the press. Maud Allan, a famous dancer, brought a case against Billing after he published accusations in his paper, the *Vigilante*, that Allan ‘was a lewd, unchaste, and immoral woman’, who was about to give a performance of *Salome* ‘designed as to foster and encourage unnatural practices among women’ and furthermore, that Allan ‘associated herself with persons addicted to unnatural practices.’⁴⁸ These allegations were reported verbatim in the press, and although Billing’s more explicit references to the ‘cult of the clitoris’, and ‘lesbian ecstasy’ were not, the link was still made in court and in newspaper reportage when the defendant withdrew his allegation that Allan was a lesbian and the jury reported they could find no evidence in *Salome* of ‘Lesbian practices’. Beyond the scope of court reports and newspapers, ‘unnatural’ is used to denote lesbianism throughout the interwar period in a wide range of books, both popular and academic, including medical texts and social studies.

‘Unnatural’ then, in Sayers’ *Unnatural Death*, serves as an umbrella term that can refer to one or more of the following: the death of Agatha Dawson, the act of murder, unfeminine behaviour, or ‘deviant’ sexuality. These strands are difficult to disentangle, with Sayers repeatedly grouping them together in her characterisation of her villain, while she treats them discretely in relation to her sleuth. Miss Climpson, for example does not fulfil traditional gender expectations: she is not a wife or mother, and she occupies an attenuated modernity in her professional capacity under Wimsey. Despite this, Sayers makes clear that Miss Climpson is not ‘unnatural’. By describing her as a ‘womanly woman’, and a ‘spinster made and not born’ (186), Sayers positions Miss Climpson as a woman who has remained unmarried not because of her nature (which is indisputably ‘womanly’), but because of historical circumstances. Miss Climpson’s professionalism in this context is in no way antithetical to her womanliness. Rather, it shows that women can do jobs well, and should not be considered as ‘wasted’ if they are unable to marry. In contrast, Mary Whittaker is identified as unnatural both on the grounds of

⁴⁸ ‘Mr Billing’s Trial’, *The Times*, 30 May 1918, p. 4; Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, pp. 15-54.

criminality and of deviant sexuality, but Sayers implies her 'otherness' in both of these respects by employing descriptions that concern her transgression of traditional gender expectations. Mary is distanced from the 'womanly' spinsterhood of Miss Climpson, by the spinster sleuth herself, who is able to spot that Mary is not dangerous because she is repressed: 'this was no passionate nature cramped [...] and eager to mate before youth should depart' (49). Instead, Miss Climpson deduces, she 'is not of the marrying sort' (186). Sayers compounds this description of Mary with repeated inferences of her masculinity.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sexologists and criminologists involved in creating taxonomies of sexual and criminal behaviour, identified masculinity as a feature of both the lesbian and the woman criminal. Various models of homosexuality including the 'third sex' model of Heinrich Ulrichs and Edward Carpenter, and the notion of sexual inversion developed by Havelock Ellis, characterised homosexuality as the possession of characteristics or attributes by an individual of the opposite sex. In these texts gender expectations played a prominent role in the identification of sexuality, and nuanced distinctions between masculinity and 'mannishness' alternated with descriptions that ascribed sexual inversion as the root cause of any unfeminine behaviour. As a consequence, in some late nineteenth-century textbook descriptions the lesbian and the 'New' Woman appear indistinguishable, in a conflation of 'deviance' with modernity that bears similarities to the interwar construction of the 'amateur' prostitute discussed in the first chapter. Krafft-Ebing wrote in 1886 that 'Uranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances.'⁴⁹ Havelock Ellis' challenge to this was more nuanced. He wrote that 'the actively inverted woman [has] one fairly essential character: a more or less distinct trace of masculinity', but noted that other women may also 'imitate men on grounds of taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion.'⁵⁰ Nevertheless, for Ellis, lesbians remained

⁴⁹ Krafft-Ebing, pp. 46-7.

⁵⁰ Ellis, p. 54.

accompanied by a 'recognizable mannishness', even if, in his tautological argument, this resided only in the fact of their lesbianism: 'The inverted woman's masculine element may [...] consist only in the fact that she makes advances to the woman to whom she is attracted and treats all men in a cool, direct manner [...] which excludes every sexual relationship.'⁵¹

Alongside the sexual typologies produced at the end of the nineteenth century, were criminal typologies, and the extent to which these distinct fields crossed over is suggested by the influence of Havelock Ellis, who published in both fields. In his writing, as well as in the writing of the criminologist Cesare Lombroso, criminal women were also considered identifiable by either their overt masculinity, or what was perceived as their lack of womanliness, an absence repeatedly equated with childlessness. Ellis noted 'the approximation of criminal women to ordinary men' and considered that '[t]he strongest barrier of all against criminality in women is maternity.'⁵² Lombroso, who identified both women and children to be 'deficient' in moral sense, considered that this deficiency in women was 'neutralised' through maternity. However, he warned:

when piety and maternal sentiments are wanting, and in their place are strong passion and intensely erotic tendencies, much muscular strength and a superior intelligence for the conception and execution of evil, it is clear that the innocuous semi-criminal present in the normal woman must be transformed into a born criminal more terrible than any man.⁵³

Lombroso's ideas were out of fashion by the interwar period, a fact Sayers acknowledges in *Gaudy Night* where an academic asks Wimsey: "'do you hold any opinions about the stories put forward by Lombroso? I understand that they are now to a considerable extent exploded'"(114). The idea of the 'mannish lesbian' however, put forward by Ellis among others, persisted and was variously adopted by detractors of lesbianism as a figure of pillory but also by women who

⁵¹ Laura Doan and Chris Waters, 'Introduction to Part II: Homosexualities', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology Uncensored*, pp. 41-45, (p.43).

⁵² Havelock Ellis, 'The Criminal', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology Uncensored*, pp. 17-20.

⁵³ Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, 'The Female Offender', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology Uncensored*, pp. 20-21.

'desperately wanted to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in Mary Whittaker, Sayers embodies masculinity, criminality and an aversion to heterosexual intimacy in a figure that both resembles nineteenth century sexual and criminal typologies, and gestures towards fears about the modern woman. The tenor of Lombroso's remarks are repeated in *Unnatural Death*, in Inspector Parker's description of women criminals: 'when a woman is wicked and unscrupulous [...] she is the most ruthless criminal in the world – fifty times worse than a man, because she is always so much more single-minded about it' (256). In the Wimsey books, Inspector Parker is frequently positioned as the bumbling foil to the more intellectual Lord Peter Wimsey, but in this instance he is not contradicted either by his friend or the narrative itself. Mary Whittaker, who is described as 'an evil woman if ever there was one' (297), is the only real suspect throughout the novel, and the 'puzzle element' of the narrative lies less in revealing her guilt than in establishing the means through which she has perpetrated her crime.

Sayers invokes the masculinity of Mary Whittaker in a number of ways. She is 'beautifully tailored – not mannishly, and yet with a severe fineness of outline that negatives the appeal of a beautiful figure' (49). Sayers use of the negative here is largely subsumed by the qualifying clause that follows it, so that 'mannishly' lingers in the mind of the reader, and achieves a more striking effect than a description of Mary's dress as 'not feminine'. Moreover, in clothing advertisements of the mid- to late-twenties, 'severe' was repeatedly paired with 'masculine', so that the 'severe fineness of outline' works to compound the masculinity of Mary's dress rather than to detract from it. As Laura Doan has noted, in the twenties, and particularly prior to the *Well of Loneliness* trial in 1928, masculine-inspired attire for women could denote the 'elegant, modern woman in the height of fashion', as much as the 'mannish lesbian'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Sayers repetition of masculine

⁵⁴ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', *Signs*, The Lesbian Issue, 9 (1994), pp. 557-575 (p. 560).

⁵⁵ Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: the origins of a modern English lesbian culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Doan quotes from advertising copy from Weatherill's and Harrods advertisements that promote, 'The present tendency towards the severely masculine mode', and 'a hint of mannish severity', respectively, p. 112.

attributes has a slow drip effect that works cumulatively to imply the suspicious nature of Mary Whittaker. There is the 'almost masculine understanding' (208) of the law, displayed by Mary's alter-ego Miss Grant; a comment that ostensibly does little but betray the casual misogyny of the lawyer who says it, but which adds to the criminal photo-fit that the narrative is working to develop. In addition to this there are the 'strong hands' of the initially unidentified woman who attacks the lawyer, and the sexual aversion of a further alter-ego, Mrs Forrest, to Peter Wimsey. Mrs Forrest is dressed, not only in feminine attire, but in the overtly sexual apparel of the Hollywood vamp or *femme fatale*, with a gold turban, jewelled shoes, and sealing-wax-red lip-stick. Nevertheless, she fails to convince as a heterosexual woman, betraying herself as 'essentially sexless', and 'spinster-ish – even epicene' (182), by her evident revulsion when Wimsey kisses her (this, of course, is suspicious in itself, if as Leavis acerbically noted, 'Women *naturally* find him irresistible').⁵⁶ What we see in these examples is that masculinity here functions not just at a descriptive level, but also at a narrative level. In *Unnatural Death*, masculinity functions as a clue for the reader to link together the several personae of Mary Whittaker. Masculinity is not only her distinguishing feature, but more importantly it is the key to her identification as a criminal.

Sayers develops the specifically lesbian criminality of Mary Whittaker through Mary's relationship to Vera Findlater. This is one of two lesbian relationships in the novel, which initially appear to be differentiated by little more than their historical context. The first relationship is between Clara Whittaker and Agatha Dawson, Mary's Aunts and 'devoted friend[s]', who live a Ladies of Llangollen style of country existence, from the late-nineteenth century until Clara's death.⁵⁷ As Agatha Dawson phrases it: 'I mean to be an old maid and so does Miss Clara, and we're going to live together and be ever so happy, without any stupid, tiresome gentlemen' (146). This relationship receives no censure in the novel, in contrast to the relationship of Mary and Vera, although it is described similarly. Mary and her

⁵⁶ Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', p. 335.

⁵⁷ Agatha is 72 in 1927. If the cousins lived together from when they came of age, then they began living together around 1880.

Aunt Clara are both described as innately ‘professional’ or ‘business’-like. At the same time, Vera describes her relationship with Mary in terms that echo Agatha’s with Clara: she professes to have ‘no use for men’ (187) and enjoys a brief spell ‘keeping house’ with Mary, ‘right away from all the silly people at home’ (186). However, while the relationship of Clara and Agatha is construed as a romantic friendship, the relationship between Mary and Vera is characterised as dangerous. This is ultimately proved when Mary murders Vera; Vera has evidence that implicates Mary in a previous murder, and correctly assuming that her friend is about to divulge the information, Mary kills her. However, Miss Climpson’s characterization of the relationship as ‘unhealthy’ (84), and Vera as a victim being ‘preyed upon’ (185), prior to the murder, suggests that the relationship is dangerous in and of itself.

Sayers distinguishes this latter-day lesbian relationship from its nineteenth-century romantic counterpart by drawing on contemporary anxieties about the schoolgirl ‘crush’, or ‘rave’, or as Miss Climpson terms it, ‘pash’, and she compounds this through a reference to the popular novel *Regiment of Women* by Clemence Dane:

Miss Findlater has evidently quite a ‘pash’ (as we used to call it at school) for Miss Whittaker, and I am afraid none of us are above being *flattered* by such outspoken admiration. I must say, I think it rather *unhealthy* – you may remember Miss Clemence Dane’s *very clever book* on the subject? I have seen so much of that kind of thing in my rather WOMAN-RIDDEN existence! It has such a bad effect, as a rule, upon the *weaker character* of the two. (84-5)

Clemence Dane’s ‘*very clever book*’ as Miss Climpson emphasises it, was published in 1917 to critical acclaim. Read now, it appears as a sensational and gothic portrayal of an evil and predatory lesbian, but on its publication the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote that the ‘detestable’ Clare Hartill was ‘throughout the tale a real woman, no nightmare, no Renaissance study in pure villainy’, even though she brought to mind, ‘all kinds of gruesome creatures, chiefly of the mousing cat and the vampire.’⁵⁸ Dane’s novel, and its reception, is an excellent example of the permeable boundaries that separated literary and popular scientific writing at the end of the

⁵⁸ Harold Hannington Child, ‘New Novels’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 Jan 1917, p. 44.

nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Lillian Faderman has identified that several of Havelock Ellis' examples of lesbianism in *Sexual Inversion* were taken from French novels and suggests that he makes 'little distinction between' these and his case studies taken from real life.⁵⁹ Dane's portrayal of relationships in a girls' school similarly passed into non-fiction texts as a reference point despite the gothic 'vampirism' of Clare Hartill whose depiction echoes Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). Mary Scharlieb makes reference to the text in *The Bachelor Woman and her Problems* (1929) while Stella Browne distinguished it as 'a brilliant piece of psychology' in her 'Studies in Feminine Inversion' (1923).⁶⁰

Set in an all-girls' school, *Regiment of Women* tells the story of Alwynne Durand an eighteen year old teacher who is seduced into an intense relationship with Clare Hartill a brilliant but tyrannical colleague in her mid-thirties. During the course of the novel, Clare's 'abnormal' emotional demands result in the suicide of a young pupil as well as Alwynne's breakdown. Alwynne recovers only after she is removed from Clare's influence, and more broadly from the 'unhealthy, if not unnatural' environment of the girls' school, and falls in love with a man, Roger.⁶¹ Sayers' reference to *Regiment of Women* does more than suggest that Mary Whittaker is up to no good and the plot and characterisation of *Unnatural Death* follows Dane's novel in several respects. Sayers replicates the dynamic between Clare and Alwynne in Mary and Vera, and she transfers the role of Alwynne's spinster Aunt (a proxy for Roger) who accuses Clare of 'vampirism', to Miss Climpson (a proxy for Wimsey) who describes Mary as a 'Beastly blood-sucking woman' (270). This replication of roles illustrates the structural dynamic that is lost when, as in English's reading, Mary, Vera and Miss Climpson are all described as lesbians. Rather, the novels by Dane and Sayers suggest a conflict between the modern lesbian and the male (substituted by the traditional, but fully competent spinster)

⁵⁹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (London: The Women's Press, 1981) p. 254. Faderman includes Diderot's *The Nun*, Balzac's *The Girl with Golden Eyes* and Belot's *Mademoiselle Giraud, My Wife* in her examples.

⁶⁰ Mary Scharlieb, pp. 51-2.; Stella Browne, 'Studies in Feminine Inversion' in *Sexology Uncensored*, pp. 61-66 (p. 65).

⁶¹ Dane, p. 248.

for the soul of the modern girl. In both novels the innate heterosexuality and social normativity of this modern girl is conveyed, as in Ellis and Lombroso, through her predisposition towards maternity: Alwynne is described as possessing a 'motherly young mind' and Vera comes 'romping over to [Miss Climpson], her hands filled with baby-linen' (50).⁶² Dane's novel clearly draws on concerns about sexuality in girls' schools, and the possibility of girls acquiring 'invertism' as the result of hysterical 'raves', or the unhealthy influence of unmarried women teachers. Although Alwynne is a young teacher herself, Clare Harthill is in her mid-thirties, an age difference that is comparable to that between pupil and mistress, and moreover the novel is set in a school. In *Unnatural Death*, which is set not in a school but a country parish, the age difference between Vera and Mary is only around three years. However, in order to depict the same-sex relationship as unhealthy Sayers still utilises anxiety regarding girls' schools: in addition to the reference to *Regiment of Women* she characterizes Vera's emotions as '*schwärmerisch*', 'natural for a schoolgirl' but 'in a young woman of twenty-two [...] thoroughly undesirable' (185). In the nineteenth-century Krafft-Ebing identified the all-women environments of 'female prisons, brothels and young ladies' seminaries' as locations in which heterosexual women might 'acquire invertism', and Miss Climpson offers a comparable list of modern and middle-class alternatives: 'Girls' school, boarding house, Bloomsbury-flat' (270).⁶³ In much the same way as Lehmann depicts all-female environments as sterile or diseased, then, Sayers conveys them in this novel as riddled with unhealthy emotion, a marked contrast to the all-male environments of Wimsey's home and his club, which are bastions of privilege and tradition.

The genre of detective fiction allows for an explicit categorization of Mary, Vera and Miss Climpson into the roles of murderer, victim and sleuth. Only Miss Climpson, under the protectorate of Wimsey, escapes with her life, which suggests that for Sayers, Vera, unlike Alwynne, cannot be rehabilitated. Vera is perhaps, after all the most sexually disruptive character, a woman who might be at home equally with

⁶² Dane, p. 161.

⁶³ Krafft-Ebing, p. 46.

women as with men; a woman who is neither stereotypically masculine, nor identifiably criminal.⁶⁴

The Documents in the Case: implicating Freud

In *The Documents in the Case* Sayers offers a depiction of the spinster that is diametrically opposed to Miss Climpson. In this novel, published in 1930 and co-authored by Robert Eustace, Sayers dispensed with her popular detective, Peter Wimsey, and instead used a real trial as the basis for her narrative: the notorious trial of Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters.⁶⁵ By comparing this novel to Sayers' other fictional works as well as non-fiction accounts of the trial, Sayers negotiation, manipulation or occlusion of the facts is brought into focus. In *The Documents in the Case* themes repeated in Sayers' other novels are grafted onto the framework of the actual case and her fictionalized account of the events that preceded it. While the subject of equality in marriage or extra-marital affairs (also addressed in *Strong Poison* and *Gaudy Night*) might be thought to stem naturally from the trial, other topical subjects – notably the employment of women, the social position of the spinster, and the influence of psychoanalytic thought, required Sayers to manipulate the facts to allow for their inclusion. The suburban setting of the crime, a setting Judy Giles notes is 'more or less invisible in accounts of modernity', is retained by Sayers' who makes it central to her moral assessment of her characters.⁶⁶

The Thompson and Bywaters trial of 1922-3 was a *cause célèbre*, widely reported in the news and enthusiastically followed by the general public. *The Times* reported on December 7th 1922 that '[a]t 4 o'clock in the morning persons began to gather in the

⁶⁴ Duggan makes this point in relation to the murdered Frieda Ward, who she describes as a 'figure of potential instability': Duggan, p. 29.

⁶⁵ Eustace supplied the scientific knowledge for the book, and according to Kenney the initial idea, but Sayers is referred to by most critics as the writer so I follow this here. Catherine Kenney, *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers*, p. 142.

⁶⁶ Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), p. 33.

precincts of the Court', to witness the trial, and wrote again the next day that 'at 8am the waiting queue numbered over a hundred'.⁶⁷ The crowd had gathered to see Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters, both on trial for the murder of Thompson's husband. Percy Thompson had been stabbed walking home from the theatre with his wife, and Bywaters, who was an occasional lodger at the Thompson household, was quickly arrested for the murder. Correspondence revealed that he and Edith Thompson had been having an affair, and it was the nature of this correspondence that convicted Edith Thompson, as well as capturing the imagination of the public who were able to read lengthy excerpts from the letters in newspaper reports. In these, Edith Thompson urged her lover to 'do something desperate', and claimed that she had repeatedly tried to kill her husband through the administration of poison and ground glass to his food and drink.⁶⁸ Although the post-mortem suggested that these claims were almost certainly fantastical, since no bodily evidence could be found for them, Thompson was convicted, and hung on the same day as Bywaters in January 1923.

Sayers' alterations to this story are made to appeal to a middlebrow audience, to create space for social commentary and to re-introduce suspense to a narrative already well-known to the public. Among them she changes the stabbing, witnessed by Edith, to a case of unseen and virtually undetectable poisoning and replaces Bywaters, who in reality was a twenty year old ship's laundry steward, with Harwood Lathom, a public-school-educated and amoral but brilliant artist who is recognised as one of the true painters of his generation. These largely aesthetic alterations designed to appeal to a middlebrow reading public, are accompanied by others which allow Sayers to discuss subjects repeated in her works including women's employment and changes to the class system. The first of these changes concerns an alteration to Edith's employment. After her marriage, Edith Thompson continued to work as a bookkeeper and manageress in the millinery firm in which she had been employed for ten years. She was described to

⁶⁷ 'Ilford Murder Trial', *The Times*, 07 December 1922, p. 7.

⁶⁸ 'Mrs Thompson's Story', *The Times*, 09 December 1922, p. 6.

the court by her manager as a 'very capable business woman'.⁶⁹ As Kenney has noted, the ability or choice to work repeatedly features in Sayers' characterisation of 'good' in contrast to 'bad' women; women's employment is one aspect of modernity that Sayers champions. In *The Documents in the Case*, Margaret – Edith's fictional counterpart – is unemployed. Her confinement to the home by her anxiously respectable husband is offered as a key source of her fatal discontent; it is central to Sayers' characterisation of the confined wife as a vacuous and potentially unstable figure, and more broadly her critique of middle-class constructions of 'respectability.'

The second major change, with which I am primarily concerned, is Sayers' inclusion of a spinster into the narrative in order to facilitate a critique of psychoanalysis, and the denial of personal responsibility and morality in modern society that Sayers suggests it both reflects and encourages. In the newspaper accounts of the trial, Mrs Anna Maria Lester, a widow who lived in the Thompson household, is reported to have appeared briefly in court to verify that the couple were not happy.⁷⁰ In Sayers' revisualisation of the Thompson household, Margaret and George Harrison have a spinster 'lady-help', who lodges with them, and who is positioned uneasily as a confidante to Mrs Harrison and a paid dependent. Agatha Milsom's status as a spinster, rather than a widow, is crucial to her characterisation. Meddlesome, and prone to ill-health and nerves, Agatha Milsom appears as a composite of many of the stereotypes regarding the repressed spinster that circulated in the interwar period, and her narrative serves to confirm the worst prognoses of sexual repression. Unlike Anna Maria Lester, Agatha is not only an observer, but is instead the unwitting but dangerous catalyst to the extra-marital affair that leads to murder. She fatally influences Mrs Harrison and ends the novel confined to a nursing home, 'rambling' and 'demented' (61), as the result of a complete breakdown. Since she is preceded in Sayers' canon by the morally unquestionable and sexually chaste Miss Climpson, (*Unnatural Death*, *Strong Poison*) and followed by a phalanx of worthy

⁶⁹ 'Ilford Murder Charge', *The Times*, 25 October 1922, p. 9.

⁷⁰ 'Ilford Murder Charge', *The Times*, 26 October 1922, p. 9.

spinsters in Sayers' 1935 *Gaudy Night*, Agatha Milsom's characterisation begs the question why Sayers would employ stereotypes that she actively contradicts in earlier and later novels. The answer is that Sayers clearly uses *The Documents in the Case* and Miss Milsom to highlight the insipient dangers, not of sexual repression but of psychoanalytic reasoning itself. However, in so doing she provides a mocking portrait of the spinster analogous to that derived from the theories she critiques.

In *The Documents in the Case* Sayers retains the importance of correspondence to the real-life trial by employing an epistolary narrative, but she broadens the field of correspondence to include individuals beyond the couple on trial as well as including statements from two witnesses and newspaper excerpts. It is through this fragmented narrative that the reader is introduced to Agatha Milsom: initially through her own letters to her sister, and later through the letters and statement of John Munting, a writer in the adjoining maisonette, and Paul Harrison, the victim's son. Agatha's letters convey her as a middle-aged woman obsessed with her health, and more specifically with the deleterious effects of the sexual repression to which, as a spinster, she feels she has been irrevocably condemned. Her candid response to her doctor's diagnosis that she is 'just going through a difficult phase', is reported and glossed in her first letter to her sister: 'I said, "I suppose it is sex, doctor, isn't it?" (Of course, one gets quite used to asking things perfectly frankly, and one doesn't mind it a bit.)' (9-10). Armed with a 'handbook to Freud' (45), Agatha is conversant in the Freudian register of repression, compulsion, and childhood trauma. Through her willingness to talk sex, Sayers characterises Agatha as an individual who is not just the passive subject of psychoanalytic discourse, but one who actively, and dangerously, engages with Freudian ideas and proselytises them. Concern of this kind did circulate throughout the twenties when Freud's ideas became popularly known but not universally adopted.⁷¹ *The Times* reported on the particular danger to health of unlicensed psychoanalytic 'quacks', a danger

⁷¹ Graves and Hodge talk about the opposition made by 'earnest self controllers' to concerns about sexual repression, p. 103.

highlighted in the judge's summation and newspaper reportage of the suicide of a woman under spurious psychoanalytic care in Mecklenburgh Square in 1923.⁷²

Sayers subverts Freudian theory by suggesting that it is the adoption of psychosexual ideas and identities, rather than any notion of repression itself, that is dangerous for the individual. Freudian theory is characterised as encouraging the denial of personal responsibility and the flouting of moral and social boundaries. Agatha shirks all responsibilities for her own ill-health or actions by blaming either her sex-repression or her childhood: 'I am sure it is all due to that early unhappiness that I am in the doctor's hands now' (48). She encourages Margaret to do the same, blaming Margaret's 'repressive' husband for her unhappiness and encouraging her 'to live in her books and to abstract herself from the wearing and irritating realities of life' (47). Sayers' representation of Margaret here clearly draws on descriptions of Edith Thompson as a fantasist, who quoted passages from popular fiction, including works by Robert Hichens, as possible murder solutions in her letters to Bywaters.⁷³ However, where Edith Thompson was condemned at trial for her 'wicked affection' and 'the most culpable intimacy' with Bywaters, Sayers tempers Margaret's escape into fantasy and extra-marital affair, by offering the parroted psychology of Agatha Milsom as a root cause.⁷⁴ Agatha insists that wish-fulfilment is much healthier than repression, which may end 'with consequences which may be *terrible to contemplate*' (49, my emphasis). This is inverted by Sayers who suggests instead that it encourages the breakdown of moral boundaries, of which George Harrison's murder is a terrible consequence. While it is Harwood Lathom who commits the murder, an event which occurs after Agatha Milsom has been

⁷² Graves and Hodge, pp. 102-104.

⁷³ *The Times* of 25th October 1922, quoted from a letter from Edith Thompson to Frederick Bywaters dated 16th May, 1922: "It must be remembered that digitalin is a cumulative poison, and that the same dose, harmless if taken once, yet frequently repeated becomes deadly.' Darling boy, the above passage I have just come across in a book I am reading, 'Bella-donna' by Robert Hichens. Is it any use?' In *The Documents in the Case John Munting* describes Margaret Harrison as 'dazzled' by 'the passionate pages of Hichens and de Vere Stacpoole' (86).

⁷⁴ Filson Young (ed), *Notable British Trials: Trial of Frederick Bywaters and Edith Thompson* (Edinburgh and London: William Hodge and Company Limited, 1923), pp. 146, 255.

institutionalised, Agatha's 'warped mind and perilous preoccupations' (86) are nevertheless cited as an unhealthy influence. Popular psychology is thus castigated as incitement to bad behaviour; it is both contextualized within a broader, modern disaffection with traditional behavioural boundaries, as circulated in popular literature, and positioned as a key component of this disaffection.

Less explicitly, Sayers attacks psychoanalysis through her characterisation of Agatha: specifically in her hypersexualised (mis)readings of her own situation which are initially a source of comedy. Agatha repeatedly reads sexual advance into the actions of her male acquaintances, but is incapable of identifying her own sexual desires, which repeatedly surface. To comedic effect Sayers bawdily transposes Agatha's sex obsession into an 'uncontrollable longing for shrimps' (54), which, immediately interpreted by the knowing reader, remains an incomprehensible symptom of her malady to Agatha. Sayers uses the epistolary narrative to juxtapose Agatha's recollection of events with letters from other characters who recast and contradict her narratives. After Agatha encounters John Munting in the shared hall of their maisonette while collecting the milk in her dressing gown, she writes to her sister that she 'couldn't escape' and so 'carried it [the meeting] through as unconcernedly as I could' (18). Agatha identifies Munting's gaze as sexual: 'his eyes were looking me up and down all the time in the most unpleasant way' (18), but her own description of Munting's body as 'all joints and hollows'(18), conveys to the reader her own voracious stare to which Agatha remains oblivious. This latent reading is confirmed by Munting's own letter to his fiancé, in which he describes Agatha as 'a dreadful middle-aged female with a come-hither eye' who 'cornered me' while 'prowling round the hall' (20) in pyjamas and negligee, and by successive letters where further acquaintance with Miss Milsom has changed his opinion of her from a source of amusement to a 'poisonous old woman', '[i]mpertinent old bitch' and 'dangerous woman' (46), who is a cause of anxiety.

To an extent, Sayers' disparagement of the spinster *is* an attack on the psychoanalysis she endeavours to practice: it is Agatha's misreading of situations

through the filter of psychoanalysis which makes her comic, and it is her proselytising of wish-fulfilment that makes her a dangerous influence, if not a lone voice. The murder victim prophetically notes that ‘nowadays [...] there is far too much talk about “not being able to help one’s self”’ (50). Sayers de-professionalises psychoanalysis by voicing it through a comedy spinster, and it is thus diminished to the crank status of other unconventional practices including the Coué mantras that Agatha also performs and spiritualism which Sayers undermines in a similar manner in *Strong Poison*.⁷⁵ However, Sayers’ discreditation of psychology is reliant at least in part on the already existing stereotype of the spinster as both ridiculous and dangerous, a proliferating stereotype in interwar Britain, and paradoxically one partially constructed by psychosexual discourse. This is most in evidence when Agatha claims she has been sexually assaulted and the lack of credence given to her claim rests not on the inefficacy of psychoanalysis as an interpretive tool, but more simply on the spinster as a comically unattractive figure. A running joke throughout the text is Miss Milsom’s ‘kittenish’ (67) demeanour and inappropriate dress juxtaposed with her asymmetrical features. George Harrison, who jokes with his son that Miss Milsom is ‘scarcely the Venus of Milo!’ (51) asserts that he ‘found [the claim of assault] rather difficult to believe, since the man (to do him justice) had shown no signs of being actually demented’ (77). Harwood Lathom, ostensibly her seducer, confirms that in his view she is a ‘[d]isgusting old woman’ (87). Sayers’ inversion of Agatha’s claim, voiced by the reliable John Munting, that ‘far from repulsing Lathom, she had encouraged him. He had broken from her [...] with considerable difficulty’ (87), may have been intended to expose the ‘disastrous consequences’ of ‘talk about not being able to help one’s self’ (50). However, it also works as an accurate portrait of that same ‘talk’: the psycho-sexual view of the spinster as repressed, conflicted, and potentially mentally unstable and/or sexually incontinent.

⁷⁵ [T]he Coué-ists [...] used to repeat a hundred times a day to themselves under their breath [...] ‘Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better.’ (Coué believed that auto-suggestion could cure many ailments [...]).’ Graves and Hodge, pp. 188-9.

Through her use of epistolary narrative, Sayers gives the illusion of both a democracy of evidence and a voice for the spinster. In fact, the letters and the facts contained within them are clearly weighted, and the spinster repeatedly muted. Throughout the novel it is the male voices of Paul Harrison and John Munting who are distinguished as voices of truth by virtue of their narrative function and the type of documents they contribute. Both serve in the role of unofficial detectives working together to dismiss the claim of accidental death and as such they are the only individuals to provide statements and notes in the text (which gloss the letters of other correspondents) as well as letters. Furthermore, Paul Harrison is given the metanarrative to the text in the form of an introductory letter which contextualises all of the 'documents', while Munting is a fiction writer, an occupation which, far from suggesting a creative relation to the truth, is repeatedly used in Sayers' novels as a yardstick for integrity.⁷⁶ The interpretation of events by both gentlemen is thus weighted in the reader's mind more heavily than that of Agatha, whose voice is first rendered comic, then discredited by other letters and finally silenced. Her letters cease early in the narrative, and even these are retrospectively invalidated by Paul Harrison who visits her after her breakdown:

it is obvious that nothing Miss Milsom says *later* than April, 1929, is of any evidential value whatsoever, and that *all* her statements, without exception, must be received with extreme caution, except in so far as they tend to prove the influence exerted, consciously or unconsciously, by her upon my stepmother. (61)

This statement appears paradoxical and requires a kind of double-think on the part of the reader. The letters are both to be read and not read; they are not 'of any evidential value' but they 'prove the influence exerted.' This response to the spinster's voice accurately reflects the contradictions inherent to circulating stereotypes of the spinster, where she was oxymoronically considered a dangerous nonentity. Moreover, Paul Harrison's editorialising of the spinster echoes Sayers' own narrative treatment of Agatha. In *The Documents in the Case*, in contrast to Sayers' other works, the negative views expressed by characters about the spinster

⁷⁶ Harriet Vane, Wimsey's love interest and eventual wife who features in four of the Wimsey novels is both a crime novelist and a sleuth.

are not critiqued by the narrative or by Sayers' characterisation but confirmed by it. Miss Milsom is both muted and considered influential: she is rendered comic, her views repeatedly discredited, and her later letters excised from the narrative while at the same time her 'warped mind and perilous preoccupations' (86) are identified and verified as a source of anxiety and as a catalyst to murder.

Throughout *The Documents in the Case*, Sayers' repeated disparagement of psychoanalysis is gendered.⁷⁷ While Agatha and Margaret enthusiastically embrace Freud, the male characters of the text are united in their dismissal of 'psycho-analytical quacks': John Munting argues 'Pre-natal influences and childhood fears have gone out with compulsory Greek' (23), and George Harrison bemoans the 'absurd importance' given to 'whims and feelings' (60). Harrison's complaint however, is directed specifically at Agatha, rather than his wife, and linked to her class status. Agatha is a paid help, but her 'quacks' have encouraged her to 'talk openly at the dinner-table about things which [...] ought only to be mentioned to doctors'. Moreover, she has become 'impertinent', her housework and her cookery are unsatisfactory, and 'she has been getting altogether above herself' (60). Harrison mingles two discrete elements in his discontent about Agatha Milsom: sexual propriety and class position. In the last chapter I highlighted that these areas of anxiety were repeatedly aligned in Rosamond Lehmann's characterisation of the unmarried and lower middle class Mabel Fuller (*Dusty Answer*) and Miss Robinson (*Invitation to the Waltz, The Weather in the Streets*). Sayers' Agatha Milsom, is depicted similarly in that neither her class nor her sexuality seem to be fully controlled by her. However, where Lehmann's spinsters are the only lower middle class presences in her texts, Miss Milsom is placed within Sayers' acerbic critique of suburbia. As such, while Agatha's impropriety is located as the consequence of both her spinsterhood and class status, it speaks to a broader concern about class within the novel.

⁷⁷ Graves and Hodge offer a similar characterisation of psychoanalysis as the province of lonely, moneyed women who have had nervous breakdowns, p. 102

Although there is not space to discuss Sayers' depiction of suburbia in full here, it is worth noting. Sayers' retention of the suburban location of the Thompson murder in her fictional account of the case would have been identified by her readership, located largely in the middle-classes, as a site of class anxiety and elitist opprobrium. From its Victorian inception, '[t]he phenomenon of the suburbs has always been the object of considerable criticism: the very word "suburban", like provincial, implies a wealth of uncomplimentary meaning.'⁷⁸ But by the early interwar period when the Thompson and Bywaters murder took place suburbia was experiencing a change, and by 1930 when *The Documents in the Case* was written this change was in full swing. In the twenties, the post-World War I housing boom, fuelled by the political promise of 'homes fit for heroes', as well as the need to re-house Londoners from insanitary and war-damaged accommodation massively increased suburban areas around London. One in every four houses built was a council owned, and in Dagenham, the vast Becontree council estate (which also spread into Ilford, home to Edith Thompson and her husband) increased the population from 9,127 in 1921 to 89,362 in 1931.⁷⁹ Concomitantly, in the thirties, some writers deployed the derogatory label 'slum' to suburban areas, where they used it not to condemn physical privations as previously, but aesthetic and intellectual ones. In *Pillar to Post, the Pocket Lamp of Architecture* (1938) Osbert Lancaster suggested that suburban houses would 'inevitably become the slums of the future.'⁸⁰ Using similar terminology an article on 'The Suburban Neurosis', published in *The Lancet* the same year, asserted that 'We have allowed the slum which stunted the body to be replaced by a slum which stunts the mind. Perhaps, like a pack of cards, these rotten little houses will in due course collapse.'⁸¹

In *The Documents in the Case* the 'rot' of these houses is exposed. The anxious 'respectability' of lower middle-class suburbanites is revealed as inauthentic, a

⁷⁸ Helen Barrett and John Phillips, *Suburban Style: The British Home, 1840-1960* (Boston, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), p. 42.

⁷⁹ Barrett and Phillips, p.125; Quoted in Roy Porter, *London: A Social History*, p. 309.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Graves and Hodge, p.174; Barrett and Phillips, pp. 42-3.

⁸¹ Stephen Taylor, 'The Suburban Neurosis', *The Lancet*, 26 March 1938, 759-761 (p. 761).

sham that they will deploy crime to protect: 'They believe in Respectability. They'll lie, die, commit murder to keep up appearances. Look at Crippen. Look at Bywaters' (82-3). Here references to real crimes are used to reflect particularly on the character of Margaret Harrison, the adulterous wife of the novel. The Thompson and Bywaters murder is the basis for the novel, but Sayers also links Margaret to Crippen through her choice of employment, which echoes that of Ethel le Neve, Crippen's mistress; Margaret is 'a sort of suburban vamp, an ex-typist' (20). Lucy Bland has noted how, while the lower-middle class man was repeatedly cast during the interwar years as 'pottering around the garden or sitting aimlessly in his slippers', the lower-middle class woman was 'cast as sluttish, pleasure seeking, [and] without morals.'⁸² In commentary on their trials, the respectability of both le Neve and Thompson was mocked. For Le Neve respectability was 'like a fetish', and James Douglas ironically commented that the reason for the Thompson and Bywaters murder was that 'They were too respectable! [...] They preferred the risk of murder to the risk of scandal!'⁸³ In *The Documents in the Case* this idea that 'respectability' is a sham and thin veneer, is both juxtaposed with, and rendered similarly to Freud's idea of the ultimate futility of repression. Even as Sayers critiques Freudian quackery for encouraging a lack of sexual self-control, she depicts class, rather than sexuality, as something that will necessarily 'out'. Moreover, in the personas of Agatha Milsom and Margaret Harrison, who is identified as being of a lower social strata prior to marriage than her husband, she genders this link between the lower middle-class, uncontrolled sexuality and crime, thus conforming to, rather than challenging some of the classed and gendered stereotypes of the era.

***Gaudy Night*: 'Stretching our reconciling hands to past and present'**

Gaudy Night finds Sayers in more familiar territory, travelling between 'town and gown', as her protagonist, the detective writer Harriet Vane, evaluates her literary

⁸² Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, p. 114.

⁸³ Richard Huson (ed.), *Sixty Famous Trials* (London: Daily Express, 1938); Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, p. 115.

life in London and a possible marriage to Wimsey against the quieter allure of an academic life at Oxford. The twin strands of the narrative involve Harriet weighing up her relationship with Wimsey while she investigates a series of poison pen letters and instances of vandalism at her alma mater, the fictional Shrewsbury College. *Gaudy Night* is the third of the Wimsey novels in which Harriet appears but is the only one in which she takes the detective lead. Sayers qualifies her endorsement of 'women's eyes for women's matters', however, when Harriet's attachment to Wimsey prevents her from solving the crime, and Wimsey himself steps in. Nevertheless, in this setting Sayers considers the 'place' and alternative narrative offered to unmarried women by academia, even as she examines the idea that they may be a 'danger', either to a male academic tradition, or more generally, as a result of their 'thwarted' sexual and maternal passions.

Gaudy Night begins as Harriet, having received an invitation to Shrewsbury's annual gaudy, remembers her own experience of a women's college:

A letter lay open on the blotting-pad before her, but its image had faded from her mind to make way for another picture. She saw a stone quadrangle, built by a modern architect in a style neither new nor old, but stretching out reconciling hands to past and present. (1)

Sayers' description of the quadrangle as 'neither new nor old, but stretching out reconciling hands to past and present' can aptly be used to describe *Gaudy Night* itself, as well as her own broader project in the Wimsey novels. It is an ideology embodied in Miss Climpson for example, who as we have seen negotiates the trials of modernity and enjoys its freedoms while retaining a traditional and religious outlook, and Edwardian dress. It is also the spirit of her patron, Wimsey who is himself both up-to-date and the latest incarnation of an aristocratic lineage that stretches back to the Normans. In *Gaudy Night* the text itself gestures to both past and present. It not only describes life in the thirties in relation to an ancient institution, but is also peppered by Sayers, a 'modern [textual] architect', with quotations from seventeenth century literature as well as modern novels. Shrewsbury itself is 'neither new nor old', and Sayers' construction of the college,

based loosely on Somerville where she studied, offers a particular response to the question of women's place in the modern world.

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf uses the idea of women's colleges similarly, to ask how women would set about remodelling society if given the opportunity. Woolf suggests three possibilities that she could lobby for if she were to offer a guinea to a women's college subscription: she could ask the authorities to rebuild the college along traditional lines; she could ask them to rebuild it but differently; or, calling for 'Rags. Petrol. Matches.' she could ask them to burn it to the ground. Woolf decides on the second option, since the first confines women to tradition, and the third consigns them once again to economic dependence on their fathers and brothers. In contrast, the second option allows women to build 'an experimental college, an adventurous college [...] built on lines of its own.'⁸⁴ Sayers' Shrewsbury, in contrast, is built along traditional lines, but offers 'reconciling hands' to the present in its full provision of a place for women, a place that had been widely debated a few years previously, and was still not fully assured.

Dangerous women (1): '[T]he University should be master in its own house.'

As discussed above, towards the end of *Unnatural Death* Sayers inserts an elliptical comment about Oxford. She notes that in June 1927 'Oxford decided that women were dangerous' (*Unnatural Death* 227). The comment is not elaborated but refers to the motion passed by the university in June 1927 to cap the number of women students to a proportion of not more than one in four, and to prevent the formation of more women's societies. The statute was reported in several articles in *The Times* which listed arguments in favour of the cap to include the inferior intellectual ability of women, the lack of economic contribution made by the colleges (ironically, considering that a cap on student numbers would enforce this paucity) and even citing declining moral standards.⁸⁵ Encompassing these, and explicitly

⁸⁴ Woolf, 'Three Guineas', p. 157.

⁸⁵ 'Women at Oxford', *The Times*, 15 June 1927, p. 11.

stated, was the notion that Oxford owed its 'distinctive character' to being a male space;

The supporters of the statute are not merely affirming a theoretical principle when they say that Oxford has always been a man's University, and that it is fully within its rights in taking measures to remain so. ⁸⁶

It is important to acknowledge that in their arguments, both sides of the debate upheld that Oxford had a duty to retain its male tradition and heritage. Those for the cap argued that 'the university should be master in its own house', and that more women students would inevitably endanger this; those against the cap argued that more women did not necessarily mean change. ⁸⁷ Sayers' depiction of Oxford, which largely focuses on the fictional Shrewsbury College, places women firmly at the forefront of the university but it is also pervaded by this same reverential approach to tradition. While Sayers manipulates the university's physical and administrative borders to accommodate her women staff and students, the emphasis falls on their right to strive to achieve a place at a university whose tradition is enshrined; this place attained, the values and tradition of the university are rigorously upheld. It is not the right or the place of women to alter or to question it.

Sayers stakes out women's place at Oxford both temporally and spatially. The plot of *Gaudy Night* begins at the annual Gaudy, a weekend reunion where reminiscences are shared and current news about the college circulated. Here Sayers brings together alumni, academics of long standing, and current students, and conveys, through the interweaving of past and present, the college's own tradition, portraying it as an established institution rather than as an ephemeral or marginal presence at the mercy of university debate. This established presence is solidly rendered in bricks and mortar by Sayers who reflects both the chronological span of the college and its integration within the University in the building itself, which, as mentioned above 'stretch[es] out reconciling hands to past and present'

⁸⁶ 'Women at Oxford', *The Times*, 13 June, 1927, p. 15.

⁸⁷ 'Women at Oxford', *The Times*, 15 Jun 1927, p. 11.

(1). Sayers portrays the paucity of funds experienced by women's colleges, through the comparison of their consumables with those of the male colleges, a strategy used by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*.⁸⁸ At the 'grovellingly poor' Shrewsbury (34), funds cannot be found for decent coffee, while in Christ Church Harriet is shown 'the vast fireplace with its shining spits' and hears 'statistics of the number of joints roasted and the quantities of fuel consumed per week in term-time' (204). Nevertheless, while the fictional Shrewsbury may reflect the economic position of the women's colleges as poor cousins to the older male colleges, Sayers gives it a physical footprint so comprehensive that she backhandedly apologises for it in her foreword to the novel. Sayers integrates the fictional Shrewsbury into the physical map of Oxford, attaching it to non-fictional roads and describing its position in relation to actual locations. Shrewsbury is a college in the process of expansion (a new library is opened in the course of the plot) and this fictional expansion is at the expense of other, real, college sites. Sayers displayed, as she termed it, 'monstrous impertinence' (vii) in her destruction of Balliol's 'sacred cricket ground' (viii) for the foundations of Shrewsbury, acquiring in doing so a few more metres squared for women out of the male tradition. She also flouted the cap of 1927, acknowledging that by peopling her college with one hundred and fifty women students she was 'in excess of the limit ordained by the statute' (vii). Moreover, Sayers uses the male academics in her novel to actively support women's position within higher education: Dr Threep in conversation with the Vice Chancellor dismisses the poison pen accusations made against Shrewsbury and asks 'is it not curious that such peculiar delusions should exist – and *persist* – at this day?' (325).

Through the college's fear of media interest, however, Sayers conveys the limited acceptance of women's higher education in the wider world, particularly in relation to unmarried women academics: "'Soured virginity" – "unnatural life" – "semi-demented spinsters" – "starved appetites and suppressed impulses" – "unwholesome atmosphere" – [Harriet] could think of whole sets of epithets, ready-minted for circulation' (88). Even as Sayers equates this kind of name-calling with

⁸⁸ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 12-21.

the crank poison pen, she acknowledges its real effect: 'parents would not care to send their young innocents to places where psychological oddities flourished unchecked' (86-87). Sayers' depiction of Shrewsbury, which is positioned against the idea, not only of psychological, but also sexual oddities, conveys a very different impression of university life to that offered by other women novelists writing at the same time including Rosamond Lehmann and G.M. Trevelyan.

Sayers positions Shrewsbury's ethos, like its architecture, as an integration of the modern into the traditional. Modernity, where it emerges, does so through the women students and is largely innocuous; they drink cocktails rather than sherry, wear less while sunbathing than their elders approve of, and take for granted their right to university education. In contrast to the Cambridge of Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* discussed in the previous chapter, or the Oxford of Trevelyan's *Hot-house*, Shrewsbury is entirely devoid of both cocoa and any atmosphere of sexual frisson between women. Emotional relationships, where they exist, are confined to heterosexual and frequently, marriage-directed narratives. Although one past student is referred to as having had a 'g.p.' or grand passion for a former teacher, this is both located in the past, and immediately associated with psychological instability: 'she went potty on some new kind of religion' (28). The undergraduates, compete for male attention rather than forging close bonds of their own but even these heterosexual liaisons are discouraged and, in contrast to Lehmann's work particularly, are shown to be peripheral to university life. Harriet's advice to one undergraduate, upset because another has 'stolen' her fiancé, is to "'stop chasing undergraduates, because it bores them to tears and interrupts their work. I'd tackle the History and get through Schools'" (189). It embodies the absolute academic ethos with which Sayers' Shrewsbury is imbued. Unlike Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*, Sayers' predominant focus on the staff of Shrewsbury rather than the students, works to position the college as a destination site, rather than a transient phase. In her depiction of the staff however, as with the undergraduates, Sayers allows no hints of the romantic or emotional friendships that Martha Vicinus identifies as central to the experiences of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women

academics. In direct contrast to Trevelyan's *Hot-house* members of staff are seen as colleagues rather than friends or partners. They retain their titles throughout and are depicted only in the public areas of the Senior Common Room, and dining hall, or boating on the river, never in the intimacy of their private rooms. Their relationships are characterized by academic respect, and are almost wholly professional, if cordial.

By eliding women's close relationships with each other, Sayers creates an environment in which the singularity of the unmarried women is paradoxically emphasised, even as they are depicted as part of a group. As a result, Wimsey's description of 'the remarkable solidarity and public spirit' of the college' (522), does not fully resonate with Sayers' depiction. This is not limited to the portrayal of romantic attachments, which may have been more likely to be interpreted as deviant post-1928, but also to familial ties. Miss Shaw, the one academic who self-consciously styles herself as motherly, is portrayed as the character least likely to receive the confidence of her students. In her effacement of close ties between women Sayers does create a college that is not 'feminine' or 'soft', and therefore not open to the claims of declining moral or academic standards circulated by opponents of women's education in the press, but this comes at a price. It is a college constructed within the traditional framework of the male colleges, whose only real claim to modernity is the presence of women. In *Gaudy Night*, Sayers thus achieves for her single women the occupation of male space, but not its transformation, a feat that will be discussed in later chapters in relation to the writers Sylvia Townsend Warner and Virginia Woolf. Through this however, she does offer a very real alternative to the romance narrative, and offers the 'surplus' woman a valuable and valued place in society, 'a place achieved, inalienable, worthy of reverence' (10). Shrewsbury both embodies and symbolizes an alternative value system where it is 'the work you are doing that really counts' (11), and truth, academic integrity and rigour are offered as standards against which not only unmarried women, but women irrespective of their marital status, and men, can be accounted.

Dangerous women (2): The problem of the psycho-spinster

In *Gaudy Night*, Sayers addresses what Winifred Holtby called 'the persecution of the virgins', raising the spectre of the lunatic spinster only in order to more firmly dismiss her from the coterie of women dons that she depicts.⁸⁹ Unlike the depiction of Agatha Milsom in *The Documents in the Case*, Sayers' dons exhibit no physical or mental symptoms of repression. Rather, it is through Harriet's (mis)reading of a drawing by the 'poison pen', that Sayers points suspicion towards the spinster, inviting the reader to interpret any further actions through this mistaken focalisation. The note is a childish drawing of a naked woman 'inflicting savage and humiliating outrage upon some person of indeterminate gender in a cap and gown' (43). Harriet's reading of the drawing is that '[i]t was neither sane nor healthy; it was in fact, a nasty, dirty and lunatic scribble' (43), and it is in her search for a psychologically unstable suspect that she is drawn to the members of the college because of their unmarried status, a fact that the dons themselves appreciate. The Dean herself queries whether 'it might even be one of ourselves. [...] elderly virgins, and all that' (90).

Both Marya McFadden and Elizabeth English have read the threat of the spinster in *Gaudy Night* as the threat of the lesbian, but again, as I discussed in relation to English's reading of *Unnatural Death*, I think this involves a misreading of the narrative positions of the women in question. McFadden writes that Shrewsbury, for Harriet 'represents [...] a threat to the heteronormative identity that she has attempted to establish in the intervening years', keeping a distance in 'an attempt to deny what may be her own homoerotic desires.'⁹⁰ English too suggests that Harriet is a 'fairly ineffectual and reluctant detective' because she is 'distracted by desires that arise' on her 'return to the enclosed female community.'⁹¹ For both writers, repression throughout the novel is equated with 'repressed homoeroticism'. These

⁸⁹ Winifred Holtby, 'King George V Celebrations', p. 92.

⁹⁰ McFadden, p. 358.

⁹¹ English, p. 163.

readings of Harriet have to ignore the twin narrative that runs through the novel, and combines the romantic story of Harriet and Wimsey, with the detective story of the poison pen. Both are concluded simultaneously at the end of the novel when the culprit is revealed, and Harriet accepts Wimsey's proposal of marriage. More importantly, the whole novel is structured by the question whether Harriet should follow her heart (Wimsey) or her head (a life of work), and the revelation that the poison pen is Annie the scout, a woman whose marriage and widowhood have resulted in her losing capacity for rational thought, is specifically positioned as a challenge to Harriet's softening towards Wimsey. Harriet's position within the college is thus specifically related to a concern about celibacy rather than lesbianism and repressed heterosexual rather than homosexual desire, a fact that Wimsey explicitly sets out:

Isn't it a fact that, having more or less made up your mind to a spot of celibacy you are eagerly peopling the cloister with bogies? If you want to do without personal relationships, then do without them. Don't stampede yourself into them by imagining that you've got to have them or qualify for a Freudian case-book. (357)

Where there does remain a possible conflation of the spinster and the lesbian is in some instances of the anti-spinster rhetoric that Harriet attributes to the media, and which is also voiced by Annie. 'Unnatural' as discussed above, was used regularly as a euphemism for lesbianism, and 'unnatural life' alongside 'soured virginity' and 'starved appetites' (88), is one of the 'epithets, ready-minted for circulation' that Harriet imagines the press employing about Shrewsbury. For Annie, unmarried women living together 'isn't natural', and, using another synonym in circulation by this point she adds: 'some of these clever ladies are a bit queer, don't you think?' (140) The ambiguity of 'queer' at this point, however, is suggested by its repeated use. In the same conversation, just one page earlier, Harriet uses it to imply strangeness, not sexuality as she: 'suddenly recollected that Annie's husband had been queer, or committed suicide, or something unfortunate' (141). One suggestion is that Sayers is highlighting the means through which the spinster and the lesbian are equated in discourses that are distanced from the intellectual women academics themselves, whether by class (Annie) or by intellect (the 'ready minted' phrases of

the press). The use of these phrases by Sayers serves to misdirect her reader, but she ensures that they are not phrases used by her academics who she depicts as pedantic where terminology is concerned. During a discussion about their own position in the university, and how it is viewed by the public these women all use the phrase 'unwomanly', and thus denote their 'odd' relationship to gender expectations, but not explicitly sexual ones. This repeats the distinction between natural and unnatural made by Sayers in *Unnatural Death*, which is brought up by Wimsey as he recollects this past case, and refers to Mary Whittaker as a woman responsible for 'corrupting one or two people's minds' (407). In *Gaudy Night*, this sense of corruption is transposed not onto the spinster, but onto the widow Annie, whose two young daughters are exposed to views antithetical to Shrewsbury: 'I can't see what girls want with books. Books won't teach them to be good wives' (142).

Through Annie, Sayers subverts the truths held by Ellis and Lombroso that maternity acts as a check on criminality, but she also offers another uncomfortable rendering of the working class, and another ascription of lunacy to an unmarried woman, this time a widow. Annie is initially discounted as a suspect because she is a college scout, and unlikely to have written one of the poison pen notes which is in Latin. Harriet, considering possible culprits while in the dining hall, diverts suspicion from the scouts because she describes them in terms of social observers, rather than participators: 'the scouts looked on impassively from the serving hatches. "And what they think of us all, God only knows," mused Harriet' (59). The effectiveness of this strategy both relies on, and reflects, the ghostly presence of servants in much modern fiction, although their regular appearance in detective stories was enough for S.S. Van Dine to include a prohibition on servant murderers in his 'Twenty Rules for Detective Stories.'⁹² Sayers' choice of Annie could be construed in this context as a double-bluff, but alongside her demonisation of female dependents as 'bad' or 'mad' in *Unnatural Death* and *The Documents in the*

⁹² S.S. Van Dine, 'Twenty Rules for Detective Fiction', in Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp. 189-193.

Case, it appears more as a repeated trope. Annie although a mother, shares characteristics with both Mary Whittaker and Agatha Milsom. She is described as having 'a kind of hungry look about her' (248), a look that recalls the 'starved appetites and suppressed impulses' of the spinster, but also the 'extra-ordinary strength' (233), of Mary Whittaker.⁹³ She has 'a most unfeminine vocabulary' (514) and the 'stream of hoarse, filthy abuse' (509) that she directs at Harriet as she attacks her suggests both the sexualised verbal outpourings of Agatha Milsom and a commentary on Annie's class.

Annie's mantra, that 'a woman's job is to look after her husband and children' (539), combines two discrete reasons behind her attacks. She attacks the college because she feels it is *her* job, to avenge her husband, and because she disagrees with the academics of Shrewsbury in *their* choice of job, which she blames for the dismissal and subsequent suicide of her husband, and more broadly for the mass unemployment of men. Sayers critique of these views begins with Annie's class, and she subverts Annie's accusation by suggesting that her husband was 'hampered a little in his social career by having in a weak moment married his landlady's daughter' (456). Annie's views on the education of women, marriage and motherhood, which are classed both by this reference, and her position as a scout, are then equated with Nazism. *Gaudy Night* was published two years after Hitler's political ascendancy to the position of Chancellor, and Germany's increasing interwar 'relegation of woman to her proper place in the home' (408) is identified by one of the Shrewsbury dons. Sayers repeats this point when Annie vandalises an anti-Nazi book that attacks 'the Nazi doctrine that woman's place in the State should be confined to the 'womanly' occupations of *Kinder, Kirche, Kuche*' (522). However, while Annie is identified as psychologically disturbed, and by the end of the novel, her 'problem' is being 'medically dealt with' (549), Sayers also applies this association of the working class with the ideology of Nazism to other members of the college staff. Padgett, a porter who is distinguished by Sayers for his First

⁹³ In Rosamond Lehmann's *The Weather in the Streets*, sexual and/or maternal fulfilment are repeatedly equated with plumpness and satiety, where women characters who are without partners are frequently thin, both physically and sexually 'starved'.

World War service with Wimsey, articulates the same opinions in a tellingly idiomatically phrased conversation with a foreman: "'Wot this country wants," said Padgett. "'is a 'Itler.'" "That's right," said the foreman. "Keep the girls at 'ome'" (139). Like the fascist symbol that North spots in a poor area of thirties London in Woolf's *The Years*, this conversation indicates increasing concern within the middle classes of the rise of fascism in England as well as in Germany by the mid-thirties. While Sayers' equation of Annie's views with Nazi ideology indicates her as the novel's villain, however, and the possessor of a very poisoned pen, Sayers' ascription of the same ideas to Padgett and the foreman implicates the entire working class of the novel in fascism without any discernable narrative purpose.

Conclusion

Gill Plain has suggested that 'the [detective] genre's transgressive "potential" is not to be found in its conclusion; rather, it finds expression in the writing *before* the ending – in the body of the text.'⁹⁴ Elizabeth English has drawn on this in her analysis of *Unnatural Death* and *Gaudy Night*, and Marya McFadden has similarly identified this latter novel as 'a work in which gender and sexuality are deconstructed to unleash a play of polymorphously perverse possibilities.'⁹⁵ While Plain's analysis illuminates the pleasurable transgressions experienced in reading detective writers including Agatha Christie, it works less well in relation to Sayers' detective fiction. Whereas in Christie 'it is precisely the nice people who make the cleverest killers', in Sayers the 'goodies' are often easily distinguishable from the outset, and so too are the 'baddies'.⁹⁶ Sayers' wish was to write in a style similar to Wilkie Collins and to move characters in detective fiction away from 'the automata – the embodied vices and virtues' to ones who had 'more in common with humanity.'⁹⁷ However, by embedding her detective stories in the social anxieties

⁹⁴ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-century crime fiction: gender, sexuality and the body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 6.

⁹⁵ McFadden, p. 356.

⁹⁶ Light, p. 95.

⁹⁷ Sayers, 'Introduction', p. 105.

and debates of her day, she was much less transgressive than the more deliberately stylistic Christie. Light argues persuasively that while Christie's spinsters, vicars, and squires may conform to their stereotypes, these are firmly detached from either morality or their narrative role as murderer or victim. In contrast, Sayers' stereotypes appear more pernicious by being linked to the morality of the individual. Ironically, her objective to lead characters away from 'automata' led to her stigmatizing identifiable rather than purely literary types.

Read together, *Unnatural Death*, *The Documents in the Case*, and *Gaudy Night* reveal a repeated link in Sayers' fiction between sexual deviance and criminality. Looked at in the context of Sayers' other fiction, it is revealed that this is an equation that only occurs in women criminals, and not their male counterparts. Deviance in Sayers, located in the lesbian criminal, the sexually incontinent spinster, and the disturbed widow is differentiated from the acts and identities that she positions within the realm of sexual modernity including the celibate spinster employed in valuable work, and the woman cajoled into pre-marital sex but reclaimed through a romance narrative and marriage proposal. The single women that Sayers identifies as sexual deviants are not only identified and punished, they are also denied their autonomy. Both Agatha Milsom and Annie the Scout end up under medical supervision while Mary Whittaker, is rendered 'unnatural'. For all three it is implied that crime, or incitement to crime, is not a choice, but rather is something that is innate: something that has emerged from a psycho-sexual or biological disturbance. In these depictions, as I have shown, Sayers echoes the sexual and criminological typologies of women that were produced at the end of the nineteenth century.

Sayers' differentiation between single women, like Lehmann's, also appears to be influenced by class. Where Miss Climpson is eliminated from suspicion by virtue of her employment and the patronage of Wimsey, in *Agatha Milsom and Annie*, Sayers draws characters whose suspect sexuality, criminality, and / or madness are all indivisible from their lower-class status. While Sayers can be considered a progressive author by virtue of offering women the chance of meaningful

employment and education in her texts then, she does so by reference to a core of traditional upper-middle class and aristocratic values, and her depictions of single women work variously to allay, but also confirm, the circulating fears with which they were associated.

Far from enabling 'polymorphously perverse possibilities' then, Sayers draws a line between women who can be subsumed in a particular male tradition, where they have the opportunity to be judged and treated as equals, and those who cannot. In spite of their differences it is this attitude that aligns Sayers closely to Leavis, despite the latter's hatchet-job of a review on *Gaudy Night*. It also exemplifies why Woolf might have consigned them both to the 'middlebrow'. Leavis, who took issue with Woolf's *Three Guineas* wrote:

the only chance of [women] getting accepted as intellectual equals by intelligent men (and so ultimately by the men who run the institutions and professions) is by living down their sex's reputation for having in general minds as ill-regulated as Mrs Woolf's.⁹⁸

This attitude, that equality for women is their opportunity to aspire to 'the best kind of masculine mind' appears to be shared by Sayers in *Gaudy Night*.⁹⁹ It is a position flatly refuted by Woolf who demands in *Three Guineas* that women critique the procession of educated men before they join it. Of the Leavises Woolf wrote 'all they can do is Schoolmaster', a position that she aligned with the middlebrow in her letter-essay of the same name.¹⁰⁰ Here it is the middlebrow's preference for 'dead writers' and 'dead painters' that Woolf particularly condemns, in contrast to the highbrow's search for the new. This allegiance to tradition permeates Sayers' fiction. Despite the respect that Sayers pays to certain types of single women they are ultimately bound by a tradition that, however elite, is in the final instance constraining. In my final two chapters, however, I turn to two writers whose approach to the past is less reverential, and whose minds 'ill-regulated' by the

⁹⁸ Q.D. Leavis, 'Review', in *Virginia Woolf The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975). pp. 409-419 (pp. 411-412).

⁹⁹ Leavis, 'Review', p. 414.

¹⁰⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume 4: 1931-35*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982), p. 337.

standards of Leavis, offer more disruptive approaches to the single-woman narrative.

4. Sympathy for the Devil: Domestic and Urban Disruption in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* and *Summer Will Show*

In November 1935, after attending her first large political meeting Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote to Julius Lipton that: '[t]he thing I enjoyed [...] was discovering that I can heckle. [...] to my rapture I found that of all things I loved making rude remarks at the top of my voice and that the top of my voice was gratifyingly loud and nasty.'¹ Evidently satisfied with herself, Warner concluded 'it is awful to think of all the years this good gift has been slumbering in me.' A reading of her first novel, *Lolly Willowes*, published nine years previously suggests that it was not a gift that slumbered in her writing however. Warner's fiction, diary entries, and letters are all shot through with the insistent voice that undermines established authority, that shouts 'nonsense' to collectively held truths, or gleefully shrieks that the Emperor is naked. In her fiction, Warner embraces disruption, whether of plots, narrative form, or character, at a strategic level. Repeatedly, her agent of disruption is the single woman.

In this chapter I look at Warner's single women narratives, *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and *Summer Will Show* (1936) in which disruption plays a key role.² Warner's protagonists in these novels can broadly be designated by the term single women, but they are differently single: Laura Willowes is a virginal spinster, Sophia Willoughby is a deserted wife whose children have died, and Minna Lemuel is a sexually promiscuous, bohemian artist. Through the experiences of these women Warner explores some of the ways in which domestic and urban spaces, in British and French history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have been used to reflect, construct and perpetuate social relations and hierarchies. She identifies the classed and gendered nature of spaces and details the everyday implications of

¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. by William Maxwell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p37.

² Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes* (London: The Women's Press, 1978); Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show* (London: Virago, 1987). All further references will be made in the text.

these for the middle-class women who live in them: including the gendered division of interior and exterior spaces into separate spheres, women's inequality under property laws, and social prohibitions on women living or travelling alone. In this respect, 'the Architect of Apsley Terrace', she suggests, is as much a 'useful prop of civilisation' as 'Society, the Law, the Church, the History of Europe [...] the Bank of England, [and] Prostitution' (*Lolly* 150).

Warner's novels do more than mimetically represent these social relations and spatial practices however. They provide an arena in which physical and social borders can be critiqued and transgressed. Warner's single women draw strength from their liminal relationship to the family and the establishment; they become disruptive presences and provide alternative focal positions from which 'civilisation' can be viewed. In *Lolly Willowes*, Warner's eponymous spinster both trespasses beyond the socially prescribed domestic interior and threatens to explode its integrity from within. Far from being an 'angel in the house', she is a demonic subject who takes Satan as her knight errant, or loving huntsman. In *Summer Will Show* Warner's deserted wife follows her husband's lead and deserts her home in turn to become a communist revolutionary who literally dismantles the streets for her cause. In these novels Warner argues forcefully that the occupation of one's own space is not enough for single women to claim autonomy; in the words of Laura Willowes, it is not just a room but a 'life of one's own' (239) that is needed. Through nuanced spatial descriptions and shifting narrative perspectives Warner guides her readers through the 'educative process' of her characters who must learn to re-inhabit and re-read their surroundings in order to achieve this.³ In both of these novels, Warner overtly critiques a domestic role for women; in them women's route to selfhood, autonomy and articulation necessarily begins by walking away from a certain kind of domestic sphere. Both novels begin by critiquing the limited positions offered to women in society at various points in history, but both end by inviting a more radical and broader re-visualisation of social relations. Warner's

³ Janet Montefiore, 'Listening to Minna: Realism, Feminism and the Politics of Reading', *Arguments of Heart and Mind: Selected Essays 1977-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 132.

choice to employ an entirely 'other' perspective, whether satanic or communist, is mirrored in the form of her narratives, which begin in a realist mode, but evolve and fragment under the pressure of pastiche, fantasy and humour. The domestic and urban disruption of her single women then, is matched by Warner's own textual disruption, which suggests once more the difficulty of accommodating the single woman within traditional narrative frameworks.

Lolly Willowes

Lolly Willowes was Warner's first novel and was immensely popular, becoming the first American Book-of-the-Month Club book and achieving a nomination for the Prix Femina award. Released in January 1926, it had to be reprinted twice in one week during the following month, and by June it had sold over 10,000 copies in the United States.⁴ Critics received the novel favourably, relieved that it did not treat the spinster with undue irreverence or oppressive earnestness. Laura Willowes was not one of 'those endless old maids of the country that are now so constantly the butt of novelists and short story writers', but nor was her tale 'one more study [...] of a frustrated woman's life and death.'⁵ A number of studies of the latter type had been published prior to *Lolly Willowes*, including F.M. Mayor's *The Third Miss Symons* (1913) and May Sinclair's *Mary Oliver: A Life* (1919) and *The Life and Death of Harriet Fream* (1922). These narratives sought to explain the 'insignificant, feeble and unhappy' lives of the seemingly 'ceaseless supply of generous, touchy, incapable old ladies in England,' through detailed studies of their nineteenth-century upbringing and its psychological consequences.⁶ The novels were innovative in their analysis and portrayal of the inner consciousness of the spinster, but despite the empathy of their authors, the spinsters created by Sinclair and Mayor were stereotypical: mean, bitter and thwarted, victims of circumstances and environments that they ultimately remained incapable of questioning or defying. In

⁴ Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 65.

⁵ CHW, 'Lolly Willowes', *Bookman*, 69:414, 1926, 326-7, (p. 327); Orlo Williams, "Lolly Willowes", *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 Feb. 1926, p. 78.

⁶ F.M. Mayor, *The Third Miss Symons* (London: Virago Modern Classics, (1980), pp. 141, 140.

contrast, Warner utilises the familiar literary form of a birth to death narrative, Victorian born spinster, and eponymous title, to pastiche a tradition that she then subverts. As one critic noted, 'Nobody would expect the emergence of a cloven hoof from this quiet realism'; when it does emerge Warner uses her devil and spinster to disrupt the domestic sphere that bound Laura's literary fore-sisters so irrevocably.⁷

Key to the narrative of *Lolly Willowes* are the three houses and locations in which Laura Willowes lives during her life. These houses are the focus for Warner's critique of the spinster's lot. Through her descriptions of their interiors and household routines Warner conveys Laura's class, her social position and the minutiae of her daily life. These are not static, and in her transitions between houses Warner uses the domestic as an index of historical, social and personal change. Lady Place, Somerset is the place of Laura's relatively free Victorian childhood, and early adulthood; Apsley Terrace, London is where she spends twenty unhappy years in spinsterly servitude as a Maiden Aunt in the Edwardian household of her brother; Great Mop, in the Chilterns, is where Laura retires to after the First World War, determined to be autonomous. Like Rosamond Lehmann in *The Weather in the Streets*, Warner uses different households to explore different ways of life, but unlike Lehmann's protagonist Olivia, Laura Willowes is portrayed by Warner as being profoundly affected by these moves and the paradigmatic changes to her life that they cause.

In his essay 'Being Dwelling Thinking' Martin Heidegger makes the claim that 'Dwelling [...] is *the basic character* of Being in keeping with which mortals exist.'⁸ Being, for Heidegger is intimately associated with space and place. Being is being-in-the-world, and he terms this type of situated existence as *Dasein* which translates from German as 'being there'. Underpinning Heidegger's reasoning is his excavation and examination of the Old English and High German words for

⁷ Orlo Williams, p. 78.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, 'Being Dwelling Thinking', in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. by Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 100-109 (p. 109).

building and being. Heidegger moves from a conflation of building and dwelling, '[t]he Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in place', to an equation of both terms with being.

What then does *ich bin* [I am] mean? The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin, du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling.⁹

In her descriptions of the three households of *Lolly Willowes* Warner intimately associates being with dwelling, or more precisely, the ways in which certain dwellings, and ways of dwelling, allow or prevent the spinster from fully 'being'. Laura's journey through the spaces of Warner's narrative passes through the Victorian, Edwardian and interwar periods of British history, but Laura has to detach herself from a passive participation in this kind of historical progress in order to both claim her autonomy and learn to use it. Warner's approach to domestic space is fourfold; firstly she critiques the spinster's position within the family home. Secondly, she allows the spinster to trespass beyond its borders, suggesting as she does so that that the spinster is a potentially disruptive figure. Although profoundly affected by her environment, Laura is not in the final instance contained by it. Thirdly, Warner recreates the domestic to a different template by allowing the spinster a room of her own. Finally, she turns away from the domestic along with the civilisation it symbolises, reflects and perpetuates. In order to find a place for her spinster Warner is driven to adopt radical measures, and while critics have suggested that the domestic offers women writers 'a pattern within which to write or against which to write', in the final instance Warner has to abandon it altogether.¹⁰

The Victorian and Edwardian domestic: Lady Place and Apsley Terrace

Warner's first deviation from the birth-to-death narrative of previous novels about spinsters is to manipulate its chronology and to begin the narrative with the funeral

⁹ Heidegger, p. 101.

¹⁰ Briganti and Mezei, 'House-Haunting', p. 154.

of Laura's father, when Laura is twenty-eight. Everard's death precipitates Laura's move to her brother's household, and so *Lolly Willowes* begins with Laura's loss, not only of her father, but also of her home and her autonomy. This narrative configuration achieves two ends. It means that when Warner describes Lady Place shortly after the beginning of the novel, the reader is aware that it symbolises a way of life that has already passed, and that Laura herself is already a figure in exile. However, by describing Lady Place after the move to Apsley Terrace has been decided, Warner also forcibly brings the past into the narrative present, and by pushing the two residences into closer narrative proximity she invites the reader to compare them. It is a narrative strategy that Warner employs throughout *Lolly Willowes* and also *Summer Will Show*; she uses it to highlight how traditions are passed down and actively affect the present, but also to illustrate how the past can be employed in a more revolutionary manner, 'blasted out of the continuum of history' to bear witness to an alternate present.¹¹ This will be discussed further below.

The Victorian era, as experienced by the middle-classes, has repeatedly been described in terms of separate spheres for men and women. From the late eighteenth century, as the workplace became separated from the home, men were increasingly located in and identified with the exterior 'public world of work, office and citizenship'.¹² Women, in contrast were located in and linked to the private, domestic sphere of the home. Their lack of need to work was a crucial signifier of middle-class affluence and thus women frequently lived with their parents until marriage when they moved to the residence and economic patronage of their husbands. Although historians are increasingly identifying ways in which these spheres were permeable the related dichotomies of men/women, inside/outside, are repeatedly represented in Victorian and Edwardian fiction. In *Lolly Willowes*, although the 'public' world is only fleetingly glimpsed, Warner divides Lady Place into house and garden, setting up a dichotomised schema of inside/outside that she

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992) pp. 245-255 (p. 253).

¹² Lewis, *Women in England*, p. x.

subverts in order to explore and undermine gender assumptions. In the first place, she associates the house with men as well as with women, in order to highlight not its domestic aspect, but its value as property: particularly as property that is rarely owned by women. In the second place, she associates the outside with women, offering the garden as an alternate space in which Laura is unconfined by Victorian etiquette and can be articulate.

Lady Place, is, paradoxically, described in terms of a male history of genealogy, ownership and property; Warner traces the historical tradition of the house by describing the family tree, following the male line of succession. Where women are mentioned they fulfil a distinctly feminine or domestic role: there is Emma, the Romantic era Great Aunt who dies appropriately 'of a decline' (9), and Great Aunt Salome famous for her cookery. By embellishing details of the Willowes' genealogy through references to the *bric-a-brac* and furniture, including a Romantic harp, an imperialist's parrot, and a royalist bible, bequeathed to Lady Place by preceding generations, Warner creates a sense of the past in the present. Warner uses her description of this diverse clutter to suggest the continued and affective presence of the ideological legacies that these objects embody and symbolise. In *Lady Place*, successive generations of the Willowes family are schooled in the well-worn ideological grooves of their ancestors through the comfort of their chairs:

They slept in beds and sat upon chairs whose comfort insensibly persuaded them into respect for the good sense of their forbears. Finding that well-chosen wood and well-chosen wine improved with keeping, they believed that the same law applied to well-chosen ways. (7)

Laura's relationship to the house is personal and emotional but also socially and economically mediated; it is the place where she grows up in intimate familiarity with her surroundings, but as the younger sister of two brothers it is not a home that she will ever inherit. Her time there, like her childhood, is therefore transient: a fact that Warner conveys by describing *Lady Place* in the past tense. Laura's position as 'housekeeper', which she takes up after her mother's death, exemplifies this. Laura may 'keep' the house in the sense of being responsible for the running of

its domestic routine, but she cannot 'keep' the house in the sense of owning it. Moreover, as a spinster, even Laura's position as housekeeper is contingent. While the position of housekeeper in the Victorian house offered an alternative (female) head-of-house role to the unmarried woman, it was automatically rescinded if the male head married.¹³ In keeping with this Laura cedes the housekeeping keys to her sister-in-law who is placed above her in the domestic hierarchy through marriage. Warner thus subtly underwrites her representation of separate spheres with the understanding that the feminine, domestic sphere remains owned and organised by men, and that the hierarchy of women in the domestic sphere is organised according to marital status.

In direct contrast to the house, which is pervaded by a male history of accession and ownership, is Warner's description of the garden, a place in which Laura spends much of her time. This is a space that is outside rather than inside, and which is characterised by female, but not feminine knowledge: the oral tradition of botany and alternative medicine that is passed on to Laura by Nannie Quantrell. As a child and a servant respectively, Laura and Nannie occupy a place outside the middle-class feminine paradigm. Wendy Gan has identified the garden as an important space of privacy for middle-class women from the late nineteenth century onwards, although she acknowledges that its permeability places limits on its efficacy as a space of solitude.¹⁴ The garden in this context may act as a space of temporary reprieve, but it operates under the same rules of ownership as the house. In the work of Katherine Mansfield, a contemporary of Warner, the garden similarly functions as a site where woman can envisage themselves apart from their social and familial obligations, but again, this is only a temporary measure.¹⁵ While, as a child, Laura is able to occupy both the exterior and interior spheres of Lady Place,

¹³ On the position conferred to the spinster as housekeeper see for example F.M. Mayor, *Third Miss Symonds* (1913), 'As mistress of the house, Henrietta was promoted to the circle of the married ladies,' (58). Where this does not happen, for example in Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), it is used to show the inappropriate behaviour of the wife and spinster: Lady Isabelle Carlyle and Cordelia Carlyle respectively.

¹⁴ Gan, pp. 20-37.

¹⁵ See for example 'Prelude' and 'At the Bay', Katherine Mansfield, *Selected Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 79-120, 281-314.

as she grows older social precepts demand that she is placed firmly in the domestic interior. Laura leaves behind childhood and the garden simultaneously when her mother dies and she becomes housekeeper of Lady Place. Although this chain of events seems to Laura to be more gravely fitting than the champagne bottles and 'flimsy ball-dress' (18) of the traditional debutante ball, Warner suggests that all women are really 'subdued into young ladyhood' (18) when Laura notes that after all, 'coming out' really means 'going in' (18).

Warner's coding of the garden as female space and the house as male space initially appears to invert the separate spheres notion of the feminine interior and masculine exterior, but as critics have noted there were multiple and conflicting gendered notions of space at this time, including the Victorian equation of men with culture and women with nature.¹⁶ Warner places Laura's sympathies with the garden rather than the house but dismisses the notion of this as an inherently female affinity by presenting the relationship as a sophisticated one. Laura's knowledge of plants is derived through study of the 'forsaken green byways of rural pharmacopeia' (31) and she makes her own distillations. Moreover, Laura's interest in botany and the external world is a means through which she is articulate, writing and publishing her own pamphlet, 'Health by the Wayside.' In this way, Warner manages to oppose the natural, external world to the socially imbricated sphere of the house without either reducing Laura's affinity to nature to a symbol of essentialised femininity, or reducing her own prose to the literary form of the easily parodied pastoral. For some novelists of the interwar period, the pastoral, exemplified by novelists including Sheila Kaye-Smith, became shorthand to denote the naivety or even stupidity of their characters. Stella Gibbons mocks the stock pastoral protagonist relentlessly in *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) through the character of Elphine who chases squirrels and writes poetry, and whose first outspoken utterance to the brisk Flora Post, after introducing herself, is that houses stifle her and she hates them.¹⁷ In Dorothy L. Sayers' *Unnatural Death* the cluelessness of the final victim,

¹⁶ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 4.

¹⁷ Stella Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm* (London: Penguin, 1938), p. 123.

Vera Findlater is signalled not just through her naive wish to 'live close to the earth and the fundamental crudities', but because her understanding of this is mediated through fiction: 'Do you read Sheila Kaye-Smith?' (52) she asks Miss Climpson. Laura's own knowledge of the countryside, articulated in terms of pharmacopeia, and mediated by her reading of Nicholas Culpeper is clearly distinguished by Warner either from any crude equation of women with the earth, or from naïve pastoral. It is positioned instead as an alternative tradition and form of knowledge to that embodied in the imperial house.

One further reading of the garden is clearly suggested by Warner whose textual spaces, like the physical buildings and gardens they resemble, are overlaid with multiple meanings. Laura's childhood and her early association with the garden along with her subsequent turn to the devil, suggest a prelapsarian reading of Lady Place. Warner compounds this in a passing anecdote she tells about Laura's childhood. Gan has suggested that part of the difficulty of appropriating the garden as a space for women is 'its Edenic heritage that privileges the heterosexual couple', but Warner specifically occludes this aspect of the Edenic myth to provide an alternate reading.¹⁸ Laura, playing with her brothers is given the part of passive maid waiting to be rescued and is tied by hayband fetters to the *Bon Chretien* (Good Christian) pear tree. Forgotten in her brothers' exuberance, she is found in the twilight by her Father, unafraid and singing a song about a snake that has lost its mackintosh. The Good Christian fruit tree and the presence in Laura's imagination of the serpent clearly suggest a Christian schematic and battle for Laura's soul; a gentle revision of Eve's position in Genesis, and subsequent literary 'fall' narratives, including Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *Faustus*. However, Warner's own schematic retains the signs and symbols of Christian belief while inverting their meanings. The fall for Laura is rewritten as her entrapment by social convention followed by her exile into the domestic and Christian interior of her brother's home. In this context, the serpent Satan, when she calls for him, appears as a 'kind of black

¹⁸ Gan, p. 37.

knight' (234), a redemptive figure who restores her to a garden unbounded by social or familial responsibilities where she can live autonomously.

Through Laura's move to Apsley Terrace Warner develops her domestic critique to suggest that certain types of modern domestic existence are not only confining, but are alienating and deadening. She does this by contrasting the domestic routine of Apsley Terrace to that of Lady Place, and by showing Laura's concomitant loss of her sense of self. Laura's move to London coincides with the 'official' onset of her old-maidhood, and her position in Apsley Terrace is therefore used by Warner to convey the social position of the confirmed spinster. Laura is twenty-eight, only two years away from thirty, popularly considered to be the cut off age for marriage.¹⁹ As her sister-in-law notes Laura would therefore 'have to make haste if she were going to find a husband,'(2). The 'small spare room' (6) that Laura is allotted reflects her marginal status as a Maiden Aunt within a family who feel, 'they could not give up the large spare room to Lolly' (2). She is removed to Apsley Terrace like 'a piece of family property forgotten in the will' (6) and her placement in the household is debated by her sister-in-law, at the same time that she considers where to put the walnut bureau, washstand and fireplace.

Laura's absorption into her brother's household, even with the five hundred pound annuity that Woolf identified as promoting independence, reflects standard middle-class practice of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, although by the turn of the century, this had begun to change in some circles.²⁰ As Warner notes, 'Even in 1902 there were some forward spirits who wondered why that Miss Willowes, who was quite well off, and not likely to marry, did not make a home for herself and take up something artistic and emancipated' (6). For the average spinster of the upper middle class, social disapproval prohibited living alone, even if financial means did not. While the New Woman had emerged as a strident and frequently

¹⁹ This continued well into the twentieth century. See also Lehmann, *Invitation to the Waltz*, p. 35: '[S]he wouldn't get a husband now. She hadn't a chance. She was thirty.'

²⁰ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 10. Vicinus notes the ubiquity of the practice in mid-nineteenth century.

unmarried figure in the media and literature of the *fin de siècle*, and the Edwardian era saw the beginnings of artistic Bloomsbury in Gordon Square and the marches of suffragists throughout London, Warner's portrait of Laura is of an old-fashioned type of spinster, the daughter of 'a conservative family [who] kept to old-fashioned ways' (7). Warner's decision to make Laura ordinary rather than emancipated counterbalances her later revelation that Laura is a witch and it allows Laura, despite her diabolic leanings to speak for all women when she denounces household drudgery at the end of the novel.

Warner's description of Apsley Terrace contrasts completely to that of Lady Place: it is anonymous; it is constituted entirely of the domestic interior; its routine is stripped of ritual and follows a different temporal rhythm. As the name of its street suggests, the 'tall house in Apsley Terrace' (3) is one of a number of identical houses and lacks the individuality of Lady Place. Apsley Terrace and London are described by a number of negatives all opposing the rural character of Laura's earlier life: there is no lawn, only gravel, 'no greenhouse [...] and no apple-room, and no potting-shed' (4-5), no poppy heads, sunflower seeds or lavender drying, and no tarred string. Laura is '[d]ivested of her easily-worn honours as mistress of the household' at the same time as she is 'shorn of her long meandering country days' (61); with the loss of her home and 'with everything thrown away she seemed to be denying the significance of her youth' (43). The family history and personal memories with which Lady Place was saturated and the rural pharmacopoeia through which Laura understood and articulated the outside world, are all lost to her at Apsley Terrace. Without a sense of the past, and stuck in an alien and anonymous environment, Laura loses any sense of herself except as a relational being in the present: she is Aunt Lolly to the family and Miss Willowes to society, 'but Laura was put away' (61).

In her descriptions of Laura's dwelling in Apsley Terrace, Warner manages to put forward the paradoxical existence of the spinster within the family. Laura is simultaneously anonymous, in that she is never Laura, and ever-present, because

Aunt Lolly is 'too useful to be allowed to stray' (66). She is both marginalised, as suggested by her small room, and fully subsumed within the household 'introduced as a sort of extra wheel, [Laura] soon found herself part of the mechanism, and interworking with the other wheels, went round as busily as they' (46). Warner here confers the alienation and anonymity common to descriptions of the modern city, onto the domestic sphere, while simultaneously retaining traditional facets of the domestic. Although Lady Place is positioned in a rural setting and Apsley Terrace is located in London, Warner's distinction between the two is more complex than a simple opposition of the country with the city. Instead, Laura's domestic life at Apsley Terrace is described in opposition to both her country childhood and the later exploratory walks that she makes around the metropolis.

Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei have suggested that by writing about domestic life women writers of the interwar period were able to articulate a different kind of experience of the modern to 'the luminous agonised portrait of the artistic self' found in the works of Lawrence, Joyce and Conrad.²¹ They suggest that writing about and through domestic experience can offer 'a kind of epistemology of the home' where 'being in the world' is interpreted 'through domestic ritual and the language of the everyday.'²² Many of Briganti and Mezei's arguments are persuasive, and certainly, as I discuss in my chapter on Woolf, '[i]n writing from a domestic space of house, household, and family, women writers can create a position [...] from which to value ordinary women's lives.'²³ However, Warner's writing suggests that the existence of diverse 'ordinary women' within the domestic space of house, household and family makes writing through this space more complex. In Warner's writing, domestic space is divided by hierarchies and territories delineated by marital status and class. It is a space that renders some 'ordinary women' (spinsters, servants) marginal and/or mute. Laura resides in the small guest room; the servants remain largely 'unseen and underground' (47).

²¹ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism*, p. 1.

²² Briganti and Mezei, 'Reading the House', p. 837.

²³ Briganti and Mezei, 'Reading the House', p. 843.

Furthermore, in the context of Warner's writing 'domestic ritual' appears an overtly emotive term for household practices: one through which critical discourse invests the everyday with a significance that is lacking in the term 'domestic routine'. Certainly, in Warner's comparison of Lady Place and Apsley Terrace it is the ritualised or meaningful aspects of domestic practice that she occludes in her descriptions of the latter dwelling, in order to highlight the mundane meaninglessness of Laura's daily round.

In the Lady Place of Laura's childhood, domestic tasks are naturalised and ritualised through their incorporation within seasonal cycles and are sanctified through their juxtaposition with holy days and pagan feasts. Warner describes how each Midsummer Eve the household has a picnic, and how each Good Friday the stuffed animals of the house are brushed and aired on the lawn. Household furniture is polished with home-made beeswax produced each spring. In contrast Apsley Terrace is run along Fordist lines; it is both timetabled and consciously normative, divided by 'regular days and regular meals' (49), with a weekly routine rather than a seasonal cycle. For Laura and her sister-in-law Caroline days are filled with a regime of 'doing, doing, doing' (236): 'shopping, letter-writing, arranging the flowers, cleaning the canary cage, and the girls' walk' (47). The tasks themselves are typical of the feminine sphere continued from the Victorian period, but in her description of their regulation Warner employs the terminology of household management that was increasingly prevalent in domestic discourse from the early nineteen twenties. Although set pre-war, this is the only text examined in this thesis in which a modern 'cult of the domestic' is fully realised, and here it is explicitly disparaged. White notes that '[b]y the early 'twenties, household management had come to be regarded as a demanding and responsible profession, requiring systematic instruction if competence were to be achieved in all its many branches.'²⁴ This instruction was in part provided by the glut of new home magazines that emerged after the First World War. The first edition of *Good Housekeeping* promised its readers that 'every new invention that is practical and economical in use will be

²⁴ White, p. 102.

brought to [your] notice', and regularly featured advertisements for electrical goods including vacuum cleaners and washing machines.²⁵

Warner's portrayal of Apsley Terrace is of an upper-middle-class house with servants; a house in which the staff rather than the 'ladies' of the house would do the cleaning. Nevertheless, Warner incorporates the language and imagery of scientific household management and mechanisation to position Apsley Terrace as the antithesis to the organic Lady Place: an unhomely 'home' in which Laura is alienated and obliterated. Laura awakes to the sound of 'iron noises from the kitchen' 'followed by the automatic noise of the carpet sweeper' (46), and she herself is 'part of the mechanism' (46). Knowledge, nature and religion are all contained by the routine. Flowers are relegated to the ground floor lavatory where they are always arranged, church is compared to the weekly winding of the clock, and books, the beloved objects of Laura, are made subject to both the domestic timetable and the intellectual restrictions of a public rather than a personal library. Just as the canary cage is cleaned regularly, '[e]very Tuesday the books were changed' (48), and no qualitative distinction is made between the two events.

Border trespass and domestic disruption

Warner's descriptions of Laura's life at Apsley Terrace are dominated by the domestic interior and oppressive domestic routine. Although leavened by humour, there is nothing to suggest in the first third of the novel that this is not just one more 'study [...] of a frustrated woman's life and death,' in the vein of *Harriet Frean*, or *The Third Miss Symons*.²⁶ However, in contrast to these literary counterparts, while Laura is marginalised and made unhappy throughout her time at Apsley Terrace, she is not entirely contained by it. Despite her brother's prohibitions Laura trespasses

²⁵ 'The Reason for Good Housekeeping', (1922), Brian Braithwaite, Noëlle Walsh, Glyn Davies (eds), *Ragtime to Wartime: The Best of Good Housekeeping 1922-1939* (London: Ebury Press, 1986), p. 11. For adverts for the Electrolux Cleaner, and the Standard Electric Washing Machine and Vacuum Sweeper, see pp. 33, 75.

²⁶ Orlo Williams, p. 78.

over the physical borders of the family home in walks around London and in her eventual escape to Great Mop. Moreover, Warner implies that the spinster is an *unheimlich* figure and potential force of domestic disruption, one who brings to the domestic hearth of Apsley Terrace a different kind of spatiality. Again, Heidegger's link between being and dwelling is useful here. Apsley Terrace may initially efface Laura's sense of herself but she retains the 'secret country of her mind' (135), in other words, her very being contains the potential for a different kind of dwelling.

Warner does not present Laura's journeys outside of the home as incursions into the male sphere. Ignoring the city of Henry's law practice, she takes Laura to spaces in London that are 'other'. Wandering is connoted as a diabolic practice in itself in the Bible with Satan '[r]anging over the earth [...] from end to end' throughout Job, and Laura, a potential acolyte follows in his footsteps.²⁷ In her visits to Bunhill Fields, an enormous cemetery for dissenters including Blake and Defoe, and the Jewish burial ground at Wapping, Laura strays from the domestic Christianity of Apsley Terrace. These are heterotopian spaces that are variously liminal: green spaces in the urban city; spaces on the border of life and death; spaces that allegedly contain the dead, but in reality increasingly contain nothing at all. These are places that despite 'the brilliance of the streets by night' (4), above all remain dark: physically dark; heretically dark; and in the case of the burial ground at Wapping, located in the 'dark continent' as Victorian philanthropists christened the East End of London.

Warner herself was a nocturnal walker in London's east end, often walking from Knightsbridge to Limehouse, the Docklands, Shadwell, Wapping or Poplar. Recollecting these walks, her friend Bea Howe described the areas thus:

the Chinese quarter with its tucked-away sleazy restaurants up incredibly narrow and winding staircases, Shadwell's dark wooden houses from which painted child-harlots [...] crept, silent Wapping Stairs with slimy steps leading down to deep dark water lapping softly where barges lay moored, hidden, secretive, and the naphtha flares on street stalls and the sound of raucous Cockney boys, shouting²⁸

²⁷ Job, 1. 7, 2. 2.

²⁸ Bea Howe, 'The Sylvia I Knew: A Personal Recollection', *PN Review*, 8 (1981), 39-40 (p. 39).

As Lucy Bland has noted, the Chinese quarter in London was a notorious site of anxiety during the interwar period, synonymous in the public imagination with drugs and crime.²⁹ In Warner's transposition of the East End to fiction however, the lack of people, encounters, or events are noticeable; there are no 'child-harlots', no 'Cockney boys', no-one at all. Warner allows her wandering protagonist to overstep geographical boundaries that are also social, trespassing into working class or slum areas where many gentlewomen who were not social visitors, would fear to tread, especially at night and alone, but the importance of these spaces to the text is symbolic rather than descriptive or realist. Laura sees no-one in these walks and no untoward events occur; rather, to paraphrase Charlotte Mew, 'it is [herself she] goes to meet'.³⁰

Warner utilises the common middle-class perception of the East End (and of deprived areas in London generally) as a 'dark' place. It was a concept that had pervaded the investigations of Victorian social researchers and philanthropists including William Booth, and retained currency in the interwar period, when the journalist Ada Chesterton wrote *In Darkest London* (1936), an exposé of the conditions of homeless women. To this idea of a 'dark' London, Warner adds a temporal dimension. Wandering by the Thames, east of the city, Laura 'liked to think of the London of Defoe's *Journal* and to fancy herself back in the seventeenth century, when, so it seemed to her, there were still darkneses in men's minds' (77). Warner thus conflates the darkness of men's minds, the darkness of Laura's location, and an earlier time. Furthermore she characterises Laura's wandering as the search for the 'secret country of her mind' (135); 'the country of her Autumn imagination (86)'. In *Lolly Willowes* the external spaces of the dark city act as symbol and metonym for Laura's psyche, and her wandering among them both reflects and enacts a search for her sense of self. Unlike many women writers of modernist and middlebrow fiction, who use interior space to frame and explore the psychology of

²⁹ Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, pp. 55-101.

³⁰ Charlotte Mew, 'The Quiet House', in *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 20-22.

their characters, Warner turns away not only from the domestic, but from built space more generally. The darkness and temporality of this space are equally suggestive. Warner uses Lady Place and Apsley Terrace to explore successive eras of middle class existence and the position of the spinster during these times. Laura's dark London stands in opposition to these places, and is conveyed as a space that is both physically present and temporally anterior. Just as Defoe's London lurks under the paving stones of the twentieth century capital, so, by extension, the dark mind lies under Laura's civilised one, like a 'secret country'. Warner renders the anterior space and the anterior mind accessible by refusing to acknowledge the authority of linear history and instead, using real space as a means of expressing continuity with the past.

Laura trespasses over the border of the family home into an alien environment, but she also brings elements of the 'other' back with her. Laura smuggles purchases from her journeys into Apsley Terrace: second-hand copies of Herodotus and Johnson, chestnuts, flowers and beech leaves. These goods are not extraordinary in themselves but they challenge the coherence and ethos of the domestic, family-centred, and mechanically ordered house. Laura's flowers are exotic, unseasonable and expensive in stark contrast to those chosen by Caroline but more importantly they are for her herself, and through them Laura stakes a claim to her needs as an individual. Similarly her second hand books, unlikely to be available via the family's library subscription, both re-associate her with the esoteric reading of her youth, and actively promote her leisure. Reading them she is unable to simultaneously sew, and in doing so she chooses personal pleasure before a useful and sanctioned feminine pastime that she loathes.

It is Laura's mind that presents the largest challenge to the family home however:

while her body sat before the first fires and was cosy with Henry and Caroline, her mind walked the lonely sea-bords, in marshes and fens, or came by nightfall to the edge of a wood. [...] an ungodly hallowedness – these were the things that called her thoughts away from a comfortable fireside. (76-7)

The hearth, a symbol that had been ubiquitous in Victorian literature for a certain ideal of home, remains a significant symbol in interwar literature. Jane Lewis suggests that shaken by Darwinism, Victorians had invested the wife and mother by the hearth, or Angel to use Coventry Patmore's term, with an almost religious significance to the extent that: 'The hearth itself became sacred, and the chief prop of a moral order no longer buttressed by belief.'³¹ In placing her ungodly spinster by the fireside Warner therefore positions her at the moral centre of the family home where she is an *unheimlich* presence, simultaneously there and not there, a homely spinster and a wandering tramp. Freud's characterisation of the *unheimlich* or uncanny was that it was a deviation from the homely, something that existed within the home but which revealed something 'other', something that had been repressed: 'the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.'³² Laura's daydreams reveal an undomesticated mind, composed of marshes and fens, those landscapes that man struggles to reclaim and retain, beneath her humble and passive servitude. They suggest that what is only temporarily tamed, is the spinster herself.

This idea is not dissimilar to the circulating theories about the ungovernable sexuality of the spinster, that inspired variously monstrous and humorous depictions of the unmarried woman in the fiction of Lehmann and Sayers. In *Lolly Willowes*, however, it is recontextualised. Apsley Terrace does not resemble the 'familiar, tame, dear and intimate' space of the home as Freud characterises it.³³ Rather, it is modern domestic life that Warner renders *unheimlich*, and in comparison to the mechanical nature of this, Laura's marshes, fens and woods appear justifiably hallowed. What is repressed here is not Laura's sexuality, but rather, her autonomous self and the chance to be and do as she pleases. The spinster is *unheimlich* and threatens the sanctity of the hearth not because she is thwarted or sexually repressed, but because she embodies the potential for a different kind of

³¹ Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 81.

³² Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-162 (p. 124).

³³ Freud, p. 126.

living. In a post-war England where the 'cult of the domestic' was widespread and role of wife and mother idealised, Warner's spinster is offered as a darker, less utilitarian alternative.

The interwar domestic and 'a life of one's own'

After twenty years, Warner's spinster turns, and declaring that 'nothing is impracticable for a single, middle-aged woman with an income of her own' (101), Laura leaves Apsley Terrace and moves to Great Mop in the Chilterns. This break, though it is apparently unrelated, occurs after the First World War, effecting the paradigmatic shift in relations experienced widely in the nation and characterising the interwar period as one of change and female independence – even for the middle-aged. In Laura's room of her own, Warner envisions a different kind of domesticity, one in which 'a life of one's own' might be possible. Subtly inverting domestic practices Warner infuses them with a diabolic power. From its position as the moral centre of the house the hearth is recast as a site of sorcery. Beside this Laura's landlady Mrs Leak becomes 'the Witch of Endor' as her gossip summons visions of living and dead villagers, 'she called them up and caused them to pass before Laura' (124). Similarly baking is recast as a quaintly Satanic act when Laura '[t]o amuse herself [...] had cut the dough into likenesses of the village people' (142). The practice of making likenesses of enemies in order to destroy them was a prime example of witchcraft in the seventeenth century, when the witch trials considered that 'the speediest way to take a mans life away by Witchcraft, is to make a Picture of Clay, like unto the shape of the person whom they meane to kill [...] and pricke it in that part of the Picture you would so have to be ill.'³⁴ Placing her currant scones in the oven '[c]urious developments took place'. Laura's baking recasts the villagers; it gives Mr Jones a hunchback and renders Miss Larpent 'more like a gnarled thorn tree than a woman' (143).

³⁴ Thomas Potts, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2007), p. 20.

The transition from Apsley Terrace to Great Mop is not entirely smooth however. Warner suggests that modes of dwelling are as important for autonomy as places of dwelling, and this is crucial because it highlights the responsibility of the spinster in the construction of the conditions of her life. Moving is not enough and at Great Mop Laura learns to re-inhabit and re-read her environment. Laura begins her life at Great Mop stuck in the 'doing, doing, doing' (236) mode of inhabiting that she endured at Apsley Terrace: '[T]he habit of useless activity was too strong for her to break' (110). She relates to the countryside as a tourist rather than an inhabitant, scurrying ceaselessly around it and using maps and guidebooks to mediate and direct her relationship to her environment. Maps designate social as well as geographical boundaries; they delineate areas of exclusion and areas that are owned, the separate spheres of the haves and have-nots, creating as well as reflecting physical and social inside(r)s and outside(r)s. They are the concretisation of the birdseye focal point that Michel de Certeau claims 'construct[s] the fiction that creates readers.'³⁵ There might be more green spaces in the Chilterns than in London, but while Laura is limited to the paths chosen and delineated by the mapmakers she remains in thrall to the limitations that bound her to the domestic interior at Apsley Terrace. Missing a sunset because she doggedly follows a crooked road, Laura decides enough is enough and later throws her map and guide book into a well. Doing so she eschews an objective view, and 'content henceforth to know no more of [the countryside] than did its own children' (128) she becomes the rural equivalent of one of de Certeau's *Wandersmänner*, walkers 'whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read.'³⁶ Wandering map-less, Laura rewrites spatial boundaries on the ground.

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf makes the frequently cited statement, that in order to write women need an income of five hundred pounds a year and a room of their own.³⁷ The rooms to which Woolf refers are both practical and symbolic. They

³⁵ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 92.

³⁶ de Certeau, p.93.

³⁷ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 6, 103.

offer the privacy and freedom from interruptions necessary for sustained thought, but they also symbolise a footprint on the topography of the early twentieth-century intellectual and cultural landscape; a small square footage in an arena otherwise tenanted almost exclusively by men. In *Lolly Willowes* which, as many critics have noted, was published two years prior to the publication of *A Room of One's Own*, Warner suggests that five hundred pounds and a room, even in a remote village, is not enough for Laura to achieve autonomy or to escape the social obligations impressed upon her by her family. It is a necessary move, but it is not a sufficient one. A room, after all, cannot be considered in isolation; it is part of a house and a village or town, a wider community annexed to the rest of England and the world by a network of social, postal and rail links. Moreover, it remains in thrall to the dominant ideologies of its historical time and place. Warner clearly illuminates the ideological web that holds city and country together as a coherent whole through the arrival of Laura's nephew Titus, whose perception of his Aunt remains unchanged despite her move. In doing so Warner prevents her novel from becoming a simple modern pastoral (or proto-type aga-saga), where well-being is achieved through a move from the city to the country. Although, as Gan has noted, Warner does not present a full social or economic picture of the countryside, by focalising *Great Mop* through Titus she does offer a classed and gendered reading of the village within a specified historical setting.³⁸

Titus, the inheritor of Lady Place, places his pipe and tobacco on Laura's mantelpiece like the 'orb and sceptre of an usurping monarch' (158). As Jacqueline Shin has noted, '[t]hrough his unwitting usurpation, the landscape, which has lost its unique identity, is colonized, domesticated, and rendered picturesque – essentially fixed and framed as a pictorial object.'³⁹ 'Fixed and framed' it becomes once again like a map, with all its attendant exclusions, and moreover one of which Titus is 'in possession' (161). The dominance of Titus' focalisation is conveyed through the shifting position of Laura who is both dispossessed of her landscape

³⁸ Gan, pp. 77-83.

³⁹ Jacqueline Shin, 'Lolly Willowes and the Arts of Dispossession', *Modernism/Modernity*, 16 (2009), pp. 709-726.

and immediately re-placed in her old familial role, 'she was the same Aunt Lolly, so useful and obliging and negligible' (163). Even having learned to re-read and re-inhabit her environment is not enough, Warner suggests, for the spinster who finds herself diminished by the collusion of, '[s]ociety, the Law, the Church, the History of Europe, the Old Testament, [...] the Architect of Apsley Terrace, and half a dozen other useful props of civilisation' (150). The modes of power that operate in London, Warner acknowledges, can easily transfer to the country.

This re-emergence in the text of the vexed relationship between being and dwelling and the problems therein invites a turn back to Heidegger whose thoughts in 'Building Dwelling Thinking' were in some ways anticipated by women writers of the interwar period. For Heidegger, the relationship between being and dwelling is not only explained *by* language as discussed above, it is also intimately connected *to* language. In the essay 'Poetically Man Dwells' Heidegger explains this further. The essay title is taken from a line by the poet Hölderlin, and using this as his starting point Heidegger examines the relationship between poetry and dwelling. His conclusion is that poetry is not a secondary characteristic of dwelling or something that merely makes dwelling more pleasurable. Rather, '[p]oetry is what really lets us dwell'.⁴⁰ If this is the case Heidegger asks 'through what do we attain to a dwelling place?' and his answer is '[t]hrough building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building.'⁴¹ Since dwelling is intimately connected with being in Heidegger, as we have seen above, what we can infer from this is that poetry in some way enables the individual not only to dwell, but to 'be'. Moreover, the being that poetry enables is authentic. For Heidegger, poetry, is the 'authentic gauging of the dimension of dwelling, [...] the primal form of building.' It is only through this creative process, and not through the imposition of old or outworn forms, that the individual can fully 'be': 'This measure-taking [of poetry] is itself an authentic

⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 209-227 (p. 213).

⁴¹ Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells', p. 213.

measure-taking, no mere gauging with ready-made measuring rods for the making of maps.⁴²

In the interwar period women writers were expressing similar thoughts on the radical potential of a creative approach to language. In *A Room of One's Own*, an essay which in many ways could be subtitled 'being and dwelling', Woolf acknowledged the need for women writers not only to co-opt physical spaces but to create for themselves new textual spaces. Writing, she explains, is 'built now in a square, now pagoda shaped, now throwing out wings and arcades', its 'sentences built [...] into arcades or domes'.⁴³ Of crucial importance, she notes in another essay is the need for new writers to 'reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place' from the 'ruins and splinters of [the] tumbled mansion' that the previous generation's writing has become.⁴⁴ Looking at women's writing particularly, Woolf considers that 'there is no reason to think that the form of the epic or of the poetic play suit woman any more than the sentence suits her.'⁴⁵ Woolf's incitement to women (and to the moderns more broadly) is to rebuild writing if it is to be a space in which they can find themselves at home. It is only through the radical revision of writing that the woman writer will be able to express herself, to dwell comfortably, and to be.

What we see in *Lolly Willowes*, which predated *A Room of One's Own*, is this vision in practice. In order to create a permanent space in which the spinster can be herself, Warner has to change her mode of engagement with her text. It is not enough for her to move her protagonist to a different kind of house. Critics of classic realism have suggested that it 'performs [...] the work of ideology' by colluding with the institutions and hierarchies it purportedly reflects.⁴⁶ If realism is mimetic in its purest sense, then any text that challenges the social order or status quo can to an

⁴² Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells', pp. 224-225.

⁴³ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 71-2.

⁴⁴ Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 32-36 (p. 35).

⁴⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 77.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Janet Montefiore, 'Listening to Minna: Realism, Feminism and the Politics of Reading', *Arguments of Heart and Mind: Selected Essays 1977-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp.124-142 (p.125).

extent be considered fantastic, and Warner embraces this. Just as Laura throws away the maps that prevent any chance of her developing an authentic relationship with the countryside, Warner abandons the 'ready-made measuring rods' of realism. Veering away from a literary form that constrains her, Warner moves to what has been popularly considered 'a charming British fantasy' when Laura, distraught at the presence of Titus, calls for help and is answered by the Devil.⁴⁷ This literary 'turn' can be critiqued as a species of 'fairy godmother' intervention, but it can also be considered a necessary means to resolve the socially subjugated position of the spinster in literature at a point in history when the spinster continued to be marginalised: a position that the mimetic conventions of realism could potentially only reflect and perpetuate. Laura's devil does not just pop in to the narrative to spirit her nephew away, leaving the fabric of realism intact. Rather, he suggests the heterogeneity of the 'real' and offers an alternate perspective from which to consider its competing factions. This literary shift also enables Warner to engage with, and rewrite, earlier texts whose 'ready-made measuring rods' can be considered the basis for at least some later works in which the single woman finds herself marginalised. By opening up her narrative to these intertexts Warner offers her spinster a much wider and more radical stage than *Great Mop*.

Titus might re-map Laura's countryside from the authoritative perspective of the detached and moneyed landowner rather than the immersed *Wandersmann*, but Satan diminishes Titus' perspective as easily as Titus diminishes Laura's. Existing beyond time, Satan exposes the transience of the buildings and civilisation of man:

Not one of the monuments and tinkering of man could impose on the satanic mind. The Vatican and the Crystal Palace, and all the neat human nest-boxes in rows, Balham and Fulham and the Cromwell Road – he saw through them, they went flop like card houses, the bricks were earth again [...] the dead timber was restored to the ghostly groves. (230-1)

As the Vatican, the Crystal Palace and the human nest boxes go 'flop' the reader is invited to see the consequent dissolution of religion, human progress, and the institution of the family, the 'useful props of civilisation' that contribute to Laura's

⁴⁷ Quoted in Shin, p. 1.

marginalisation. Behind this transient civilisation, Satan suggests, is the satanic or 'uncivilised' mind. This is the 'secret country of her mind' that Laura has been trying to find, but which Warner characterises as a perspective on society, rather than as a physical place. Warner is not advocating anarchy, and she lampoons the idea of an actual satanic counterculture in the disappointing Witches Sabbath that Laura attends. But what she does do is to suggest the contingency of the way that society is arranged and to highlight its inequalities.

In the first chapter of this thesis I referred to the Victorian painter Augustus Egg and his famous triptych *Past and Present*, which attributed the 'fall' of an entire household to a fallen woman. There, in the centre of the first painting, a collapsing house of cards built by the woman's children symbolises the collapse of the Victorian family and their home as a consequence of her extra-marital affair. When Warner visualises the 'neat human nest-boxes' going falling 'flop like card houses', she subverts the image: re-imagining it as one, not of tragedy, but of liberation. Laura too, is a fallen woman in the true biblical sense of the word, one who has turned to Satan and away from God, but her fall is positioned as essential to her recovery of her sense of self. When Laura abandons society altogether, choosing to sleep in a ditch at the end of the novel rather than return home, Warner suggests that any re-appropriation of the domestic home on the part of the single woman can only produce a limited autonomy, and that a further and fuller reconceptualization of society is needed. Warner's editor, Charles Prentice made her change the end of the novel, which he thought intimated Laura's death too obviously. This intervention alongside Warner's (different) use of the fall invites a comparison with Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*. In the fiction of both of these writers a fall is the necessary consequence of deviation from the narratives expected of single women. Rhys and Warner's re-imagining of the fallen woman in the interwar period invests her as a figure of resistance in a world in which, they imply, resistance is still punishable. While their editors' interventions suggest that such apparently punitive narratives were difficult to market, both Rhys and Warner use ambiguity to evade

the conclusion that the single woman's integration into society on her own terms was possible.

Summer Will Show

'I have changed my ideas. I do not think as I did.'

(Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show*, 1936)⁴⁸

Warner's descriptions in *Lolly Willowes* were not all from the realms of fantasy. In addition to her minute descriptions of the domestic interior from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, she also drew upon a range of earlier historical and literary texts. Warner incorporates into her narrative the names of two sixteenth century women put to death for witchcraft, Agnes Sampson and Euphan Macalzean, as well as naming Laura's kitten after Vinegar Tom, the familiar spirit that is featured in the famous woodcut of Matthew Hopkins, the infamous Witchfinder General.⁴⁹ Warner had read Robert Pitcairn's transcripts of the North Berwick witch trials and wrote, 'the actual speech of the accused impressed on me that these witches were witches for love [...] it was the romance of their hard lives, their release from dull futures.'⁵⁰ However, despite Laura's speech on the treatment of women 'all over England, all over Europe [...] as common as blackberries and as unregarded' (234), at the end of *Lolly Willowes*, her diabolic epiphany remains a largely personal one, indeed, necessarily so, since the one thing Laura wants is to be left alone. Laura does not become a witch to be 'a district visitor on a broomstick' (239). In contrast, in *Summer Will Show*, Warner creates two single women characters who are revolutionary in the more literal sense that they are active participants in the revolutionary uprisings of Paris in 1848.

⁴⁸ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p. 402.

⁴⁹ The woodcut was the frontpiece for Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches* (1647) and is reproduced in Brian P. Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 275.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), p. 59.

In *Summer Will Show*, Warner's fourth novel but second single woman narrative, Warner shifts her focus. The novel is a transition between the style of her earlier novels, which employ her 'light and satirical' 'Lolly manner', and her later explicitly historical ones.⁵¹ *Summer Will Show* begins in the mode of historical realism and is set first in England in 1847 and then the revolutionary France of the following year. Although it follows the narrative template set by Warner in *Lolly Willowes* of domestic critique, trespass, revisualisation then abandonment, in the later novel the weighting of these sections differs. In *Summer Will Show* the domestic critique is brief and the focus is on urban rather than domestic disruption; a subject that spoke to Warner's own burgeoning interest in politics during the thirties. Warner, who joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1935 closely observed the events of the Spanish civil war. She worked briefly at a Red Cross Hospital in Barcelona for three weeks in September 1936 and visited the country the following year as part of the 2nd International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture.⁵² In *Summer Will Show*, Warner's single women are located within a revolution whose aims are broader than their own autonomy, or even the autonomy of women more generally. Nevertheless, Warner suggests that it is their singleness that significantly contributes to their revolutionary potential. Not only because it is as a result of their ambiguous marital status that they find themselves outside the domestic environment, but because their singleness potentially renders them classless within the context of the mid-nineteenth century.

Sophia Willoughby and Minna Lemuel differ greatly from Laura Willowes, not only in terms of historical context and characterisation but also in the way in which they can be categorised as single. Sophia, at the beginning of the novel is a mother of two in her late twenties, who manages a large English estate on her own after the desertion of her husband. Minna, in contrast, is the mistress of Sophia's husband; she is a sexually promiscuous Jewish storyteller with idealistic revolutionary sympathies. Moreover, immediately after meeting, Minna and Sophia strike up a

⁵¹ Warner's earlier novels are *Mr Fortune's Maggot* (1927) and *The True Heart* (1929). Later, historical novels include *The Corner that Held Them* (1948) and *The Flint Anchor* (1954).

⁵² Harman, pp. 150-162.

'passionate amity' (156), that results in the latter woman abandoning her own social circle to live with Minna. The two women are not directly referred to as lovers in the novel, although this is elliptically alluded to, and while the nature of their relationship remained largely unexplored by interwar critics their lesbianism has been widely acknowledged in criticism since, with Terry Castle identifying *Summer Will Show* as a 'paradigmatically lesbian' novel.⁵³ As a lesbian with a partner, and simultaneously a legally married wife, Sophia strains the definition of the single woman, but she crucially begins and ends the novel alone. At the beginning of the novel Frederick's desertion results in Sophia's 'peculiar freedom' (53); without a husband she lives like a single woman but her marriage also serves to protect her from prospective suitors. 'I go to my house, she said to herself, alone. I rule and order it alone. And no one doubts my sufficiency, no one questions my right to live as I do' (22). At the novel's end Minna's presumed death in the June Days revolution means that Sophia is once more alone. As Wendy Mulford has noted, the novel embodies a political dialectic, and Minna's death, which also signifies the death of the idealism she embodies, leads the way for Sophia to more fully embrace a revolutionary communism.⁵⁴ Sophia's singleness is thus essential to Warner's examination of women's freedoms and responsibilities, even if their revolutionary inspiration and strength is shown to emerge from a shared commitment. The fiction of Jean Rhys suggests that women's experience of marriage and singleness is not dissimilar; in *Summer Will Show*, Warner dismantles these marital boundaries entirely.

Janet Montefiore has highlighted two different approaches to *Summer Will Show* in her comparison of her own reading of the text to Castle's. Montefiore considers the novel 'a non-canonical classic of 1930s socialist realism', but one that simultaneously, like Warner's *Lolly Willowes* 'subverts our current notions of realism as a mode that is hopelessly complicit with the notion of bourgeois

⁵³ Terry Castle, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Counterplot of Lesbian Fiction,' *Textual Practice*, 4 (1990), 213-235, (219).

⁵⁴ Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930-1951* (London: Pandora, 1988), p. 120.

subjectivity.’⁵⁵ In contrast, Castle considers *Summer Will Show* ‘an exemplary “lesbian fiction”’, which ‘dismantles the real, as it were in the search for the not-yet-real,’ making it appear ‘odd, fantastical, implausible,’ or a ‘lesbian feminist fantasy text in realist clothing,’ in Montefiore’s paraphrase.⁵⁶

There is nothing remotely believable about Sophia Willoughby’s transformation from ‘heiress of Blandamer’ into lover of her husband’s mistress and communist revolutionary, if by ‘believability’ we mean conformity with the established mimetic conventions of canonical English and American fiction.⁵⁷

As Montefiore notes, the differing focus of the two critics underpins their evaluation of the realism of the text; Montefiore considers the narrative mode of the novel, whereas Castle focuses on its plot. While *Summer Will Show* can certainly be characterised by Castle’s ‘search for the not-yet-real’, the necessity of any historical believability of the novel at the level of plot, is thrown into question if we consider the dual chronology of the text. Arnold Rattenbury wrote that ‘the book’s real greatness lies, I think – perhaps with historical novels it always does – in its encapsulation not so much of the 1848 revolution as of the 1930s of its writing.’⁵⁸ Another critic hailed it as ‘an instructive commentary on the world as it is now.’⁵⁹ While Rattenbury’s review ignores the lesbian relationship between Minna and Sophia and entirely diminishes their central roles (he refers to them only as ‘the propertied wife and unpropertied mistress of the same conservative gentleman’), it does highlight Warner’s temporal dynamism. Warner’s novel is ostensibly about the Parisian uprisings of 1848 but it gestures forward, both to Warner’s own relationship with the poet Valentine Ackland and also to the Spanish Civil War. In the context of its mid-nineteenth century setting the plot of *Summer Will Show* may be considered to strain believability, but in the context of the 1930s, the novel, if not strictly autobiographical, certainly draws from events in Warner’s own life. Written in the first years of Warner’s adoption of communism the novel is a ‘tiger’s leap into

⁵⁵ Montefiore, p. 125.

⁵⁶ Castle, pp. 218, 231; Montefiore, pp. 138-140.

⁵⁷ Castle, p.229.

⁵⁸ Arnold Rattenbury, ‘Plain Heart, Light Tether’, *PNR*, 8 (1981), 46-48 (p. 47).

⁵⁹ Reviewer in *Time and Tide*, September 1936, quoted in Mulford, p. 122.

the past' of the kind encouraged by Benjamin; rather than accurately reflecting history it serves to question history's partisan perspective, and to explore the role of the individual in revolution, a preoccupation of Warner's throughout the late nineteenth-thirties.⁶⁰

Summer Will Show begins in the year 1847, where the apparent autonomy of the deserted Sophia is curtailed and undermined by a network of social and familial obligation. Although Sophia acknowledges that 'It was boring to be a woman, nothing that one did had any meat in it' (53), she remains initially passively acquiescent and bound by propriety 'She could do nothing out of doors, a woman's sphere was the home' (53). Sophia is 'Sophia Willoughby of Blandamer House, Dorset, England' (4, my emphasis), and as such is conveyed as constituted by the tradition that she perpetuates in her turn, 'in every case of doubt consulting the practice of her father, and doing as he would have done' (6). Nevertheless, Warner shows that Sophia is not naturally domestic; that she would prefer to live a life outside of the domestic sphere. She day-dreams of 'a wild romantic life in which, unsexed and unpersoned, she rode, sat in inns, slept in a bracken bed among the rocks [...] knocked people down, outwitted shadowy enemies' (36), and declares that 'it is my own mark I want to leave, [...] Not always to work my will through others'' (53). For this to be practically possible, Sophia cannot be a mother, and Warner kills off her two small children with smallpox. Given that Warner strains historical verisimilitude throughout the novel, the need for these deaths is questionable; boarding schools or relatives could presumably have intervened. Warner's choice however frees Sophia from maternal responsibilities altogether, and in particular frees her for her relationship with Minna. Childlessness in the fiction of Rhys and Lehmann conveys the sterility of modern life, Warner uses it to suggest something more contentious: the incompatibility of motherhood with revolution.

⁶⁰ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 253.

Paris

Sophia's journey to Paris crosses the borders of country and the boundaries of seemingly wifely behaviour. It is the first of many such border crossings that occur in the book and marks both Sophia's strength of character, and a transition from passive acquiescence to active purpose. Sophia's objective is to wrest her husband from his mistress and to regain her own sense of purpose through motherhood. In neither *Lolly Willowes* nor *Summer Will Show* does Warner suggest that the limitations imposed on women are surmountable by anything other than extraordinary measures, and despite the conservatism of Sophia's purpose, which is motherhood, her journey (in 1848, to a foreign country, without a maid) is extraordinary. In order to achieve her narrative purpose Warner pushes historical realism to its limits, although there were precedents for this.⁶¹ However, she also makes clear through her representation of Paris, that moments of historical change do by their very nature test the boundaries of credulity. Revolutionaries necessarily move the 'not-yet-real' to the sphere of reality and Sophia can only dismantle the edict 'women cannot travel alone' by travelling alone. In shifting the limitations of historical realism Warner is able to test the validity of socio-historic prohibitions on women's behaviour. She asks, in fact, if they are 'real' and reveals them to be mechanisms of control rather than inherent truths. In doing so Warner opens up a fissure in other social edicts governing behaviour and destabilises the authority of those that have already been voiced in the text; if women can travel alone, as Sophia does, then perhaps their sphere is not necessarily the home, even in nineteenth-century England.

In the revolutionary Paris in which Sophia alights the city is actively revisualised by its inhabitants; the dissolution of the social order becomes apparent in the

⁶¹ The biography of Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, suggests that Wollstonecraft travelled to Paris alone in 1792, although this does not necessarily mean that she was without a servant. It also notes that she travelled to Scandinavia very shortly after the birth of her first child with only one maidservant.

demolition and reconstruction of the streets. Warner sets *Summer Will Show* in the early days of the Second Republic: Sophia meets her husband's mistress Minna on the eve of the February days uprising (February 22nd 1848) and their relationship, which dominates the book, is brought to a catastrophic end during the failed uprising of June of the same year, when Minna is shot and presumed dead. Warner's illustration of the destruction of the streets, and the breakdown of social boundaries that this destruction reflects and enforces, thus has its basis in historical reality. Though Warner is selective in her transposition and fictionalisation of this reality, the obvious link between the social and the spatial in this context are not invented by her. During the February uprising, wooden chairs and omnibuses were set alight in the Champs-Élysée and barricades were erected in the streets, 'railings were dismantled to provide weapons and instruments with which to rip up paving stones from the streets.'⁶² Baudelaire described these paving stones as 'magic cobblestones' that would 'rise up to form a fortress.'⁶³ In contrast Warner's portrayal emphasises the domestic nature of the constructed barricades:

a random barrier of sawn-off boughs bristling, tables and chairs piled together, a cab or two [...] a mangle and a bedstead. Round it was a group of men, some busy uprooting paving-stones, others artistically rearranging the confusion of boughs and bedsteads, like demented furniture removers. (140-1)

Warner's description achieves two ends. Firstly, the domestication of the revolution serves to humanise the revolutionaries, to show the personal nature of their fight, and to suggest that revolutions can be fought by means at the disposal of everyone. Secondly, it dismantles in one manoeuvre the ideology of separate spheres that has bound Sophia's life to a 'narrow den of gentility' (91). Warner's barricades rewrite the trajectory of the city streets, forcing people to find alternative routes, but they also dissolve the integrity of the interior/exterior dichotomy. Breakfasting revolutionaries with 'tin coffee-pots, long wands of golden bread, a sausage in a paper chemise, [give] a domesticated appearance' (152) to the street, while in

⁶² William Fortescue, *France and 1848: The End of Monarchy* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 69.

⁶³ Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 15.

contrast, Minna's apartment, from which Sophia views the barricades, is resolutely undomesticated with 'a nomadic quality [...] as though another evening might sweep it away' (152). While this is in no sense a revolution *for* the single woman, it is a means through which Sophia can find a non-domestic space in which she can leave her 'mark', and it also acts as a space through which Warner can symbolise Sophia's personal revolution.

Warner thus presents Paris as a city in transition: a place where the ownership and meaning of spaces are being contested. Within the narrative Paris serves several purposes. This Paris is a real historical space, which Warner reaches back to in order to critique class, gender, and the nature of revolution itself, both in the past and in the present in which she writes. It is also a symbolic space, through which the personal revolution of Sophia, as she rebels against her domestic lot and leaves her husband, is reflected. Furthermore, it is a developmental space, one in which and through which Sophia is educated about class conditions and eventually turns to communism. Sophia's emerging political consciousness is portrayed by Warner through her increasing ability to correctly read urban signifiers of class embodied in the streets of Paris, and her developing awareness of the terrain. One criticism of *Summer Will Show* was that despite purporting to be a revolutionary novel it dealt with one individual's conversion rather than a collective movement: 'This, if it were the end of the first chapter instead of the last, might be the story of a true conversion [...] something more than the salvation of a private soul.'⁶⁴ What Warner does do however, is to direct this individual conversion outwards, and to convey through Sophia's changing understanding of her environment, a way to read the city in which the reader is simultaneously directed.

Reading the City

Warner maps the changes to Sophia's social position and her attitudes against a framework that resembles the horizontal and vertical axes of a graph, with the

⁶⁴ Eleanor Clark for *New Republic*, quoted in Mulford, p. 123.

vertical axis representing class hierarchy and the horizontal representing Sophia's narrative journey. At the beginning of the novel Sophia occupies a high position on the vertical axis, occupying aristocratic hotel rooms and bohemian apartments, and ends in a low position, in the poverty-stricken streets of the poorest *arrondissements* in Paris, and even lower, in the basement of the communist arms manufacturers. This social descent is given a physical structure by Warner who conveys Sophia's alignment with the 'upper', 'middle' or 'lower' classes in terms of her proximity to the street. Sophia's desertion of her husband (despite his prior abandonment) results in her impoverishment as he cuts her off entirely, 'Not a penny do you get from me. [...] By the law, it's mine. When you married me it became mine' (264). Prior to the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 the property and wealth of women passed to their husbands automatically on marriage, a policy that rendered leaving one's husband a virtual economic impossibility.⁶⁵ Choosing to leave her husband nevertheless, Sophia begins her life with Minna penniless:

With a step she had ranged herself among the *mauvais sujets*, the outlaws of society who live for their own way and by their own wits. There had been no tedium about her fall, and with a flash every false obligation was gone. (288)

Sophia's singleness is thus aligned with her status as an 'outlaw' and through this Warner suggests its radical potential. Sophia's singleness is at this point designated by the fact that, despite remaining married, she is no longer financially, physically or otherwise under the control of an authoritarian male figure whether husband, father or brother. As such singleness in this sense is not confined to a certain marital status or sexuality, it could equally determine the spinster, or the lesbian, partnered or not. Warner suggests an affinity between Sophia and the working classes, as her husband employs a 'lock out' to persuade her to return, a strategy described by one of the novel's communist agitators thus: 'I will close the manufactory until such time as hunger shall compel you to agree with me' (305). This affinity is not finally 'placing' however, and Warner rather suggests that, in an era in which class is

⁶⁵ Lucy Bland, 'Marriage Laid-Bare', p. 125.

largely determined by male relatives, the single woman is a class nomad. This sense of placelessness allows for a unique view of the city.

Sophia's fall is social, from the upper to the lower classes, but it is also moral. From Sophia's first night on Minna's couch, socially unaccounted for – not staying with family or at an hotel – and tainted by Minna's association with the *demimonde*, Sophia considers that '[h]ers was the liberty of the fallen woman now' (156). Her occupation of the streets – whether to observe the revolution, to market or to canvass for the communists – confirms this designation. As I have previously discussed, in 1848 the presence of an unaccompanied upper or middle class woman on the city streets would certainly have been reason for social suspicion if not castigation. Even in the 1930s, as I have discussed in my chapters on Jean Rhys and Rosamond Lehmann, the presence of unaccompanied women in the streets at night was considered an indication of immorality. Warner acknowledges this equation of the single woman with the fallen woman but changes its emphasis, highlighting the liberty rather than the degradation that is the consequence of Sophia's position, 'she could do anything, go anywhere' (156). Sophia might be an 'outlaw of society' but the obligations that she has walked away from are 'false', and it is society rather than Sophia that Warner critiques. As in *Lolly Willowes*, therefore, Warner suggests that a social fall is necessary for single women to achieve any type of liberty or autonomy outside of the domestic sphere.

Again like Laura, Sophia needs to learn to read her surroundings. On her arrival in France, as an English aristocrat and outsider to French politics, Sophia literally cannot see the writing on the wall and she rejects the inherent menace of political graffiti that depicts the French monarchy as a pear tree waiting to be cut down. Fortescue notes that the political credibility of the July Monarchy and Louis-Philippe was repeatedly undermined prior to the revolution by caricaturists who depicted the King variously as a doctor bleeding the French nation, an assassin of French liberty, or as a pear tree, watered by blood and surrounded by corpses.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Fortescue, p. 51.

Sophia's misreading is ironically authoritative in tone, 'She knew the French. A nation that must have its king, if only to quarrel with' (106). Similarly, by using inappropriate analogies Warner illustrates how Sophia's reading of a revolution that she repeatedly overlooks is directed by her class and nationality: 'She had overlooked the revolution again – an affair of foreign politics' (159). Sophia compares the smell of revolutionary gun-fire to an aristocratic shooting party on her estate, and the sound of shots recall not anarchy but 'peaceful autumn mornings [...] the Virgilian romance and dignity of the landscape in which the English landed gentry go out to shoot pheasants' (170).

At the beginning of his essay 'Walking in the City', Michel de Certeau describes looking down on Manhattan from the World Trade Centre. His position 'transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes.' Although this text is legible, it is also a lie however. What one sees as a detached and distanced observer is a 'theoretical' or visual simulacrum: 'a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and misunderstanding of practices'.⁶⁷ Sophia's view of Paris observed from Minna's high apartment, after just one night in the city is a similar lie. Even after witnessing a night of barricades her perception obliterates poverty and revolution under the 'transparent text' of a picture postcard:

[she] opened the window and leaned from the balcony. The shabby gaiety of the houses opposite charmed her. The colouring of the rue de la Carabine, the light-hearted pallor of the tall housefronts, was as reviving as a watercolour after the look of England, so solidly painted in oils. (152)

As Sophia's social position descends from the aristocratic to the impoverished Warner alters her presentation of Sophia's environment to reflect not only the changed surroundings but Sophia's changing perception of them. As Janet Montefiore has noted Sophia's 'consciousness bounds the text' and 'the transformation of [her] political consciousness [...] is set up as an educative process for the reader.'⁶⁸ Thus, Sophia's initial and purely visual misreading of a picture postcard Paris evolves into a sensual immersion in the Parisian market. Sophia

⁶⁷ de Certeau, p. 93.

⁶⁸ Montefiore, p. 132.

pinches chicken flesh and prods mackerel, '[h]er fine nostrils quivered above cheeses and sniffed into pickle-tubs and the defencelessly open bellies of pale rabbits' (287). Moreover, her understanding of the social intricacies of Paris is conveyed as she participates rather than observes. She haggles with vendors and 'when people jostled her it was not because she was a fine woman, but because she stood in the way of a fine duckling' (287). From following Sophia's increased understanding of this aspect of Parisian life, the reader follows her awakening political consciousness which Warner continues to describe as a kind of way-finding. The Communists are based in another Paris still and initially 'staring at the decrepit fortress of the Marais, it seemed to [Sophia] that she would never disentangle her way thither [...] a quarter more entangled, tattered, secretive of everything except stinks, than that which lay behind her' (329).

Sophia has become accustomed to reading the goods of the market for their quality and value however, and this everyday register enables her to effectively read the initially alienating environment of the Marais. She 'observ[es] the prices of the food on the open shop-counters, and think[s] that this would be an even more advantageous place to shop than the rue Mouffetard' (329). Warner thus marks the development of Sophia's understanding of her environment and political consciousness as her journey takes her through a series of increasingly impoverished areas of Paris. By the June days uprising at the end of the novel, Sophia, who has been distributing Communist pamphlets (*The Communist Manifesto* in fact) has taken on Minna's 'mongrel-dog knowledge' (362) of Paris. Finding herself cut off by the fighting, she is still able to find her way home despite the fact that the streets themselves have become fluid with 'paving stones and blocks of cobbles [...] hacked up at random' (372). Through Sophia's ability to negotiate this space Warner introduces the reader to 'another spatiality' one which contrasts to the 'clear text of the planned and readable city,' the city of Sophia's initial picture postcard view.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ de Certeau, p. 93.

Flâneur or flâneuse?

Michel de Certeau has suggested that 'to walk is to lack a place'.⁷⁰ Sophia's walks throughout the differently construed and classed sections of Paris are in stark contrast to her circumscribed position early in the novel when she 'knew the Left Bank only as a territory into which one was taken to see something historical' (111). They are the sign and the dividends of her abandonment of a constraining domestic sphere. Critics have been divided over whether the literary critical model of the *flâneur* is one which can or should be appropriated by women writers and/or women protagonists. Warner's text, which predominantly focalises the city through the changing perceptions of a lone woman, both begs the question and offers a critique of *flânerie* in the process.

Two models of the *flâneur* dominate critical discourse; Baudelaire's appropriation of Poe's 'man of the crowd' and Walter Benjamin's subsequent discussion of/deviation from Baudelaire's model. A solitary male, Baudelaire's 'man of the crowd' as depicted in 'The Painter of Modern Life' is an artist whose 'passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd [...] to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite.'⁷¹ Baudelaire's *flâneur* is fully immersed in the crowd, as is Poe's, but Benjamin's conceptualisation differs. For Benjamin, 'the man of the crowd is no *flâneur*' since '[i]n him composure has given way to manic behaviour.'⁷² Benjamin's *flâneur* is not the pedestrian who jostles and is jostled in his turn but the individual 'who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forego the life of a gentleman of leisure.' Rather than being obliterated by the mass, Benjamin's *flâneur* distances himself from it both categorically and physically, 'His attitude toward the crowd is, rather, one of superiority, inspired as it is by his observation post at the window of an apartment building.'⁷³

⁷⁰ de Certeau, p.103.

⁷¹ Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. and intro. P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 390-435 (p. 399).

⁷² Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, pp. 152-196 (p. 168).

⁷³ Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 169.

It is with the historically-specific incarnation of the *flâneur*, that Janet Wolff engages in her paper on 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*.' In this essay Wolff draws attention to the gendered division of public and private spheres by the Victorian middle-class and the subsequent differences between men and women's experiences of modernity in that class. She comments that 'even by the late nineteenth century, women could not go alone to a cafe in Paris or a restaurant in London,' and concludes from this that '[t]here is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century.'⁷⁴ Not only were women encouraged to remain within the home, but the necessary invisibility required of the *flâneuse* to be fully immersed in the crowd is denied to the woman who is an unusual figure on the city streets and thus remains the subject of the male gaze rather than the objective onlooker.

The bases and conclusions of Wolff's argument have been critiqued, from both a historical and a theoretical perspective. Parsons suggests that Wolff's analysis serves to enforce the separate spheres divide as much as to reflect a ubiquitous, but not absolute practice: 'by asserting that female experience concerns the domestic world, critics such as Wolff [...] only serve to exclude women from the 'modern' altogether and resituate her in the Victorian home.'⁷⁵ As mentioned previously, a number of critics have noted the increasing presence of women in the city from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in a variety of guises. Wollstonecraft's autobiography acts as an even earlier, if remarkable example of this. Moreover, Fortescue includes in his account of the February uprising in Paris the recollections of a German woman writer who travelled through the city in the following March:

We have crossed Paris by day and night, on foot and by coach, almost always without a male companion and often in full formal dress, and have never encountered the slightest problem. Everyone has been courteous and has begged for alms in the most modest way, although their need is probably very great.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Wolff, pp. 41, 45.

⁷⁵ Parsons, p. 40.

⁷⁶ Fortescue, p. 83

Wolff does offer one example of a woman alone in Paris but considers the term *flâneuse* inappropriate given the circumstances. Considering George Sand's forays into Parisian life in 1831 while dressed up as a boy, Wolff comments: 'The disguise made the life of the *flâneur* available to her; as she knew very well, she could not adopt the non-existent role of a *flâneuse*. Women could not stroll alone in the city.'⁷⁷ I would argue that Sand's disguise does not preclude her from being a *flâneuse*. Rather, disguise and performance might form the basis for a distinctive and revolutionary type of female *flânerie*, and it is this kind of *flânerie* that Warner deploys through Sophia.

Wolff's assertion that 'women could not stroll alone in the city' is applicable only to women of the upper- and middle-classes, but Wolff is fair in her assessment that it is these classes from which both Baudelaire and Benjamin take their figures of the *flâneur*; leisured men with the time and intelligence to 'botanise on the asphalt' and categorise the sights around them.⁷⁸ Warner's Sophia Willoughby wriggles between these categories however precisely because of her singleness. Sophia is a lady through upbringing and education, but when she deserts her husband she also becomes a voluntary member of *la bohème*, and a penniless 'outlaw'. To earn money, Sophia is engaged by one of Minna's bohemian friends in a confidence trick. She dresses up as an escaped nun, previously confined to a convent against her will, and sings hymns, eliciting money from the crowd against her barbarous treatment. It is by actively drawing attention to herself, through her disguise, that this ruse enables Sophia to gaze at her onlookers, crucially members of the class from which the *flâneur* is taken.

With a queer glance now, she looked on people of her own class. [...] on forays into that 'other Paris' as she learned to think of it, she saw them elegant and lifeless as she had been; and sometimes, when she was singing in the streets, such a one would pause for a moment, a fish-like wavering, a stare with glassy eyes, a compassionate glove, maybe advanced. (288)

⁷⁷ Wolff, p.41.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, p. 36.

Sophia's gaze is variously queered: through her changed class and marital status, as well as her sexuality. Warner diminishes the authority of the onlooker's objective gaze of Sophia, not only because Sophia is simulating something she is not, but because Sophia stares back, and in doing so anatomizes her onlookers with the surety of the *flâneur*. Warner here inverts the perspective of the Victorian philanthropists, also surveyors and *flâneurs* of a type, whose journeys into London's East End or 'dark continent' were considered as journeys into an 'other' London, so much so that some also adopted a disguise.⁷⁹ Through Sophia, and also through Minna, Warner offers a perspective on the Paris of 1848, not from the detached impersonal perspective of the historian or philanthropist looking down on his subject, but from the ground up. Sophia is a class infiltrator who has 'turned' in current counter-terrorism idiom, whose perspective allows the upper class spaces of her youth to be simultaneously both known and othered in the narrative.

Ragpicker, revolutionary, storyteller

Sophia makes one further movement in the novel, from the bohemian idealism of Minna to the active revolution of the communists. Deborah Parsons has suggested that it is with the 'Baudelaire-inspired surrealist ragpicker rather than the autocratic le Corbusian *flâneur*' that women's experience of the city might be productively situated, and while Warner gestures to a variety of experiences for women, influenced by class (however inherited or married in to) as much as gender, it is through the role of ragpicker that her experience as a budding communist can most effectively be described.⁸⁰ Sophia is employed by communist agents to pick the streets for iron that they can use to manufacture arms. In a period of uprising, when 'magic cobblestones [...] rise up to form a fortress' and railings are ripped out of the ground for the cause, Warner positions the ragpicker as the true revolutionary, an alchemist that turns the refuse of the street into weaponry.

⁷⁹ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 20. This need for disguise also suggests that the *flâneur*, was as liable to be objectified as prey by pickpockets and prostitutes, as the middle-class women Wolff suggests would elicit the gaze of men.

⁸⁰ Parsons, pp. 6, 10.

Sophia's occupation as a communist ragpicker necessitates more than a knowledge of the streets, it demands a creative relationship with the spaces of the city. Throughout *Summer Will Show* Sophia's understanding of the city is mediated through her relationship with Minna, a woman described as '[a] byword, half actress, half strumpet; a Jewess; a nonsensical creature bedizened with airs of prophecy, who trailed across Europe with a tag-rag of poets, revolutionaries, musicians and circus-riders snuffing at her heels' (31). Minna is an outlaw and thief, an outsider by virtue of her race, her poverty, and her idealism, and most crucially she is also a storyteller. Minna's knowledge of the urban terrain is not a simple understanding of streets that Sophia has not previously inhabited. Rather, it is an approach to inhabiting space that ignores rules and regulations. In de Certeau's terms Minna writes the text of the city rather than reading it, although Warner indicates this is a positive refusal to read rather than an inability to. Minna's is a 'mongrel-dog knowledge of Paris' (362), and an exchange between her and Sophia, as they walk through the Jardin des Plantes, illustrates their differences. Minna begins:

'I am working now on the fairy-stories of Grimm, and in order to tell them one may have to become a fox or a bear – but more often to walk and meditate, to be peaceful and solitary. I am an expert in the unfrequented alleys, the corners where no one penetrates –'
 'You cannot go down there. *Messieurs*.'
 'No, no, of course not. You are very observant.' (224)

The exchange works on two levels. Sophia's authoritarian interjection works as a humorous jab at Minna's self-important brag of expertise, but really the last laugh is on Sophia. Minna's triple negative, 'no, no, [...] not', is overdone and suggests she is humouring a child, as does her spurious praise of Sophia. The suggestion is that unaccompanied by Sophia, Minna walks where she will irrespective of signs or prohibitions, and that her expertise in the unfrequented alleys is necessarily garnered through transgression. In Minna's exchange with Sophia storytelling and spatial knowledge are juxtaposed: Minna and Sophia are both ragpickers of a kind, and Warner suggests that storytelling can be as revolutionary and as transgressive as Sophia's call to arms. In Benjamin's description 'poets find the refuse of society

on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse.⁸¹ Through Minna, Warner shows how personal experience told as story can enthral audiences and can provide a revolutionary counterpoint to official history.

The story that Minna is telling when she is first introduced to Sophia and to the reader is the story of her youth and her experiences in the Jewish pogroms of Lithuania. To requests from a clamorous audience she replies, 'No, not a fairy-tale. I have told so many. This, this shall be a true story' (115). The gloss on her tale could be as equally applied to Warner's own objective in *Summer Will Show*; a marked transition from her early individual and whimsical narratives *Lolly Willowes*, *Mr Fortune's Maggot* and *The True Heart*. Like Warner's own sleights of hand that interpolate fantasy in order to question the very fabric of what is real, Minna's narrative is self-consciously performed. It utilises all the tropes of a fairy story, including a dark wood, an orphaned child and an absolute delineation between good and evil. Harman notes the effect on the reader of Minna's narrative, 'having said that Minna is a spell-binder, [Warner] makes her one. [...] One is, for its duration, more of a listener than a reader.'⁸² However, while listening, Sophia is not tempted to suspend her disbelief, rather she is continually reminded that Minna is an artist. Minna's performance then, like the alienation techniques employed by Bertolt Brecht, is designed not purely to enthral but instead to provoke. Her artistry, like Warner's, draws attention to itself, breaking with the transparencies of realism in order to highlight the complicity of form in narrative. The stakes are higher here because Minna's orally delivered folktale is offered not as fiction but as an alternative to official history: its fluid form enabling a platform for the stories marginalised in establishment narratives. Any dissembling on the part of Minna is conveyed by Warner not as deviation from historical truth but as a creative means of inhabiting it, and Minna's tale thus works as a microcosm of Warner's own. Through arms and through storytelling then, Warner offers to the single woman the possibility of revolution.

⁸¹ Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 79.

⁸² Harman, p. 149.

Conclusion

In *Lolly Willowes* and *Summer Will Show*, Warner offers the narratives of women who are differently single: a virginal spinster; a bohemian performer; a married but separated wife. As they critique and then abandon their domestic spheres, Warner's narrative treatment of these women is the same and this highlights the similarities rather than the differences of their singleness. In and between Warner's texts there is none of the psycho-sexual delineation between celibate and non-celibate women which is so apparent in the novels of Lehmann and Sayers. Instead, Warner reveals commonality between different types of single women through their (differently) marginal social positions and their shared narrative trajectories.

Warner abandons the domestic sphere absolutely as a site of meaning or fulfilment for single women, but she does not simply equate their release from the domestic interior with freedom or autonomy. Rather, she reveals the extent to which the city streets and the country woods are as overwritten as the interior by 'an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification.'⁸³ In so doing she largely dismantles the boundaries between the country and the city, and the city and the domestic interior, which have dominated much critical discourse on modern literature. Warner's single women remain bound by the social prescriptions and obligations that mould their environments whether interior or exterior, rural or urban, until they make a decisive turn away from the predominant ideological perspectives of society.

In an interview with the *Guardian* in 1977 Warner proposed that '[j]ust a shift in a cloud will transform a landscape however well you know it [...] There are details about it you never noticed before, and I think it's so with ordinary daily life. There's a shift of lighting and you see everything quite differently.'⁸⁴ Warner points to the disruptive potential of the single woman: her *unheimlich* spinster disrupts domestic

⁸³ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ 'I think I could be possibly interested in newts if it occurred to me', *The Guardian*, 05 January 1977, p. 8.

hegemony in her refusal to get married; her deserted wife and would-be pugilist, dreams of a gypsy-life and joins the revolution, but it is through Warner's own shift of lighting that this potential is realised. Warner opens up the spaces that confine her single women by disrupting her own narratives. The reader is confronted by shifting narrative perspectives that illuminate then subvert the social and political make-up of the spatial. Moreover, to create a place for her single women Warner is driven to push the boundaries of her initially realist texts. Remaining within sight of a realist mode and register, Warner uses a diabolic and then a communist standpoint from which to heckle authoritarian realism. Quietly disruptive, passionately revolutionary, her single women are both the catalyst and the perpetrators of Warner's wider social revision.

5. 'Reconstruction of the most radical kind'? Woolf's spinsterly re-vision of domestic and urban space

At the beginning of her biography of Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee considers the 'vast mass of material' written by Woolf during her lifetime. Describing her as 'one of the most professional, perfectionist, energetic, courageous and committed writers in the language', Lee notes Woolf's prolific output despite recurrent periods of poor health:

Even in a year broken by illness (such as 1925) she would finish revising and publish one novel and a collection of essays, write eight or so short stories, start work on another novel, publish thirty-seven review articles, keep a full diary, read a great number of books and write a great number of letters.¹

Out of these stories, novels and essays emerge an army of unmarried women. There are Rachel's absent yet influential aunts in *The Voyage Out* (1915), the unloved and 'unlovable' Miss Kilman in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *Between the Acts*' (1941) eccentric playwright, Miss La Trobe, and many others.² For reasons of space this chapter will concentrate on the spinsters of *Night and Day* (1919), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Years* (1937), three novels which broadly span the interwar period and in which spinsters appear in a variety of guises: daughter; sister; servant; philanthropist; suffragette; doctor, and artist.³ I will ask why in each novel Woolf chooses a spinster, or spinsters, to occupy the key focal position of the narrative and to direct the reader in the negotiation of certain repeated themes: the Victorian inheritance of Woolf's generation; the social standing of women; and artistic representation and response. Moreover, I will suggest that the position of the spinster is key to Woolf's articulation of her modernist aesthetic: an aesthetic that challenged the values of the literary establishment in its focus on the home, but which stood in an uneasy

¹ Lee, p. 4.

² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 141. For criticism on other spinsters in Woolf see for example, Sybil Oldfield, 'From Rachel's Aunts to Miss La Trobe: Spinsters in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf,' in Doan, *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, pp. 85-103.

³ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999); Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1992); Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009). All further references will be made in the text.

relation with the body of interwar writing that sought to valorise women's domestic roles.

Inheritance, as Lee has noted, is a central concept in Woolf's writing and one which is broadly conceived.⁴ The legacies of the Victorians pervade Woolf's texts, and are deeply embedded in the fabric of domestic and public life that she portrays. They are evoked through the furniture that is passed down through generations of Pargiters in *The Years* for example, and embodied in the traditions and ceremonies critiqued by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. In particular Woolf highlights the implications for women of an inherited social order that irrevocably separates the paths of the daughters and sons of educated men at an early age, and in which gender expectations are spatialised and diametrically opposed. Under the 'separate spheres' ideal of the Victorian middle-classes, women were encouraged to remain in the parental home until they were married, and like them, Woolf's spinsters are encouraged by their families to remain 'daughters, until [they] become married women'.⁵ Their model, as Woolf memorably evokes – and then strangles – was the Angel of the House. In contrast, their brothers, whose sphere was the public world of school, university and then the professions, were encouraged to look towards the 'Great Men' of Empire, Science and Letters as their models. The extent to which this model was applied in practice has been queried, as has the duration of its influence, but it remained a pervasive ideal. Woolf's spinsters enable her to critique this bisected and gendered ideal, because they are not the natural inheritors either of the Angel's domestic realm, or the public sphere of Great Men. These women are not wives and crucially are not mothers (although the terms are not synonymous, unmarried mothers and wives without children rarely feature in Woolf's fiction), but neither have they been given the opportunities which will allow them to stand alongside their male contemporaries.⁶ Outsiders to both camps, and outside is a word and an image that features prominently in the works

⁴ Lee, p. 50

⁵ Virginia Woolf, 'Phyllis and Rosamond', *A Haunted House, the Complete Shorter Fiction* (London: Vintage, 2003), pp. 17-29, p. 27.

⁶ One example is Castalia in the short story 'A Society', Woolf, *A Haunted House*, pp. 118-130.

of Woolf that I consider, Woolf's spinsters are perfectly positioned to critique and then reconstruct the world as inherited from their Victorian forbears. This is made possible by Woolf who, unlike many of her contemporaries, does not problematise the figure of the spinster. In the works that I will consider spinsters are not presented as economic burdens, or sexual or psychological threats, rather their social marginality is revisioned as political or artistic objectivity. From *Night and Day*, where Mary Datchett 'doom[s] her society to reconstruction of the most radical kind' (77), to *The Years* where Eleanor struggles with both physical and theoretical social reconstruction, to build better houses for the poor and to imagine a society with laws that 'fit', Woolf's spinsters are at the vanguard of her social critique.

'Everything was on trial', Woolf wrote in her own memoirs of the early twentieth century, and in her writing she applies this interrogation with a broad sweep to the home, social and political institutions and traditions, and the arts.⁷ For of course, in and through her writing, Woolf is addressing the literary as well as the social legacy of previous generations, directly in essays including 'Modern Fiction' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', and indirectly through the subjects, settings and forms of her novels and essays. If the modern woman needed to find an actual room of her own in which to work as Woolf suggests, then the modern woman writer needed to find space for herself in the house of fiction: '[I]t is from the ruins and splinters of this tumbled mansion that the Georgian writer must somehow reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place', Woolf wrote.⁸ In *To the Lighthouse* this process is transposed onto the artistic canvas of the spinster, Lily Briscoe, whose struggle to achieve her authentic vision takes the form of a transfiguration of her Victorian heritage rather than a break with it, a process that is Woolf's own.

Spaces then, both social and literary, are crucial to Woolf's critique and reconfiguration of her generation's Victorian inheritance. More than this, it is

⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', in *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. ed. and intro. by Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1976), pp. 157-179 (p. 163).

⁸ Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown', p. 35.

through her spinsterly focal perspective that Woolf offers an alternate modern perspective on the home and its surroundings to that of many of her contemporaries. I follow the work of Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei in their identification of the importance of the “‘odd” perspective of the spinster’ for the domestic novel.⁹ Certainly in Woolf’s novels the home can become the site of artistic or literary production rather than biological reproduction under the auspices of the spinster. Turned to urban surroundings the spinster’s gaze is similarly revolutionary: through her visualisation the urban metropolis becomes a potentially liberating, creative and oneiric space for women – diametrically opposed to the cities of Eliot, Dickens, Gissing and Conrad, and their ‘monstrous’ sites of self-interest, alienation and isolation.

In his assessment of Woolf’s ‘feminine fiction’ released just prior to the publication of *The Years*, Herbert Mueller explicitly criticised the domestic aspects of Woolf’s writing, comparing her to Victorian women writers as one who ‘brew[ed] genteel tempests in exquisite teapots’, and dismissing the ‘tidy proportions of her drawing-room world’ as a retreat from modernity and ‘the deeper issues of modern literature and life.’¹⁰ Mueller’s alignment of the domestic with femininity and Victorianism, ironically echoed part of Woolf’s own interrogation of domestic space in the already published *Night and Day* and *To the Lighthouse*, as well as the then forthcoming *The Years*, all of which will be considered below. It spoke to a split in opinion on what constituted ‘modern’ in the arts throughout the interwar period. On one side, as Christopher Reed has noted, was the ideological and aesthetic thrust of writers, artists and designers (some of whom had been active prior to the war) including Marinetti’s Futurists, Wyndham Lewis, and Le Corbusier, who championed technology, uniformity and city life, and articulated a modernity based on ‘the rejection of domesticity’, or what Lewis called the ‘wretched vegetable home existence.’¹¹ In addition to this group, and in aesthetic sympathy with their rejection

⁹ Briganti and Mezei, ‘Domestic Novel’, p. 197.

¹⁰ Herbert J. Mueller, ‘Virginia Woolf and Feminine Fiction’, in Majumdar and McLaurin, *Virginia Woolf the Critical Heritage*, pp. 360-366.

¹¹ Reed, pp. 2-4.

of the domestic, if politically opposed to them, came the younger generation of thirties poets with their focus on 'pylons, industry, the workers, Spain.'¹² In contrast to these groups, Woolf, and other members of what has come to be known as 'Bloomsbury' have been labelled as 'domestic modernists'. Christopher Reed who uses quotations from Woolf to illuminate the work of the Bloomsbury artists Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, suggests that the group 'made the conditions of domesticity [their] standard for modernity, projecting the values of home life outward onto the public realm.'¹³ Mezei and Briganti also use the term 'domestic modernism' to refer to a spectrum of high- and middlebrow writing, including work by Woolf, Katharine Mansfield, E.M. Delafield and E.H. Young.¹⁴ Reed, Mezei and Briganti, all note the resistance to domestically-focused highbrow work during the interwar period (which was nevertheless enormously popular in the middlebrow sector), and identify the 'persistence of an anti-domestic critical standard' in current criticism of art and literature.¹⁵

Woolf's writing poses a challenge to critics wishing to recuperate the importance of the domestic as well as those keen to uphold the primacy of the city in modern literature. Her nuanced descriptions of the evolving family home as a yardstick for social and historical change are not easily assimilated into critical views which site the city 'as peculiarly and particularly expressive of modernity.'¹⁶ At the same time however, her portrayal of domestic and urban environments makes a rigorous critique of labels including 'domestic modernism' necessary. Not only are the spaces of the city streets of such importance to Woolf that Suzanne Raitt considers them 'one of the major protagonists in *Night and Day*', Woolf also actively resists and suppresses what might be considered the 'domestic' aspects of the home.¹⁷ Her use of the spinster opposes the construction of a maternal domestic modernism seen

¹² Lee, p. 611.

¹³ Reed, p. 5.

¹⁴ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Reed, p.5; Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Shiach, p. 253. Shiach is expressing the point that the city is *not* the exclusive site of modernity.

¹⁷ Suzanne Raitt, 'Introduction', Woolf, *Night and Day*, pp. xii-xxvii (p. xxii).

in works by Vanessa Bell for example, while domestic work and the women who perform it are subjects repeatedly occluded in her writing. Woolf certainly does not, 'view the world [...] through housework, housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, decorating', as did contemporaries including E.M. Delafield and Jan Struther.¹⁸ Woolf's spinsters embody this spatial ambivalence: they are not wholly located in either the domestic or the urban realm. Mary and Katharine in *Night and Day* and Eleanor and Sara in *The Years* appear in perpetual motion between the two, while Lily Briscoe paints from the Ramsay's garden, remaining plumb between the domestic world and the public one. Their positioning, and Woolf's, demand a cohesive approach to the domestic and urban spaces of her texts. Following the lead of Woolf's spinsters then, this chapter moves between the interior and the exterior. It will begin and end with the home, but in-between will follow writer and spinster as they pace the city streets and move from the Victorian to the modern in their search for a 'habitable dwelling place'. It will begin with a consideration of the Victorian domestic which continued to inspire Woolf throughout her writing and will end by querying the extent that Woolf was able to reconstruct this, from the authentic 'vision' achieved by Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* to the 'deliberate failure' of *The Years*.¹⁹

***The Years*: 1880 – 1891**

Woolf's most detailed descriptions of the Victorian home in her fiction come in the first two sections of *The Years*. In 'Modern Fiction', Woolf asks the modern writer to '[e]xamine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day'.²⁰ In *A Room of One's Own*, she dismisses the 'historian's view of the past' and asks researchers to consider the actual conditions of women's lives: 'at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule, what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant?' (47). In *The Years*,

¹⁸ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 5: 1936-41*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 65.

²⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in Woolf, *Selected Essays*, pp. 6-12 (p. 9).

Woolf does both: she explicitly focuses on a family of 'ordinary people like ourselves' (320), the Pargiters, and she uses their daily and largely domestic experiences as a barometer of social and economic change across half a century, from 1880 to the late 1930s. One early title for the novel was 'Other People's Houses', and in an early draft she wrote, 'My intention [...] is to represent English life at its most normal, most typical, and most representative' (9).²¹ In the mid-nineteenth century John Ruskin had described the woman's 'separate sphere' of the home as a restorative haven, 'the place of Peace; the shelter not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division', which served as a refuge from 'the anxieties of the outer life [...] the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world.'²² Historians have challenged the extent to which separate spheres existed in reality, and in *The Years* Woolf critiques the ideal through reference to the quotidian. At the same time, her predominantly domestic narrative acts as a challenge to official history records of the era. Woolf's choice of years is determined by the experiences of individual characters rather than historical import and consequently the weighting of the years chosen differs considerably to that of official history: 1918 for example, takes up just three pages. Moreover, in this novel Woolf focuses historical and personal events through a network of spinsters, eyeing the domestic home, the opening of the professions and the changing streets through their detached, and ubiquitous, gaze.

As would be expected of a 'representative' novel, Abercorn Terrace, the Victorian home of the Pargiter family, is identical to many others: 'all had the same little front gardens; the same steps; the same pillars; the same bow windows' (17-8), and the implication is that the internal events of the home are equally typical. In the first section of the novel, set in 1880, Woolf offers a domestic setting that initially exemplifies the idea of separate spheres. 'Cooped up' (31) in a drawing room, the

²¹ Woolf, *Diary 4*, p. 335. In this context it is important to note that while attention has been paid to the meaning of 'Pargiter' as revealed in Joseph Wright's dictionary, Pargiters was the name of the signalman at Southease and Rodmell Halt, who the Woolfs knew and helped financially during periods of strike.

²² John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, Project Gutenberg ebook, April 1998, from the 1894 George Allen edition.

Pargiter daughters boil a kettle for tea and wait for the men of the family to return home from the outside world: their father ostensibly from his club, their brother Martin from school, and Morris from the law courts. Woolf has undermined this scene before the reader reaches it however, preceding it with one in which the father, Captain Abel Pargiter, visits his mistress before returning home. What we have then is a scene in which while the forms of Victorian society are shown to be observed, (Abel can tell no-one about his mistress; only the boys go to school; the house is identical to many others) they are simultaneously devalued.

Woolf further indicates fissures in the separate spheres ideal, in her depiction of the home, which is neither a 'feminine' place of peace and shelter, nor one in which women 'belong'. This is a place in which the 'tyrannies and servilities' of 'the public and private worlds are inseparably connected' (*Guineas* 270) and a place in which no spaces of their own are given to the elder daughters of the house. While Eleanor's writing table is placed in the family drawing room, her father and her brother both have desks in their own rooms. Inherited from her mother, Eleanor's writing table symbolises in miniature the lack of privacy, experienced by generations of women, which Woolf addresses in *A Room of One's Own*. Alongside other historians Charlotte Grant has noted the relationship between the growth of the novel and the increasing importance of the middle-class domestic environment from the eighteenth century; particularly the 'association between the representation in fiction of a character's internal mental state, self-awareness or interiority, and a focus on the [...] specifically domestic interior.'²³ What Woolf highlights in *The Years*, as Warner does in *Lolly Willowes*, is that without space of their own, the Pargiter daughters cannot articulate either their ideas or themselves, and they have no real sense of belonging. Both Delia and Eleanor defer their non-domestic thoughts: Delia until she is in bed, Eleanor until she brushes her teeth, and both find themselves on the liminal spaces of the hall and stairs asking 'Where am I?' (24, 42). Here, rather than the home acting as 'a space of memory, as a

²³ Charlotte Grant, 'Reading the House of Fiction: From Object to Interior 1720-1920', *Home Cultures*, 2 (2005), 233-250 (p. 235).

framework for identities, and as a locus of security' Woolf shows that for the daughters of educated men, the parental home acts instead as a site of existential uncertainty.²⁴ In this way, Woolf uses the Victorian home as a framework for her critique of the previous generation, and particularly of the social constraints experienced by her young, unmarried protagonists.

Woolf further undermines the private sphere by indicating the strategies for escape deployed by all but one of the Pargiter daughters. Of the Pargiter girls in 1880, only the 'mouse-coloured and nondescript' (19) Milly is a good Victorian girl, fussing over the kettle in her mother's absence and 'always bring[ing] the conversation back to marriage' (31). In contrast, Delia dreams of working with Parnell, a move that strikes against a woman's position in the home and her father's Imperial status as an erstwhile Colonel in the British Army. Ten year old Rose goes further, disobeying her sister's orders, physically leaving the boundaries of the house, and buying a toy for herself rather than embroidering a present for her father. It is Eleanor however, the eldest of the daughters, and one of the key focal positions of *The Years* who has the greatest engagement with the outside world. Indeed in the 1891 section of *The Years* she is almost perpetually outside, rushing from philanthropic venture to committee to the law courts, tripping along the pavements or observing the city from buses and taxi cabs, and only dipping in to the family home between calls.

Eleanor's mobility, both through the city streets, and across social classes, challenges not just the gendered separate spheres divide, but also the social division of the classes. In 1880 Eleanor is a rent collector for a charitable organisation in a working class area, and one of those innumerable 'spinsters and virgins with hands that had staunched the sores of Bermondsey and Hoxton' (3) with whom Woolf opens the novel. Lewis has noted how 'civic' or 'social maternalism', was popular among Victorian daughters and spinsters as a source of much needed excitement

²⁴ Shiach, p. 255.

that was condoned because of its 'motherly' nature.²⁵ Employing over half a million women by the 1890s, philanthropic work allowed unmarried women to visit areas of London, including the 'dark continent' of the East End that they would never otherwise have been allowed to visit.²⁶ What Woolf shows in the 1880 section of *The Years*, however, is how this kind incursion into 'other' territories also facilitates an expansion of Eleanor's intellectual horizon, and enables her to re-evaluate her own upper-middle class home, and life.

Returning from her 'Grove day', Eleanor brings her working class and immigrant residents home with her:

so many things were going on in her head at the same time: Canning Place; Abercorn Terrace; this room; that room. There was the old Jewess sitting up in bed in her hot little room; then one came back here, and there was Mama ill. (30)

Eleanor's unsettled mind unsettles the text. The upper-middle class home is invaded by a working class and foreign 'other', which invites the re-evaluation of the home, ('how roomy, how airy it was' Eleanor thinks (17)) and simultaneously insists on the similarity of experiences across the classes. The result is that the social and moral hegemony of the upper-middle class perspective is fractured, and as Abercorn Terrace is designated as British by its imperial head Colonel Pargiter, in contrast to Eleanor's heterogenous residents, 'the Levys, the Grubbs, the Paravicinis, the Zwinglers and the Cobbs' (30), the absolute authority of the British view is also rendered questionable. Standing between these two perspectives is Eleanor. To emphasise the effects of this cross-class, international intersection, Woolf echoes it in the experience of another unmarried woman, Kitty, Eleanor's cousin. Kitty who has been visiting her lower-middle class friend, whose family are from Yorkshire, experiences an immediate re-evaluation of Oxford tradition when she walks back into the town: 'all seemed to her obsolete, frivolous, inane. [...] the portentous old men with their exaggerated features, looked like gargoyles, carved, mediaeval, unreal' (72). The distinctions between the descriptions are as

²⁵ Lewis, *Women in England*, pp. 91-95; Vicinus, *Independent Women*: particularly chapter 6.

²⁶ Vicinus, p. 212.

illuminating as their similarities, and suggest that academics should be rigorous in their awareness of the spectrum of experiences and judgements that lie beneath the broad term 'middle-class' in interwar literature, as well as the terms 'British' or even 'English'. Nevertheless, in both cases, Woolf's single women are placed outside the upper-middle class tradition of the establishment, and are essential to her re-evaluation of society by their access to alternative perspectives.

To the Lighthouse

In the first section of *To the Lighthouse* and in *Night and Day* Woolf examines the continued distinction between men and women's social roles just prior to the First World War. In these novels however, she addresses the implications of this for women artists and writers. In *To the Lighthouse*, set during a holiday on Skye, Mr Ramsay is an academic and philosopher of the public sphere who prowls the garden and surrounding lanes and makes forays into the house only to demand attention from his wife. In contrast, Mrs Ramsay's sphere is the home and as she sits with her son framed by the house window, Woolf implicitly links her to the Angel of the House through their likeness to the Madonna and child. Lily Briscoe, a painter and spinster in her early thirties, is positioned as an observer of the couple. Through Lily, an avatar for Woolf, as well as a fictional combination of herself and her sister, Woolf examines the deep attraction of these authoritative, parental figures, but also the degree to which they must be resisted in order for the younger generation to achieve their own authentic artistic vision.

While the separate spheres are distinct here, what Woolf highlights are their complementary positions within a shared ideology, and the extent of women's collusion with this ideal. Here the professional prohibitions placed on women by men work in tandem with the cult of the Angel of the House to stifle women's creativity. Woolf's suggestion is that the latter, internalised by many women, is as dangerous if not more so, than professional barriers. Woolf diminishes any critical indictments of women's artistic work in her characterisation of Charles Tansley,

through whom they are voiced. Tansley's beliefs that 'women can't paint, women can't write' (54) are diluted by Woolf who depicts him as unable to dress for dinner, and wielding his lower-middle-class upbringing like a blunt weapon. Tansley embodies the angry male academic Woolf reads in *A Room of One's Own*, 'insist[ing] a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women' and 'concerned not with their inferiority but with his own superiority.'²⁷ In contrast Mr Ramsay prevents Lily from painting not because he thinks she can't, but because his demands for attention, and his need for her to play the feminine role constrains her vision as an artist entirely. 'Let him be fifty feet away [...] he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. [...] She could not even see the colour; she could not even see the lines; even with his back turned to her' (163).

The 'greatness of men's intellect' and 'the subjection of all wives' (15) is a creed that both Mr and Mrs Ramsay share. Her self-renunciation may leave her with 'scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by' (44), but Mrs Ramsay is 'formidable' (10) on the subject of women's deference to men. She embodies the traditional Victorian view of marriage and motherhood as the apotheosis of women's lives: 'there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman [...] has missed the best of life' (56). Lily is thus, as a spinster and as an artist, at a double remove from Mrs Ramsay. As a spinster, in Mrs Ramsay's eyes she is 'only Lily' (21) and 'poor Lily' (107), whose art 'one could not take [...] very seriously' (21). As an artist, she is thwarted by Mrs Ramsay who privileges domestic calm over artistic truth, and prevents Lily 'experimenting' with Charles Tansley: 'She had done the usual trick – been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her' (101). It is not until the third section of the novel, and crucially following the death of Mrs Ramsay, that Lily is able to achieve her artistic vision.

In her essay 'Professions for Women', Woolf describes the Angel of the Hearth in terms which clearly parody Ruskin, in whose words a wife, 'must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise not for self-development,

²⁷ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 36.

but for self-renunciation; wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side'.²⁸ Astutely capturing his manner (in much the same way that Sara will impersonate characters in *The Years*) Woolf wrote that the Angel 'was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish', and parodied Ruskin further by transposing his spiritual characteristics onto the mundane: 'If there was chicken she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it.'²⁹ In this description Woolf's Angel echoes previous literary caricatures of self-renunciation often, ironically, spinsters, where apparent altruism is revealed as a thin facade covering an iron will.³⁰ This hardness of the Angel is expanded on in her manuscript when Woolf reveals that the Angel in fact 'has more blood on her hands than Crippen': 'Writer after writer, painter after painter and musicians I dare say too she has strangled and killed.'³¹ In this description Patmore and Ruskin's good Angel is turned very bad; her deference to men makes her a liar, and to uphold her lie she is driven to kill those citizens of truth – artists and writers. Woolf's Angel is explicitly fictional, and in her parody she suggests that Ruskin's 'Queen' and Coventry Patmore's 'Angel' are too. Nevertheless, she does suggest the real and damaging effect that her image can have on women's art and voices.

Mrs Ramsay of course is hardly Crippen, she is beautiful, maternal, and kind, and in the third section of the novel, which I will discuss later, Lily is placed not as her adversary but as her successor. Moreover, in her depiction of Mrs Ramsay, Woolf must take responsibility for creating an empathetic Angel at the same time as she offers her up to critique. In this first section however, she is also opposed to Lily in another way. In Woolf's speech to the LNSWS she explicitly references the Angel of the Hearth's Britishness. She is an ideal that arises because men and women are unable to have real relationships 'for reasons I cannot go into now – they have to do

²⁸ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*.

²⁹ Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 141-145 (p. 141).

³⁰ See for example Charlotte Bartlett in E.M.Forster, *A Room with a View* (1908) or less benignly Esther Summerson's Aunt in Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853).

³¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Speech before the London/National Society for Women's Service, January 21 1931', in *The Pargiters*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978); p.

with the British Empire, our colonies, Queen Victoria, Lord Tennyson, the growth of the middle class and so on.³² In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay too is specifically equated with Victorian Britishness. Coming out of a visit to a poor family she stands 'against a picture of Queen Victoria wearing the blue ribbon of the garter' (18), and in the minds of her daughters she is associated with 'deference and chivalry, [...] the Bank of England and the Indian Empire' (10-11). In contrast, Lily, like Eleanor Pargiter, is associated with the 'other'. She lives, not in upper-middle class London, but 'off the Brompton Road' (24), and her name, common to the working classes, is also given by Woolf to one of the women Eleanor visits. Moreover, Mrs Ramsay equates Lily's spinsterhood with her foreign-ness: 'With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she would never marry' (21). As a result, she is enabled to critique the family home of the Ramsay's in a manner that befits an artist; 'in love' with both of them, she is invested in her subject, but her singleness and consequent alterity lend her detachment.

Night and Day

Set in the same pre-war era as the first section of *To the Lighthouse*, is *Night and Day*, Woolf's second novel to be published. Here she offers a simple illustration of her idea of a 'hybrid age', in her portrayal of the two young unmarried women. This novel, which is less sophisticated than either *To the Lighthouse*, or *The Years*, which both followed it, is worth looking at for several reasons. It highlights, as does *To the Lighthouse*, the persistence of separate spheres, even after Victoria, and the relevance of this to women writers. It also offers a prototype reconstruction of the domestic that will be rendered more subtly in the third section of *To the Lighthouse*. In *Night and Day* Katharine Hilberry is upper-middle class, and 'a member of a very great profession which has, as yet, no title and very little recognition [...] She lived at home' (41). In contrast, Mary Datchett is a 'private in the army of workers' (44), living alone in a London flat and working in a suffrage office. Neither, Woolf suggests, is a truer picture of the age. Katharine pours tea 'in common with many

³² Woolf, 'Speech', p.xxx.

other young ladies of her class' (3), while Mary is 'one of a great many thousands' (47). Although their juxtaposition echoes an earlier short story, the unfavourable comparison of the eponymous Phyllis and Rosamond to their more modern Bloomsbury cousins, here Katharine and Mary are used to highlight equally valid, but different, narrative trajectories. Katharine plans a new kind of marriage, while Mary finds 'another love' (471), that of writing: 'working out the details of a very enlightened and ingenious scheme? Of all possibilities this appealed to her most' (473). Writing in her diary while completing the novel Woolf noted, 'as the current answers don't do, one has to grope for a new one.'³³ Using the image of a lit flame to represent both Katharine and Mary's endeavours to find new models for living, Woolf resists privileging one over the other, choosing instead to oppose both to what she portrays as a static and crushing Victorian past.

Initially however, if Mary is free from the constraints of the Victorian age, then Katharine remains firmly in thrall to them. Although written in 1919, and set in the Edwardian years prior to World War I, Katharine's role is indistinguishable from that of her Victorian ancestors, and bears similarities to Woolf's writing about her mother's youth. Crucially the Hilberry household, like the Stephens', and the circles of Julia Stephen's youth, is literary and cultured. When Katharine pours tea at a gathering of her parents' distinguished friends and young male protégées she is not only performing a prescribed gender role in the private sphere as Eleanor Pargiter does, she is also performing a domestic function for a literary circle. This echoes Woolf's mother's role in artistic gatherings of the mid 1860s at which her role was to 'pour out tea; to hand [distinguished men] their strawberries and cream; to listen devoutly to their wisdom.'³⁴ It also speaks to Woolf's recollection of her own youth, where her domestic position was privileged over her own professional aspirations. In these recollections and in her fiction Woolf equates a domestic role for women with literary or artistic silence, but she also suggests that some women's literary work is essentially domestic. Considering her own early articles she noted:

³³ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume I: 1915 - 1919*, intro. by Quentin Bell, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 259.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, pp. 64-137 (p.88).

I lay the blame for their suavity, their politeness, their sidelong approach, to my tea-table training. I see myself handing plates of buns to shy young men and asking them, not directly and simply about their poems and their novels, but whether they like cream as well as sugar.³⁵

In *Night and Day* the literary positions held by women all partake of a degree of the domestic relation described above. Notwithstanding Mrs Hilberry's exuberant and idiosyncratic approach to biography, the objectives of her role as biographer and Katharine's role as amanuensis are to help 'establish[] indisputably that [Katharine's] grandfather was a very great man' (37). The self-sacrifice demanded of Katharine's cousin Euphemia in a similar role is such that 'the prime of her life was being rapidly consumed by her father' (214).

In *Night and Day*, this juxtaposition of male literary importance and women's domestic role is embedded in the fabric of the Hilberry household. Next to the Hilberry's drawing room, where tea is served, is an ante-room, 'something like a chapel in a cathedral' (9), where the relics and manuscripts of Richard Alardyce, Mrs Hilberry's poet ancestor, are housed. Inspired by the home of Woolf's Aunt Anny Ritchie, a 'religious temple...crowded with relics' to her father Thackery, for whom she acted as amanuensis and editor, in *Night and Day* it serves to link Victorian writers to the domestic, but above all, to the dead.³⁶ Through her depiction of the reliquary in *Night and Day*, which includes the poet's slippers and his walking stick, Woolf lampoons the veneration given by the Victorians to Great Men, but she also locates these men firmly in the past.³⁷ Nothing screams outmoded like a museum piece. In contrast, Woolf links modern writers to the exterior and the urban. Katharine quotes from Dostoevsky as she walks along the city streets and it is here that Woolf's single women experience their moments of vision. In *Night and Day*, the single woman and the woman writer must leave the values, ideologies, and literature of the previous generation, embedded in the parental home, if she is to

³⁵ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', p. 129.

³⁶ Lee, p. 44.

³⁷ Ironically a recent (2014) exhibition on Virginia Woolf at the National Gallery included, somewhat morbidly, the walking stick that she had taken with her on her final walk by the Ouse.

have any kind of life or voice, and for Katharine: 'it was necessary for her very existence that she should free herself from the past' (40). If this early novel draws a line under her Victorian heritage however, Woolf's depiction of Katharine's father's study, as well as the mausoleum, invites a revisualisation of the private sphere as a possible place of work. Through this, and her depiction of Mary Datchett's room, Woolf suggests a reconfiguration of the domestic that prefigures Lily Briscoe's realisation in *To the Lighthouse*. Mary notes of her room that:

At the end of a fairly hard day's work it was certainly something of an effort to clear one's room, to pull the mattress off one's bed, and lay it on the floor, to fill a pitcher with cold coffee, to sweep a long table clear for plates and cups and saucers. (45)

but the result is an interior that is not domestic, and a potential reconfiguration of women's position within the home.

'The Freedom of the Street'

In *Night and Day*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Years*, Woolf uses the figure of the spinster to examine women's 'place': whether they 'belong' inside or outside. Her spinsters are not wives or mothers with a privileged position in the home, but neither are they accepted into the professional world. Women, Woolf notes in *Room*, have traditionally been insiders; they have 'sat indoors all these millions of years' (87), and as such, she reasons that the domestic realm is a site of importance for writers and historians, and urges young women researchers to address the domestic in their work. Women are also outsiders, but in two potentially conflicting senses of the word. They are outsiders in a progressive sense aligned with freedom, opportunity and modernity in that they have 'issue[d] from the shadow of the private house' (*Guineas*, 130) and from the mid-nineteenth century increasingly contributed to the public sphere. As Woolf notes, in *Three Guineas* however, women could still be considered as outsiders in relation to the public sphere, a position that conversely connoted powerlessness and economic insecurity. Even by the end of the nineteen thirties, Woolf notes, that for women, 'many doors [were] still locked, or at best ajar' (141).

In her writing Woolf embraces the position of outsider wholeheartedly: socially, physically and artistically. In the first part of *Room* her narrator wanders around a male university college to which she has been invited, only to find herself shooed off the grass, then refused entry to both the chapel and the library. Her experience suggests women's marginality in Higher Education, a position that is reiterated when she compares a sumptuous lunch at a male college to dinner at a women's college strapped for funds. She deftly subverts this hierarchy however and asks, if intellectual constraint and stasis are imposed on women by them being domestic insiders, why not on men, as institutional insiders? It might be unpleasant to be locked out, Woolf's narrator concludes but 'it is worse perhaps to be locked in' (25-6). This equation between the interior and intellectual stasis is underlined by Woolf through opposition in the form of *Room*. Here, as in many of her essays, walking outside is a creative process that both facilitates and represents the imaginative journey of the text: 'as I walked through the dark streets I pondered this and that' (25). Woolf thus revisualises the marginal position imposed on women by institutions including the university, as one of physical and creative freedom.

In *Three Guineas*, she expands on this idea, imbuing the position of outsider with moral and political, as well as creative and intellectual, import. Women, Woolf suggests, should form a 'Society of Outsiders' dedicated to the critique of existing institutions and traditions, and the endowment of all middle-class women workers (including wives and mothers) with a wage, if they are to forge real social change and prevent war. Woolf's use of the term 'outsider' here, to refer to the 'daughters of educated men' is of course contentious. It excludes other, arguably more marginal, social groups, including the working classes of both sexes, and purposely ignores any inroads to 'insider' positions already made by women. Nigel Nicholson the editor of Woolf's fifth volume of letters, considered the arguments of *Three Guineas* anachronistic: 'She was describing a world which had evaporated, but which to her was still real. She who had won free of it so young, so defiantly, so

successfully, was almost alone in imagining that nothing had basically changed.’³⁸ Nicholson’s comments highlight some of the difficulties in assessing historical progress. While he identified the unprecedented number of women in higher education in 1927, to illustrate his argument, he failed to mention that this was also the year that Oxford decided to cap the number of women students out of veneration for the male tradition.³⁹ By her conscious occupation of the outside Woolf suggests more than the continued marginality of women to some institutions. Rather than demanding access to prohibited spaces, Woolf demands a full enquiry into what these spaces, establishments, and institutions mean, and what they are for. She asks ‘where is it leading us, the procession of educated men?’ (184). In her fiction, she highlights this position through her spinsters who are frequently placed as literal outsiders - streethaunters whose physical and mental wandering deviates from the linear goosetep of their brothers.

‘Outside’ in *Night and Day* and *The Years*, as well as in many of Woolf’s essays, is repeatedly the metropolitan environment of the city streets. As a result of her equation of the outside with creative and intellectual freedom, Woolf’s vision of the city is discernibly different to that articulated by other women writers considered in this thesis, as well as being different from some of her male contemporaries. In the novels of Rhys and Lehmann the city is grey and interminable, a place in which the single woman is necessarily poor and isolated, and in which romantic relationships are degraded to capitalist exchanges or extra-marital failures. For Sylvia Townsend Warner the city is the space of potential revolution, but the single woman needs to excavate the past from beneath the topsoil of the present to liberate this. For Woolf, the modern city offers a new and liberating model to the single woman and to the writer, it offers a place in contrast to the family home where the spinster can belong: so, sitting on top of a London bus in 1891, Eleanor Pargiter considers that ‘this was her world; here she was in her element’ (*Years* 91).

³⁸ Nigel Nicholson, ‘Introduction’, in Virginia Woolf, *The Sickle Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932-1935*, ed. by Nigel Nicholson (London: Hogarth Press, 1979), p.xvii.

³⁹ This is discussed in Chapter 3.

In *Night and Day*, the city street is where both Katharine and Mary experience their moments of epiphany. These epiphanies not only take place *in* the city: they are very much *of* the city. On Kingsway, Katharine is exalted by the city's 'complete indifference to the individuals' and the 'enormous rush of the current – the great flow, the deep stream, the unquenchable tide' (462) of the crowd. For her this suggests the potential for a new kind of relationship and her subsequent engagement to Ralph is described in terms of modernity, 'sketched [...] upon the outline of great offices on the Strand' (534).⁴⁰ On Charing Cross Road, Mary's 'vision' similarly emanates from the crowd; '[f]rom an acute consciousness of herself as an individual [she] passed to a conception of the scheme of things in which, as a human being, she must have her share' (271), and from this she takes her impetus to write revolutionary social tracts.

These experiences of the city as a creatively energising site for women oppose two tropes repeatedly associated with modernism: the city as a site of alienation and isolation, and the city as the forum for the specifically male *flâneur*. *Night and Day*, published in 1919, preceded T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* by three years, but it is Eliot's vision of post-war city inhabitants as a stream of walking dead: 'A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many / I had not thought death had undone so many', that has retained a higher critical currency.⁴¹ Given the pre-war setting of *Night and Day*, it might be considered that the difference between the two visions of the city lies in the ideological break made by the war, but this ignores Eliot's literary heritage. Raymond Williams traces a line from T.S. Eliot's 'unreal city' back through George Gissing to James Thompson's 'City of Dreadful Night' to show a continuity of literary response to the city, from the Victorian to the modern, which portrays that its effects on the individual are to render him isolated, alienated and

⁴⁰ For an opposing view of this as a capitulation to tradition see Ann-Marie Priest, 'Between Being and Nothingness: The 'Astonishing Precipice' of Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 26 (2003), Virginia Woolf and Others, 66-80.

⁴¹ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land, The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 21-46, p.25, ll. 62-3.

overwhelmed.⁴² In contrast, Woolf's representation of the city as a positive site for (particularly single) women extends beyond her early writing to her later novels and essays. For the young Elizabeth Dalloway 'crowds of people coming back from the city [have] more power than single clergymen in Kensington, than any of the books Miss Kilman had lent her, to stimulate what lay slumberous, clumsy, and shy on the mind's sandy floor'. While Elizabeth's vision differs from those of Katharine and Mary in its focus, the professions, the feeling is exactly the same; standing on the Strand she is a 'pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting' and her experience is overwhelmingly positive.⁴³

This sense of immersed positivity does alter in later works however. In 'Street Haunting', an essay published five years after *The Waste Land*, Woolf's imagery is more ambivalent, and in *The Years* she offers a far more complex rendering of the city, and the single woman's position within it, than in the simple domestic/urban binary of *Night and Day*. In 'Street Haunting' the lone woman narrator, sets off across the city with the pretext of buying a pencil, in order to enjoy the sights of the metropolis. Initially she is immersed in the crowd, and walks as 'part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers', but later in the essay, her distance from them, becomes evident.⁴⁴ Here she describes the 'stream of walkers' as,

wrapt, in this short passage from work to home, in some narcotic dream, now that they are free from the desk [...] Dreaming, gesticulating, often muttering a few words aloud, they sweep over the Strand and across Waterloo Bridge when they will be slung in long rattling trains to some prim little villa in Barnes or Surbiton where the sight of the clock in the hall and the smell of the supper in the basement puncture the dream. (Street Haunting, 33)

The imagery of this passage is a near relation to Eliot's, from the metonymic desk and the pervading smell of supper, to the walkers who sweep over a bridge.⁴⁵ In Woolf's description there is a distance between herself and the subjects of her

⁴² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975), pp. 285-90.

⁴³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* ed. by Stella McNichol, intro and notes by Elaine Showalter (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 150-1.

⁴⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting', p.23. Further references will be made in the text.

⁴⁵ See for example Eliot, *The Waste Land*, l.216; T.S. Eliot, 'Preludes', in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 13-15 (p. 13, l. 2).

observation, which is both spatial and class-based. The suburban homes, the primness, and the models of aspiration belonging to the crowd - 'great cricketers, famous actresses, soldiers' ('Street Haunting' 33), - are cumulatively and pejoratively listed as indicators of the lower middle class, by a narrator who leisured, literary, and living within walking distance of the city, is geographically and socio-economically distanced from them. The crowd here is crucially a specific demographic: commuters in the paid employ of the city's institutions, who will be caricatured even more harshly by Sara in *The Years* as 'the tiptoeing; the pasty; the ferret-eyed' (323). Woolf's image is not identical to Eliot's. Woolf's city retains its positive influence and in the brief spatio-temporal lacunae between work and home these commuters are not the walking dead but dreamers, gesticulators, and mutterers, qualities shared by Woolf's visionary spinsters and indeed by Woolf herself. Describing her day in a diary entry of 1915 Woolf writes, 'I had tea, & rambled down to Charing Cross in the dark, making up phrases & incidents to write about. Which is, I expect, the way one gets killed'.⁴⁶ It is as a writer that Woolf responds to the city, inspired by the spectacle, as the narrator of 'Street Haunting' is, and it is in this way, rather than as wage earners that her spinsters respond to the city. Although both Mary Datchett (*Night and Day*) and Peggy Pargiter (*The Years*) work in the city, Woolf makes it clear that their moments of vision come when they are detached from their paid work, and considering a different model of living. Women's intervention in the city in this way is limited by Woolf, who needs it to be distinct from the public sphere in order for it to retain its meaning as a space of creative and intellectual freedom.

Women's interventions in the city from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in the forms of consumerism and philanthropy have been noted by social commentators, but some critics, including Janet Wolff, Susan Squiers and Jane Marcus have been resistant to the possibility of a female *flâneur*, with Squiers suggesting that Woolf herself, an intrepid streetwalker and omnibus traveller from her teens, 'could not be 'just' a brilliant novelist observing a segment of London life; she was also a piece of

⁴⁶ Woolf, *Diary I*, p. 35.

female flesh experiencing it.⁴⁷ In Woolf's writing she suggests otherwise. In *Night and Day*, Katharine's position in the crowd is one of 'invisible spectator' (462) and this is a vantage point shared by Woolf's narrator in 'Street Haunting'. Sara in *The Years*, a spinster whose 'sallow angular and plain' features make her as unwomanly and unmarriageable as Lily Briscoe, has safe passage over Waterloo Bridge at 'any hour of the day or night' (165). In Woolf's writing she makes a clear distinction between women's traditional and modern experiences of the city, offering the Victorian city as a mid-point, or what Judith Walkowitz has termed 'contested terrain'.⁴⁸ So, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf notes the traditional equation between the unmarried woman's location in the home and chastity, and her location on the streets with a sexual 'fall'. 'It was with a view to marriage [...] that the streets were shut to her; that the fields were shut to her; that solitude was denied her [...] that she might preserve her body intact for her husband' (*Three Guineas*, 159-60). However, in contrast to other women writers including Rhys and Lehmann, this is not a reading of the streets that Woolf identifies with the modern city. Woolf's single women walk the modern city streets, unmolested and untainted by any association with the demi-monde. While Rhys' Sasha Jensen is repeatedly mistaken for a prostitute, and Olivia Curtis is doomed by Lehmann to roam the streets after becoming pregnant by a married man, Woolf's spinsters walk the streets of Edwardian and Georgian London with impunity.

In contrast, in *The Pargiters*, an early manuscript for the Victorian portions of *The Years*, the gendered and separated spheres of the private and public middle-class world are firmly mapped onto the city streets, but even here Woolf shows that such a division is unstable. Here Woolf clearly sets out the geographical parameters of the unmarried Pargiter daughters' daily lives, which are largely dictated by their

⁴⁷ For women's interventions in the city see Introduction. For resistance to the idea of a female *flâneuse* in relation to Woolf's writing: Susan Squier, 'The Politics of City Space in *The Years*: Street Love, Pillar Boxes and Bridges', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. and intro. by Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp.216-237 (p.232). For Woolf as a young navigator of the city see Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897 – 1909* (London: Pimlico, 2004).

⁴⁸ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* p. 10.

avoidance of any kind of contact with unknown men, or 'street love' as Woolf terms the whole gamut of male and female intercourse beyond the drawing room. The Pargiter daughters are not allowed to walk on their own, except during daylight and in the immediate vicinity of the house. Eleanor's philanthropic work is an exception, but propriety demands that she takes a cab, or is accompanied to the omnibus. Shopping, which would necessitate a visit to the West End, where Piccadilly in particular was a known haunt of prostitutes, is impossible unless unaccompanied by their mother: 'To be seen alone in Piccadilly was equivalent to walking up Abercorn Terrace in a dressing gown carrying a bath sponge'.⁴⁹ The Victorian city street is shown to present two forms of danger to the single woman: that of being considered unchaste by association with the streets, and that of actual physical attack. In this context, the young Rose's encounter with a stranger who gibbers at her and undoes his clothes, is seen as the latter form of 'street love', but Woolf explains that it is the inculcation from an early age of the importance of chastity, that renders the young girl incapable of sharing her experience with her older sister, and not the incident itself. In *Room*, and 'Professions for Women' Woolf makes the link between these physical and mental restrictions, placed on women to keep them 'chaste', and the artistic restrictions imposed (and self-imposed) on women: from the excision of material about their physical selves that might offend men, to the anonymisation of their manuscripts.

Between *The Pargiters* and the final text of *The Years*, Woolf abandoned her novel-essay format and cut any passages that she considered didactic. Consequently almost all of her critique of 'street love' was excluded and her presentation of the city and the position of single women within it were significantly altered. In the final version all that remains is Rose's encounter. Lacking its initial exposition, Rose's distress, her lack of sexual knowledge and her inability to communicate what she has seen is at least in part attributed to her status as a child. Grown women, even spinsters, can be inoculated against the fear of the streets, Woolf suggests, through sexual knowledge, and she counters Rose's experience with that

⁴⁹ Woolf, *The Pargiters*, p. 37.

of her sister Eleanor. In the Victorian sections of *The Years* Eleanor continually navigates the city streets alone, not only visiting the districts of the poor but rebuilding them. Her spatial freedom and lack of constraint is linked by Woolf to her sexual awareness. Eleanor not only knows about conception, she knows how to control conception (a controversial piece of knowledge for a spinster in 1891): '[O]bserving the slant' of a resident's apron she notes 'another baby coming, after all I told her' (*Years* 94). Woolf's excision of almost all references to sexuality from her final edition of the text seems paradoxical given this equation, and her initial conceptualisation of the text as an exploration of the 'sexual life of women'.⁵⁰ Despite, or perhaps because of this, Woolf's single women navigate the city streets at will. Only Rose expresses concern, and this, the narrative suggests, has its root in her childhood experience.

Wandering, wondering, and writing

For Woolf, however, the city streets are more than just a place. In her writing, wandering and wondering form a powerful conjunction. The city wanderer is rewarded with inspiration and epiphany (however brief) while the process of wandering itself becomes a fruitful approach to social and intellectual questions. Rachel Bowlby, writing about Woolf, distinguishes between two types of step, 'progressive, or the forward step in a given direction; and transgressive, or the walk that crosses and challenges set lines of demarcation.'⁵¹ In *Three Guineas* Woolf expresses scepticism about the progressive step which she relates to the 'procession of educated men's sons': who 'ke[ep] in step' and 'walk[...] according to rule' (183). This procession is visualised as a line that not only takes the individual man from his preparatory school through to the professions, but which also extends back to his male ancestors, and potentially forward to his male descendants. In contrast, Woolf's single women are repeatedly positioned as transgressive wanderers, and

⁵⁰ Woolf, *Diary 4*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Rachel Bowlby, 'Walking, women and writing, Virginia Woolf as *flâneuse*', in *New Feminist Discourses*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 26-47 (p. 29).

she uses this facility to challenge aspects of the male procession: their institutions, their approach to knowledge, and their perception of the city.

The wandering mind is a repeated trope in Woolf's writing. In *The Years* Eleanor evades the ancient procedures of the law-courts by virtue of this method. 'Her mind wandered' (107), and in so doing a 'tide' of scenes from Eleanor's morning 'obtrude' into the law court. What may seem like a momentary lapse is presented as a useful strategy by Woolf, and it is by virtue of Eleanor's wandering mind that she remembers the humanity of the judge beneath his official wig and views him as a fallible person rather than authority incarnate. Woolf's stream of consciousness narrative here works to privilege the non-professional experiences of Eleanor over the public sphere of the court. It gives a voice to an individual whose voice in the establishment is muted, but it is also specifically identified as the tool of the unconnected spinster. Eleanor's married sister-in-law, who sits alongside Eleanor is invested in the process in which her husband is involved, and consequently is caught up entirely in the performance, and incapable of detached critique.

This sense of wandering is expanded by Woolf, and becomes an approach to literary criticism and to fiction that is reserved for women, and particularly for spinsters. Edward's approach to his university Greek in *The Years* is to 'be precise; exact; [...] He must let nothing dwindle off into vagueness' (48). In contrast, Woolf's women, lacking the education of their fathers, brothers or husbands, approach literature unconfined by method. Eleanor reads 'a few lines, here and there' (202); Sara 'skipped through the pages. At first she read a line or two at random; then from the litter of broken words, scenes rose, quickly, inaccurately, as she skipped' (130). Even Mrs Ramsay, 'began reading here and there at random [...] She did not know at first what the words meant at all [...] zigzagging this way and that, from one line to another' (*Lighthouse*, 129). Woolf herself was 'inordinately conscientious', writing 'page after page of eloquent reading notes' for her reviews and spending years over the revisions to her fiction manuscripts, but in *Room* she suggests this as an alternate methodology, letting her own mind 'wander' and 'making a perfectly

arbitrary choice of a dozen volumes or so' (*Room*, 28) in the British Museum.⁵² In *Street Haunting* and *A Room of One's Own*, wandering and rambling form the basis of Woolf's argument. In 'Street Haunting', 'rambling the streets of London' ('Street Haunting' 23) is the subject of the essay, but writing is also the purpose of the walk (to find a pencil is its ostensible object) and Woolf's prose meanders and rambles as she does. In *Room*, difficult questions, Woolf notes, 'stimulate me to wander from my subject into trackless forests where I shall be lost and, very likely, devoured by wild beasts' (*Room*, 78). In Bowlby's terms this is a transgressive approach to physical and cultural space, and it is one which produces new ways of thinking and seeing.

In *The Years* Woolf reserves this transgressive approach for her spinsters and both Eleanor and Sara juxtapose the incongruous in a way that entirely revisualises spaces. Sara, sitting in a city chop-house with Martin, aligns Martin's boast that he is 'Crosby's God' (219), with the restaurant they are sitting in, and remarks 'It's a fine church' (219). Martin, whose recourse is only to the literal imagines that she is recalling her visit to St Paul's, but Sara's position as a visionary in the text suggests an alternative reading of the restaurant itself. Similarly Eleanor, reading of Martin's experiences in the army while riding through London in a Hansom cab, transposes them onto her surroundings while retaining the essential elements of both spaces, to create an urban jungle: 'An old woman was being helped across the road by a policeman; but the road was a jungle' (104), like Woolf's own 'trackless forests'. Woolf juxtaposes Eleanor and Sara's incongruous but enlightening visions of the city, with those of Martin who can only read it literally. Where they are seers, he is positioned as a sightseer or tourist, able only to report what is there, but not to revision it. In the city he repeatedly manoeuvres Sara, hurrying her, preventing her from crossing roads and directing her gaze, 'Look at that, Sal [...] Look at that!' (222) Effectively he takes on the mantle of a guide or guardian, in an environment that Woolf shows is equally Sara's, and which she inhabits, but differently. Martin, with his privileged position in British society is unable to see the city as the source of

⁵² Lee, p. 217

inspiration that it is to his female relatives, who are blissfully unconcerned with the gazes of the public that turn their way: 'The sun was blazing on the windows of St George's Hospital. [Sara] was looking at it with rapture. But why with rapture? he wondered' (225).

Reconstructing the Domestic

Woolf's opinions on the need for women to reconstruct their domestic roles and environments are most clearly realised in her memoirs of the move made by herself and her siblings, from Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, to Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, following the death of their father. This move has been immortalised in Bloomsbury legend, but what critics have increasingly noticed is the extent to which the move was not a whole scale rejection of the Victorian era, but rather a compromise with it that retained many of the values surrounding literary and artistic endeavour, and hard work, that had characterised an earlier generation.⁵³ While Woolf suggested that '[e]verything was on trial', and the rooms at Gordon Square were airy and light in contrast to the 'rich red gloom' of Hyde Park Gate, in fact, not everything was new or different.⁵⁴ The Stephens brought their Victorian heritage with them to Gordon Square, and visitors entered through a hall in which portraits of Victorians including Tennyson, Meredith, Darwin and Leslie Stephen were hung opposite five portraits of Julia Stephen, in an effective gauntlet of Great Men and the Angel of the House.⁵⁵ What had changed was that in Gordon Square the Victorian trappings, physical and social, that the Stephens brought with them were recontextualised. Pictures, furniture and china 'shone out for the first time in the drawing room at Gordon Square'.⁵⁶ At Gordon Square, also for the first time, Virginia and Vanessa could put their own artistic and literary work at the centre of their daily lives. In

⁵³ Lee, p. 162; See for example S.R. Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Katharine Mullin, 'Victorian Bloomsbury', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). pp. 19-31.

⁵⁴ Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', p. 163.

⁵⁵ Reed, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', p. 163

doing so, they did not so much break with Victorian tradition as resituate themselves in relation to it. They took up the cultural inheritance of their father, staking a claim in an artistic and intellectual milieu that was still largely the province of educated men, and they revisualised the domestic inheritance of their mother, taking the home as a subject for highbrow artistic critique, in contrast to the work of many of their male peers.⁵⁷ In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf would transpose this negotiation onto the artistic emancipation of the spinster, Lily Briscoe.

Spinsterly 'vision' in *To the Lighthouse*

In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf uses the spinster Lily, who is subtly distanced from Mr and Mrs Ramsay, to provide an emotional as well as an artistic perspective from which the reader can view both characters. While Lily is, in a sense, 'in love' (27) with both of them, she is not a relative and this gives to her critique an objectivity that is not muddied by family ties. Moreover, she is repeatedly as frustrated as she is enamoured with them. As a woman Lily is peripheral to the public and intellectual world inhabited by Mr Ramsay, and as a spinster she holds a marginal position in Mrs Ramsay's conception of society as centred round marriage and family. Woolf's depiction of spinsterhood in Lily is not dissimilar to those depictions offered by commentators who considered the spinster a dangerous figure, but Woolf subverts what they considered a barren, sterile position, into one of artistic productivity. Charlotte Cowdroy's aptly named *Wasted Womanhood* (1933) provides an illustrative example, on the subject of the 'modern girl':

For a while her work suffices her. Perhaps she withers into an official, and, never having known what it really means to live, never knows what a pitiable thing she is. More often she gradually realises the barrenness of her existence. [...] the true woman finds happiness only in giving, [...] her true destiny is only fulfilled when she can exert the divinest of her qualities – her mother's gift. Life is without meaning to her unless she 'mothers'. [...] In comparison success and prosperity are but Dead Sea Fruit.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Reed, p. 28.

⁵⁸ Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood*, p. 82

Lily is not what was termed a 'womanly woman'. She is 'skimpy' (107), and 'without the complexion or the allurements of Miss Doyle' (22), who charms Mr Ramsay with consummate ease, and becomes engaged in the first part of the novel. However, womanliness as embodied in the Angel of the House and Mrs Ramsay, is equated by Woolf to a relationship with men in which truth and integrity are necessarily compromised. Lily herself draws a link between her spinsterhood and her inability to sympathise with Mr Ramsay, 'myself [...] who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid presumably' (165). But it is her spinsterhood that Woolf suggests is central to her success as an artist. Lily's lack of womanliness enables her to privilege her art over Mr Ramsay. Furthermore, it prefigures Woolf's concept of the androgynous creative mind as outlined in *A Room of One's Own*. In *Room* she notes that in the production of art it is 'fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly' (102) and Lily who is 'not a woman', strives towards her vision by 'subduing all her impressions as a woman to something much more general' (*Lighthouse*, 60). So, while Woolf utilises the common assumption that the spinster was unwomanly, she uses it in a non-pejorative sense; the unwomanly woman, or spinster, is distanced from the social pressure to rate the needs of men over her art, and she is also potentially more likely to create a work of artistic merit.

Lily's intervention in the Ramsay household echoes the Stephen sisters' move to Gordon Square: Lily too stakes a claim in the masculine world of work, and subtly alters the dynamic of the Ramsay home to place her art at its centre. Lily focalises the intellectual work of Mr Bankes and Mr Ramsay through a domestically accustomed eye. Through this prism Mr Bankes' scientific work becomes a kitchen garden, 'involuntarily, sections of potatoes rose before her eyes' (29). Similarly, Lily understands Mr Ramsay's work by imagining his theoretical philosophy as a kitchen table. If Lily sees intellectual and scientific 'male' work through the veil of the domestic, however, she also repositions the domestic as the domain of meaningful work. Gazing at William Bankes and Mrs Ramsay over dinner, Lily aligns herself firmly with the world of work rather than with women and the

family: 'she remembered [...] that she too had her work. In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space' (92). Moving the salt cellar to remind her of this alteration to her work, Lily transposes her canvas onto the flat of the dining room table, and in so doing brings her work into the centre of the home. By staking a claim for her art on the table, Lily revisualises the 'awkward space' (92), not just of her painting, but of the domestic environment for the spinster: 'she need not marry, thank Heaven [...] She would move the tree rather more to the middle' (111).

Through Lily, Woolf synthesises the male and female inheritance of her generation of women, and so Lily is positioned by Woolf in the final section of *To the Lighthouse* not as Mrs Ramsay's antithesis, but as her successor. In part one of the novel Mrs Ramsay is portrayed as the literal creator of the home as Victorian ideal; with her 'delicious fecundity' (43) and bottomless well of sympathy, '[f]lashing her needles, confident, upright, she created drawing-room and kitchen, set them all aglow' (43). In section three, Lily herself recreates the house and garden through her painting; crucially enabled to do so through the physical absence of Mr Ramsay, and the memory of Mrs Ramsay, who has died. Her painting, which transposes the couple onto her canvas as shadow and line, is entirely in the modern post-impressionist manner; her artistic process allows her to understand their relation, but also gives her the final authority to articulate it in her own terms. Lily's artistic process is described by Woolf in exactly the same sexualised terminology she uses for Mrs Ramsay's maternal and wifely empathy: Mrs Ramsay's 'fountain and spray of life' (43), is echoed in Lily's creative 'fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modelled it with greens and blues' (174). Lily is a creator, and her artistic production is given equal importance to the maternal reproduction of Mrs Ramsay. Lily is a spinster, Woolf suggests, but she is not barren. Moreover, Woolf's repeated use of sexual imagery suggests that Lily's is the kind of art, that will be 'fertilized', that will grow, that will not be doomed to 'wither at nightfall' (*Room*, 103), again, the kind of art that Woolf sees as the product of the androgynous mind.

The 'deliberate failure' of *The Years*

In *Room*, Woolf argues that 'we think back through our mothers if we are women' (76), but as she shows in *To the Lighthouse* and her essays including 'Professions for Women', mothers can be difficult, conservative figures who oppose artistic truth. The literary mothers that she chooses for herself in *Room* – Jane Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot – are united by their profession but also by 'the possibly relevant fact that not one of them had a child' (*Room*, 67). In *The Years*, Woolf expands this model across generations of a single family, to provide a network of childless spinster-mothers through whom an alternative version of history can be told. Through Eleanor, Sara, Rose, and Peggy – all in constant interaction with their family and the world around them – Woolf also challenges the repeated characterisation in literature of the spinster or single woman as a lone, or necessarily lonely, figure.

Eleanor and Sara Pargiter are the key voices of the text. Initially at least, these characters embody the two types of fiction that Woolf had previously written, and wanted to combine in *The Years*. 'I want to give the whole of the present society – nothing less: facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both. I mean, *The Waves* going on simultaneously with *Night & Day*.'⁵⁹ In this context, the philanthropic Eleanor can be seen as a direct descendant of Mary Datchett, a pragmatic Victorian with her collection books full of facts. In contrast, the lyrical Sara, who as Tracy Hargreaves has noted 'reads like a refugee from *The Waves*', is Eleanor's visionary counterpart.⁶⁰ As discussed above, the revolutionary potential of both of these characters is conveyed by Woolf through their relationship with the streets. As street-haunters, and deviators from the common path they wander and wonder and in so doing they challenge the intellectual and institutional traditions that Woolf equates with constraint, the interior, and linear thought. In contrast, Woolf uses their different homes to chart their changing social and economic

⁵⁹ Woolf, *Diary 4*, pp. 151-2.

⁶⁰ Tracy Hargreaves, 'I Should Explain He Shares My Bath: Art and Politics in *The Years*', *The Journal of the English Association*, 50 (2001), 83-198 (p. 188).

circumstances, from the nineteenth century to the late nineteen thirties, and the effects that their surroundings have upon them. Through this dual perspective, and the diverging fortunes of these women, Woolf is enabled to explore a breadth of social conditions which is both wider and more distinctively 'modern' than those shown in *Night and Day*, and *To the Lighthouse*. Its final conclusion is more muted however, and less positive. Woolf wrote, 'the book may be damned, with faint praise; but the point is that I myself know why it's a failure & that the failure is deliberate.'⁶¹ *Night and Day* suggests that women are on the brink of a new kind of understanding and existence; *To the Lighthouse* promotes the possibilities of modern understanding enabled through the artistic process. In contrast, written in what Auden described as a 'low dishonest decade', and in the shadow of 'the black night that now covers Europe' (*Guineas*, 269), *The Years* depicts a world in which aesthetics and understanding almost necessarily fall short.⁶²

Woolf's deliberately provocative statement that, 'on or about December 1910, human character changed' has been frequently quoted.⁶³ Left largely unqualified by Woolf, it has been read as referring to one or more 'expressions of British subversiveness', including the Post-Impressionist Exhibition, the Suffragette movement (who suffered casualties during 'Black Friday', on 18th November 1910), and the Dreadnought Hoax, or less politically to the year that Woolf first rented a house in Sussex.⁶⁴ Whether it refers to one, or all of these, its positioning of a shift in human relations prior to the war is a useful antidote to literary presentations of pre-war Britain as a hermetically sealed 'golden age.' '[E]verything was different' (*Room* 13) Woolf wrote, after 1914, but there was nevertheless a period of change that preceded it, change that for Woolf was, in a creative context, as important as the war. After all, she used nearly the same phrase, 'everything was going to be

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 5: 1936-41*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 65.

⁶² W.H.Auden, 'September 1, 1939', in *Poetry of the Thirties*, ed. by Robin Skelton (London: Penguin, 1964), pp.280-283 (p.280).

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, 'Character in Fiction', *Selected Essays*, pp. 37-52, (p. 38).

⁶⁴ Lee, p. 279; Reed, pp. 87-88.

different' to describe the 1904 move to Gordon Square.⁶⁵ In *The Years*, Woolf uses this timeframe of around 1910 to mark a watershed in the lives of both Eleanor and Sara. Eleanor's father and both of Sara's parents die within two years of each other, with varying consequences. For Eleanor, a housekeeper for her father for thirty years, following the death of her mother, this change is a welcome release. For Sara, and initially Maggie her sister, it marks the beginning of a decline in prosperity. The death of their parents' generation is marked by Woolf in a change of accommodation for Eleanor and Sara who leave the security and prosperity, but also the constraint of the Victorian home behind.

Although Abercorn Terrace is not sold until 1913, Colonel Pargiter's death is followed by the immediate expansion of her geographical horizon for Eleanor who tours Spain, Italy and Greece. These travels allow her to look at England comparatively, it seems clean, plentiful, friendly, but also replace her earlier travels to the slums of Lisson Grove. Philanthropy does not survive past the war in *The Years*, where it is irrevocably linked to Victorian daughters, eager to escape the confines of the house and engage with the world. Consequently, Woolf's characterisation of Eleanor moves from a Victorian spinster stereotype to a more idiosyncratic rendition of the unmarried woman. Eleanor might appear to a fellow bus passenger in 1891 as 'a well-known type, with a bag; philanthropic; well nourished; a spinster; a virgin; like all the women of her class, cold' (98), but by developing her spinster Woolf indicates that her 'type' is the result of social and historical conditions, not any innate or biological characteristics. In a 'present day' scene Woolf repeats this journey, but this time in a cab, with Peggy, her niece as Eleanor's observer. Here when Peggy tries to fix her Aunt's image as 'a portrait of a Victorian spinster' (316), she fails. Eleanor repeatedly acts contrary to expectation. This sense of freedom, of the opportunity to expand personally and geographically, is very much associated with the spinster by Woolf. While Eleanor remains 'very vigorous' (291) in her late seventies, the men of her generation are seen to have stalled, while the married women are thwarted or muted. Edward is an

⁶⁵ Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', p. 163

'established' (387) University Professor, but Woolf uses the term to convey that he is both of the establishment and ossified by it. With 'an attitude fixed on him from which he could not relax any longer', he has 'the look of an insect whose body has been eaten out, leaving only the wings, the shell' (385). Delia and Kitty, both rebellious in their youth, are subsumed into the establishment by their marriages, Delia to a man who is both anti-suffrage and pro-Empire, and Kitty to a Lord.

By the end of *The Years*, Eleanor, who has just returned from India but is still searching for 'another kind of civilization' (318) has transformed from slum visitor to 'a fine old prophetess' (311). This trajectory is founded on her release from familial servitude following the death of her father, but also on her continued resistance to the domestic after this. Searching for a word to describe the adverts of house agents, Eleanor's brother-in-law chooses the word 'manifestoes' (382), and this is how Woolf uses her houses throughout the novel, not just as buildings, but as manifestoes for ways of living and seeing. Musing about where she will live following her father's death, Eleanor looks at country cottages in Devonshire:

What about that house then, she said to herself, looking at a house with a verandah among some trees. But then, she thought, I should turn into a grey-haired lady cutting flowers with a pair of scissors and tapping at cottage doors. She did not want to tap at cottage doors. And the clergyman – a clergyman was wheeling his bicycle up the hill – would come to tea with her. But she did not want the clergyman to come to tea with her. (186)

By resisting this home for her spinster, Woolf resists Eleanor's relegation to the country spinster stereotype and the accompanying way of life, and allows her to become modern.⁶⁶ Rather than retiring her to the country, Woolf locates her septuagenarian spinster in a modern flat with a shower bath, hot water and electric light, in a suburb she can reach by omnibus from the city centre. On the sixth floor, it affords Eleanor a panoramic view over London, a perspective that gestures towards her increased horizons and also her liberalism, and contrasts to the physical and intellectual constraint as well as the 'rich red gloom' of the Victorian

⁶⁶ This distinction between the traditional countryside and the modern urban is also found elsewhere in Woolf's work. See for example *Night and Day*, where the traveller to the country 'is apt to cast his mind back to the Middle Ages' (p. 183).

home. Eleanor's 'modern conveniences' however, convey more than just the changing times, or the dementia that North attributes to his Aunt's excitement over her 'shower bath'. They provide another example of an interior that is not domestic, not in this instance because it is transformed by work, but because it negates the need for servants.

Virginia Woolf's relationship with her servants was an ambivalent one and Alison Light offers a full discussion regarding it in her *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*. Sophie Farrell, Nellie Boxall and Lottie Hope, are just a few of the servants viewed with alternate affection, exasperation, rage, and shame in Woolf's many letters and diaries detailing the 'servant question': documents which repeatedly highlight the chasm between the upper-middle and the servant classes, even when living in close proximity, and even during an era in which live-in servant numbers were decreasing.⁶⁷ Despite her plans and strategies for doing without live-in help, Woolf relied on servants throughout her life. The 'thoroughly mid-Victorian' building of Gordon Square, needed their help just as Hyde Park Gate had, and servants often found themselves shuttled between later Bloomsbury establishments, or between their residents' Sussex homes, as needed.⁶⁸ In *Night and Day* and *To the Lighthouse*, servants are largely "'spectral" dwellers', referred to but unseen: in the former novel they are not even mentioned, and in the latter the Boeuf en Daube is Mrs Ramsay's triumph and not the Cook's.⁶⁹ In the 'Time Passes' section of *To the Lighthouse* however, the servants Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast together form part of a ruling triumvirate, alongside Mrs Ramsay and Lily, as Woolf gives to each type of woman, wife, servant, spinster, the dominating perspective of one section of the text. Through Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast the house is brought to life again. Like Mrs Ramsay and Lily, these women too are productive, but theirs is a purely physical fecundity, conveyed through the several meanings of 'labour'. They give 'a rusty and laborious birth' (152) to the house and are both the stuff of myth, an eternal force that can combat the ravages of time, and a working class 'other' whose power

⁶⁷ Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (London: Penguin, 2007).

⁶⁸ Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', p. 162.

⁶⁹ Briganti and Mezei, 'House Haunting', p. 149.

is uncomfortably rendered by Woolf as 'something not highly conscious, something that leered; something that lurched' (151). These women are married, but they share with the spinster servant Crosby in *The Years* the sense not only of being *in* the house, but being *of* the house. The groans, moans, and creaks, of Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast are inextricable from the audible sounds of the house itself. In *The Years*, Crosby's relationship with Abercorn Terrace is similarly intimate.

She had known every cupboard, flagstone, chair and table in that large rambling house, not from five or six feet of distance as they had known it – but from her knees, as she scrubbed and polished; she had known every groove, stain, fork, knife, napkin and cupboard. (206)

Crosby and Eleanor's different relationships to Abercorn Terrace offer a challenge to the concept of a 'domestic modernism' on the part of Woolf. Crosby's emotion when she leaves the house, and her attempt to recreate it through the *bric-a-brac* she has salvaged, in her boarding house room, is diametrically opposed to the response of Eleanor, who is 'so glad' to leave it. Eleanor's happiness later in the novel is explicitly linked to her rejection of the solid and material (embodied in the corroded walrus salvaged by Crosby) in favour of vision and sensation. It is the specifically domestic then, both in terms of the materiality of the house and in Crosby, a 'domestic' worker, which Woolf abandons in Eleanor's wish to 'live differently' (401).

In the manuscript of *The Years* the difference between Eleanor's flat and Abercorn Terrace is made explicit, and the flat is described in more detail.⁷⁰ In the published version, Woolf gives more space to the unsatisfactory lodgings of Sara, rooms that are more clearly suggestive of the 'failure' of the age, and which gesture to the urban world inhabited by Jean Rhys' protagonists. In contrast to the modernity of Eleanor's rooms, Sara in the 'present day' section of *The Years* lives in a house that has 'seen better days' (294) and is now partitioned into lodgings. Her street is 'sordid', 'dirty' and 'low-down' (294-5), with a fascist symbol chalked up on the wall that suggests the support that fascism, and leaders including Oswald Moseley,

⁷⁰ Woolf, 'Appendix', in *The Years*, p. 426.

received from impoverished areas of London in the nineteen thirties.⁷¹ Despite this political indication of the date, Milton Street gestures towards many other rooms and streets in *The Years*. The screaming children recall the street of Abel's lower-class mistress in 1880; the many bells recall Delia's home in 1891. Through these residences, Woolf builds up an alternative to official history in *The Years*. Through domestic observation she shows the lives of those less privileged than the upper-middle class, and identifies the spinster as routinely economically impoverished and socially marginalised: a woman who has no real class status of her own, but is dependent on male relatives for her social standing, or at the very least for her wealth. As I have mentioned above, Woolf's servants, who occupy a lower position in the class hierarchy, are regularly muted or objectified, so this focus on the marginal does need to be contextualised. Nevertheless, it is illustrative of a decentred approach to history, which the figure of the spinster facilitates. In the final section of *The Years*, Woolf suggests that this is changing in the figure of Peggy. While Eleanor's modernity is presumably only enabled by a substantial sum inherited from her father, Peggy has entered the professions as a doctor. Despite Woolf's ambivalent presentation of Peggy's profession ('In the Middle Ages, she thought, it was the cell; the monastery; now it's the laboratory; the professions; not to live; not to feel; to make money, always money' (337)) Peggy, along with Eleanor and North, is allowed to experience one of the 'moments of vision' of the text. This is a wish to 'live differently', and while it is not the completed vision of Lily Briscoe, it still gestures towards the possibility of epiphany. In contrast, Woolf suggests through Sara that the facts of relative poverty are an obstacle to vision.

If Eleanor's flat showcases the best of the interwar present and the Victorian past then Sara's lodgings comprise the worst of both eras. The underdone mutton dinner brought by the 'regular lodging house skivvy' (298) is a travesty of the dinner that

⁷¹ Although the symbol is not explicitly linked to fascism in *The Years*, an entry in Woolf's diary from September 1935 refers to a similar mark: 'In London yesterday. Writings chalked up all over the walls. "Don't fight for foreigners. Briton should mind her own business." Then a circle with a symbol in it. Fascist propaganda, L. said. Mosley again active.' Woolf, *Diary 4*, p. 337.

Crosby serves in 1880, and yet the formal aspects of the meal have survived. As in 1880, North and Sara feel unable to talk freely with a servant in attendance. The repeated interruptions by the girl are just one example of unasked for intimacy with others that characterises the lodging, from the aural assault of the woman singing scales and screaming children, to the smell of cooking that pervades the stairwell and the noise of Abrahamson taking a bath. This sense of physical intimacy but personal isolation is a key trope of the house or flat, as distinguished from the home, in modern literature, where it appears ubiquitously in works including T.S. Eliot's poetry, James Joyce's *Dubliners* and the fiction of Jean Rhys. It is unusual in Woolf's fiction however, where interiors are more usually those of the solidly upper-middle class. Here it leads to a deeply uncomfortable passage where Abrahamson, a Jew, is racially insulted and stereotyped by Sara who suggests his body will leave a greasy stain on the bath, and is blamed for Sara's need to enter the world of work, 'Must I [...] sign on, and serve a master; all because of a Jew in my bath' (323). The scene clearly echoes an earlier scene, where Crosby has to clean the bath of a Belgian with whom she lodges, and it works to draw a parallel between the social position of the former servant, and the daughter of one branch of the family who she previously served. It indicates the precarious social position of the unmarried daughter of the erstwhile upper-middle-class, but its implications clearly reach beyond that. Critics have been divided on this passage, with writers looking variously to recuperate or indict Woolf on the charge of anti-Semitism.⁷² There is not space to enter into the discussion fully here, but what I would like to briefly consider is the relationship between space, writing and the spinster that this passage suggests.

Instances of Woolf's anti-Semitism, common to her generation, but nonetheless inexcusable, do litter her diaries and letters, particularly in relation to her in-laws, but these are juxtaposed in the thirties with descriptions of herself as a Jew. Woolf was aware of the situation in Germany, which she drove through with Leonard in

⁷² See for example Hargreaves; Maren Linnett, 'The Jew in the Bath: Imperiled Imagination in Woolf's *The Years*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48 (2002), pp. 341-361; Lee, p. 680.

1935, encountering en route a Nazi demonstration with 'The Jew is our enemy' written on banners across the streets.⁷³ Although the meaning of Sara's commentary on Abrahamson is left ambiguous, it seems unlikely, given this, that it is an uncomplicated instance of anti-Semitism. From the outset, Sara has been the lyrical figure of *The Years*, a caricaturist and storyteller who re-visions events and people as she mimics or retells them, capturing a portion of their truth. As such, although she is not explicitly a writer or an artist (although her newspaper office anecdote suggests she might write) she embodies the practice of writing or art.

Throughout *The Years*, the limitations of Sara's gestures – and by extension the practice of artistic representation – are repeatedly suggested. As a child she captures the manner of her father's gestures and words, but not their meaning. When she is caricaturing Edward Pargiter, Rose notes that the likeness is only partial, 'it was not the whole of Edward' (160). Like talk heard through a door, which as Sara notes 'sounds very odd' (163), something is lost in the process of representation. Before they are interrupted by the sound of Abrahamson in the bath, North reads lines from Marvell's 'The Garden', but their surroundings actively resist an art in which 'delicious solitude' can be imagined, or have meaning, and he stops. In place of Marvell's Eden Sara offers her own modern vision of the city, a pastiche of Eliot's *The Waste Land*: 'Polluted city, unbelieving city, city of dead fish and worn-out frying pans', in which commuters are rendered as 'the strutting; the tiptoeing; the pasty; the ferret-eyed; the bowler-hatted, servile innumerable army of workers' (323). This vision of the city is recognisably modernist: it recalls Eliot as well as Woolf's own earlier vision of the commuters walking over Waterloo Bridge in 'Street Haunting', but it is very different in tone to the narrative of the rest of *The Years*. Although North notes that Sara's excitement, alongside her words, create an entity in and of themselves, he reads into the actual words the facts 'that she was poor; that she must earn her own living' (325), and this highlights the link between social and historical context and the aesthetic. Woolf's location of an identifiably modernist aesthetic in Sara's sordid flat, flanked by a fascist symbol, and her

⁷³ Lee, p. 678

juxtaposition of a literary stream-of-conscious with anti-semitic rhetoric, seems to suggest that the modernist vision of the twenties is an inappropriate response in the late thirties. The highbrow in its prioritisation of the aesthetic over the individual is potentially culpable of collusion with the fascist order that Woolf links to the districts of the urban working classes. In contrast to Woolf's project in *The Years*, it is conveyed as a literary response to modernity that is impoverished, bitter, and invested. Sara's failure of vision here then, is more broadly the failure of modernism, and it is with the vision of Eleanor, her less modern but more liberal spinster, that Woolf chooses to close her text.

Conclusion

In *Night and Day*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Years*, it is through the spinster that Woolf chooses to critique women's social role, their inheritance and their visionary possibilities. Read together these three examples of Woolf's fiction provide an index of her changing circumstances and social and aesthetic interests. *Night and Day*, set before the war and her first novel to be written after the catastrophic breakdown that followed her wedding, examines through two single women, the possibilities of both a writing life and a new kind of marriage. *To the Lighthouse*, a more textually inventive novel and one which exemplifies a modernist sensibility, considers how art can approach the domestic and professional inheritance passed down from an earlier generation. In this novel, the vision of Lily Briscoe is enabled by her position as a spinster, and from this vantage point she synthesises the spheres of men and women, as well as the past and the present through her painting. *The Years*, written at a time of international and domestic political uncertainty, is completely different in tone. Written in tandem with Woolf's political essay *Three Guineas* it suggests the possible failure of the modernist vision at the same time as it refuses to be wholly pessimistic: suggesting that a continued attempt to articulate and think about ways to 'live differently' are processes valuable in and of themselves. In her search to 'reconstruct a habitable dwelling place' for her spinsters, Woolf, like her avatar Lily Briscoe, is finally driven to embrace the past as well as the present. From *Night and*

Day, where the 'old believers' (534) are derided, she moves to a more amicable relation to the past: if Hyde Park Gate or Abercorn Terrace have to be left, then their older, if not their oldest, inhabitants remain respected. Eleanor herself – more than two decades older than Woolf – embodies to some extent, the survival of the Victorians into this modern age and in her modern flat she keeps her Victorian writing table and the portrait of her mother. In 1934 Woolf noted a conversation with Maynard Keynes, 'I begin to see that our generation – yours and mine V., owed a great deal to our fathers' religion. And the young [...] who are brought up without it, will never get so much out of life.'⁷⁴ In *The Years*, the younger generation voiced by Peggy, saturated with the pessimism of the thirties, look to the late-Victorian 'Believers' as '[a] wonderful generation', ones who can still believe in 'the things that man had destroyed (314)'. Woolf's spinsters then span an interwar social critique which begins with the rejection of the traditional and ends by gesturing towards Victorian values, but this gesture should be seen as a transgressive rather than a retrogressive step. In the course of their wandering, Woolf's spinsters have reached the Professions and found a room of their own, and it is with economic autonomy as well as a vigorous mind, that they swerve away from the conditions of modernity to try to 'live differently' (401).

⁷⁴ Woolf, *Diary 4*, p. 208

Conclusion

[T]here are, I imagine, few parts of the world where the once traditional contempt for the spinster is more thoroughly a thing of the past. Time was – not so very long ago – when the middle-aged Englishwoman who had not found a husband was considered fair game for the jester; by the humourists of the Victorian age she was always depicted as a figure of fun – an unattractive creature who, in spite of all her efforts, had failed to induce a man to marry her. That was the old maid as a past generation saw her – and we do not see her today; we have too many unmarried women successful in business or professional life, distinguished in literature, science, and art, to be able to keep up that joke.

(Cicely Hamilton, *The Englishwoman*, 1940)¹

I began this thesis with a quotation from *The Times*, which suggested that none of the statistics revealed by the 1921 census were more problematic than those which confirmed the preponderance of women over men. Emigration was suggested, and although polygamy does not seem to have entered discussions after the war, unmarried women were variously labelled ‘surplus’ and ‘superfluous’.² Concerns about their psychological and their physical health circulated. Published nineteen years later, the above quotation from Cicely Hamilton seems to suggest that by 1940, this was a concern of the past. Not only was the ‘old maid’ no longer a figure of fun, ‘surplus’ women had been transformed in the popular imagination to valued members of society through their contributions to business, literature and science. Again, this needs to be seen as part of a bigger picture. What this thesis has shown, in the literature of just five women writers, writing within a largely middle-class paradigm, is the heterogeneity of the single woman in fiction during the interwar years, as well as the range of discourses in which single women were discussed and the variety of ways in which they were depicted. In the fiction I have examined, stereotypes *are* utilised, but where they are deployed it is often in order to debunk a theory about another ‘type’ of single woman. So, the spinster is psychologically and sexually unstable in Lehmann’s fiction, but this works to excuse the extra-marital

¹ Quoted in Beauman, p. 62

² Walter Gallichan’s *Women under Polygamy* (1914) suggested this option: Jeffreys, p. 145.

behaviour of the mistress. In contrast, the virginal spinster is the personification of honesty and discretion in the crime novels of Dorothy L. Sayers, but those suspected of sexual deviance are criminalised or pathologised. In Rhys' fiction and Woolf's non-fiction, women are just women irrespective of their marital status; 'outsiders' to the establishment and the nation, they are located in a marginal position of powerlessness or power depending on the writer. In Woolf's fiction, and the fiction of Sylvia Townsend Warner the single woman is a harbinger of change, and a potential revolutionary, opposed to the smugly insular wife, but Woolf in particular details the impoverishment, hardship, and potential failure of vision that might be consequent on such view from the economic margins. This range of experience suggests that, with reference to literature at least, it is impossible to categorise the interwar period as some commentators have done, either as a time of unmitigated progress for the single woman, when she was viewed with more consideration and her opportunities were increased, or as 'an era of domesticity', when she was rejected by feminism and placed under subjugation to the housewife and mother. The realities, as I have shown, are located somewhere inbetween.

Interwar women writers responded to the 'question' or 'problem' of the unmarried woman by adapting their narratives to her various needs: critiquing the hegemony of wife and motherhood as an ideal for women and, in some cases, offering alternatives. It is as if writers heard the plea articulated by early interwar protagonist Muriel Hammond and gathered round to answer it: 'All books are the same – about beautiful girls who get married [...] Why doesn't somebody write a book about someone [...] like me?'³ Their responses, as I have shown, are not all radical, but by their very nature they invite a reassessment of the 'place' or 'places' of single women. In these novels the single woman is not superfluous or marginalised, she is of central importance to the narrative.

As might be expected from writers who are of similar ages, writing contemporaneously, patterns do emerge across these texts. While literary critics

³ Winifred Holtby, *The Crowded Street* (London: Virago Modern Classics, 1981), p. 219.

have considered women's employment in popular novels and working-class weekly magazine stories, and while historians suggest that new opportunities for women were emerging in the employment sector, and were featured in articles by the press, few of the texts that I have considered offer paid work as a viable alternative to marriage. Sayers, who worked in an advertisement bureau prior to writing full-time is the only author of the five who offers examples, not only of women working, but of their work being both valuable and remunerative. For Rhys and Lehmann's protagonists work is something performed to survive, and Woolf from Mary Datchett to Sara Pargiter, repeatedly depicts paid work as necessarily antithetical to truth. In *Three Guineas*, as in *A Room of One's Own*, there is a conflict between the opportunities opening to the 'daughters of educated men', and the professional world they must enter, with 'its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed' (*Guineas* 199). Queenie Leavis, in an unduly personal review that featured veiled attacks on Woolf's lack of education as well as her childlessness, queried this idea, noting that 'mental chastity' was difficult to practically realise for those who still needed to earn their five hundred pounds a year.⁴ In *Room*, Woolf's call for women to rise and write is dampened somewhat by her own recollections of writing for money: 'to be doing work that one did not wish to do, and to do it like a slave, flattering and fawning' (39). The consequence of these attitudes to work are that in many of these texts, a positive resolution to the single woman's narrative is reserved only for those with personal wealth, or at least enough for them to write or paint in peace. Although there has not been room to do so here, a comparison of these single women and their narratives with those of working women in other popular forms of fiction during the interwar period would be productive.

Distinctions between the classes that are not limited to social or economic details are also widespread in the fiction that I have considered, although depicted differently by the various authors. In the fiction of Lehmann and Sayers particularly, the lower middle class single woman is repeatedly equated with sexual instability and

⁴ Q.D.Leavis, 'Review', in Majumdar and McLaurin, pp. 409-419 (pp. 412-3).

incipient madness: pitiable or threatening and sometimes both, in depictions of these women Lehmann and Sayers both link the transgression of socially accepted sexual parameters with the overstepping of class boundaries. In the fiction of Rhys, single women of the *demimonde*, are depicted as feisty and modern in their use of slang. In contrast, the moral turpitude of their landladies, a class of woman for whom Rhys had an 'irrevocable hatred', is conveyed through a specifically working-class vernacular.⁵ For Woolf in *The Years*, the spinster servant Crosby is an embodiment of the past: materialist, and a staunch advocate of the class system, she unwittingly ironises the ideology of a past generation of the upper-middle class that Eleanor tries to leave behind.

These single women narratives offer two distinct challenges to literary critics. The first, which critics of women's writing have been practicing for some time, is to approach comparisons across the critical divide of modernism and the middlebrow. My examination of single women narratives across the fiction of these women writers reveals close textual and narrative affinities across the divide, and conversely perceptual and narrative differences within both camps. Rhys' own textual inventiveness is not an experience shared by her single women, who have only a 'limited [...] ability to write new scripts' and find themselves constrained or negated by the cultural forms in which they look to understand themselves.⁶ In contrast, Woolf lets Mary Datchett write a new social order and Lily Briscoe paint her own picture. Lehmann's protagonists long for a position in the domestic home, while Warner's reject it, but both writers are driven to twist their narratives away from the realism on which they are founded in order to achieve a suitable, if not ideal, resolution. The formal challenge offered by modernism and modernist literary techniques is not always accompanied by a challenge to social values; similarly, the middlebrow does not always fully contain women in their 'despised domestic roles'.⁷

⁵ Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 111.

⁶ Marshik, p. 168.

⁷ Humble, p. 130.

The second challenge that the single woman novel offers to critics is spatial. Criticism thus far has been largely divided into work on the domestic interior or analyses of the modern city. Several challenges to this division have been made in recent years, and the objective of this thesis has been to show the incredibly productive nature of a simultaneous examination of outside and inside, especially in relation to the single woman.⁸ As I have discussed, interwar women writers repeatedly depict the single woman rushing from one to the other, and moreover, as destabilising spatial structures and borders and their meanings as she does so. The single woman renders the city pavements domestic as she walks out to perform her errands, or upends them to form barricades, but she also makes the domestic uncanny: the site of inexplicable fogs and unhomely intrusions. She flouts the critical brief of the *flâneur*, but so too does she resist critical terms including 'domestic modernism'. By bringing together a variety of differently single women, created by writers working across genres and in different styles, this thesis highlights the necessity of a rigorous approach to the house, home or domestic environment, terms which are not necessarily synonymous, and acknowledges it as a site of heterogeneous experience and conflicting meanings.

In Winifred Holtby's *The Crowded Street*, the maiden Aunt, Aunt Beatrice, is 'ignored as completely as the carpet.'⁹ In Warner's *Lolly Willowses*, Laura decries the position of women, 'as common as blackberries, and as unregarded' (234). In their interwar fiction, Rhys, Lehmann, Sayers, Warner and Woolf, all make a textual space for the single woman who they render remarkable. In these novels, the single woman, impoverished or not, sexually active or not, turns her back on expected behaviour and saying 'one word to you', eschews the respectable, disrupts the home, or revolutionises the street, revisualising the 'tyrannies and servilities' of the interior and exterior by subverting them both.¹⁰ These women are not all

⁸ In addition to Gan, cited above, see: Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga, *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, subverting and appropriating public and private space* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

⁹ Holtby, *The Crowded Street*, p. 220.

¹⁰ Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 108; Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 270.

revolutionary in the literal sense of the word, but they all invite a reassessment of the single woman's narrative and in doing so they demand not only a room of their own, but a criticism of their own: in particular a rigorous approach to the multiple possibilities of the domestic, and a coherent approach to the routes taken between the inside and outside. In this thesis I have sought, alongside other recent works, not only to ensure that the single woman is not 'ignored as completely as the carpet', but to stake a claim for her importance, in all of her manifestations, to interwar women's literature. However imperious the call 'back to home and duty' was following the First World War, the single woman in literature, whether she longed for the marital home or refuted it, offered an important perspective from which to critique, re-evaluate and re-negotiate the social and the literary 'place' of women.

Bibliography

- Abravanel, Genevieve, 'Intertextual Indentifications: Modigliani, Conrad and "After Leaving Mr Mackenzie"', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Jean Rhys, 3 (2003), 91-98
- Anderson, Amanda, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993)
- Angier, Carole, *Jean Rhys* (London: Penguin, 1992)
- Auerbach, Nina, 'Foreword' in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters* ed. by Laura Doan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. ix-xv
- — *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982)
- Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994)
- Bailey, Peter, "'Naughty but Nice": musical comedy and the rhetoric of the girl, 1892-1914', in Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan, *The Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36-60
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Towards a Historical Poetics', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. and trans. by Michael Holquist trans. by Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258
- — 'Rabelais', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 167-206
- Barrett, Helen, and Phillips, John, *Suburban Style: The British Home, 1840-1960* (Boston, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1993)
- Baudelaire, Charles, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. and intro. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.390-435
- Beauman, Nicola, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-1939* (London: Virago, 1983)
- Beddoe, Deidre, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918 – 1939* (London: Pandora Press, 1989)

- Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973)
- — ‘On Some Motifs in Charles Baudelaire’, in *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), pp. 152-196
- — ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, pp. 245-255.
- Benstock, Shari, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago, 1987)
- Bingham, Adrian, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Bishop, Cecil, *Women and Crime* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931)
- Bland, Lucy, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995)
- — ‘“Guardians of the Race” or “Vampires upon the nation’s health?”: Female sexuality and its regulation in early twentieth-century Britain’, in *The Changing Experience of Women*, ed. by Elizabeth Whitelegg (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), pp. 373-388
- — ‘Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s-1940s’, in *Labour and Love: Women’s Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940*, ed. by Jane Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)
- — *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)
- Bland, Lucy and Laura Doan (eds.), *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998)
- — *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998)
- Blunt, Alison, and Dowling, Robyn, *Home* (London: Routledge, 2006)
- Bowlby, Rachel, ‘Walking, women and writing, Virginia Woolf as *flâneuse*’, in *New Feminist Discourses*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 26-47
- Bradley, Laurel, ‘From Eden to Empire: John Everett Millais’s “Cherry Ripe”’, *Victorian Studies*, 34 (1991), 179-203

- Braithwaite, Brian, Walsh, Noëlle, and Davies, Glyn (eds.), *Ragtime to Wartime: The Best of Good Housekeeping 1922-1939* (London: Ebury Press, 1986)
- Briganti, Chiara and Kathy Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel and E.H. Young* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)
- — ‘Domestic Novel’, *The Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English*, ed. by Lorna Sage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- — ‘House Haunting: The Domestic Novel of the Inter-war Years’, *Home Cultures*, 1 (2004), 147-168
- — ‘Reading the House: A literary perspective’, *Signs*, 27 (2002), 837-846
- Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago, 2004)
- Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 1996)
- Browne, Stella, ‘The Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and their Bearing upon Reconstruction’, in Sheila Rowbotham, *A New World for Women: Stella Browne Socialist Feminist* (London: Pluto Press, 1977) pp. 90-105
- — ‘Studies in Feminine Inversion’, in *Sexology Uncensored*, ed. by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 61-66
- Cantwell, Mary, ‘A Conversation with Jean Rhys’, in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp. 21-27
- Caslin, Samantha, ‘Flappers, Amateurs and Professionals: The Spectrum of Promiscuity in 1920s Britain’, in *New Sociologies of Sex Work*, ed. by Kate Hardy, Sarah Kingston and Teela Sanders (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 11-21
- Carr, Helen, *Jean Rhys*, 2nd ed. (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2012)
- Castle, Terry, ‘ Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Counterplot of Lesbian Fiction,’ *Textual Practice*, 4 (1990), pp. 213-235
- Chandler, Raymond, ‘The Simple Art of Murder’, in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947), pp. 222-237
- Chesterton, Mrs. Cecil, *In Darkest London* (London: Stanley Paul and Co Ltd., 1935)
- Corbett, David Peters, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1845-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)

- Cowdroy, Charlotte, 'Thwarted Women', *Evening News*, 19 September 1921, p. 4
 — — *Wasted Womanhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1933)
- Craig, Patricia, and Cadogan, Mary, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Dane, Clemence, *Regiment of Women* (London: Virago, 1995)
- D'Cruze, Shani, 'That damned place was haunted': The Gothic, Middlebrow Culture and Inter-War 'Notable Trials', *Literature and History*, 15 (2006), 37-59
- De Certeau, Michel, 'Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)
- Deegan, Dorothy Yost, *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951)
- Delafield, E.M., *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* (London: Virago, 1984)
- Doan, Laura, *Fashioning Sapphism: the origins of a modern English lesbian culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001)
 — — (ed and intro), *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991)
- Duggan, Lisa, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000)
- Dyhouse, Carol, 'Mothers and Daughters in the Middle-Class Home, c.1870-1914', in *Labour and Love*, ed. by Jane Lewis, pp. 27-47
 — — *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939* (London: UCL Press, 1995)
- Edelstein, T.J., 'Augustus Egg's Triptych: A Victorian Narrative of Adultery', *The Burlington Magazine*, 125 (1983), 202-212
- Eliot, T.S., *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)
 — — 'Wilkie Collins and Dickens', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 460-470
- Ellis, Havelock, 'Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol II: Sexual Inversion', in *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* ed. by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 52-57

- Eltis, Sos, 'The Fallen Woman in Edwardian Feminist Drama: Suffrage, Sex and the Single Girl', *English Literature in Transition 1880 – 1920*, 50 (2007), 27-49
- English, Elizabeth, *Lesbian Modernism: Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)
- Ewins, Kristin, "'Revolutionizing a Mode of Life": Leftist Middlebrow Fiction in the 1930s', *ELH*, 82 (2015), 251-279
- Faderman, Lillian, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (London: The Women's Press, 1981)
- Ford, Ford Madox, 'Preface to the Left Bank', in *Tigers are Better Looking*, by Jean Rhys (London: Penguin, 1972), pp. 137-139
- Forster, E.M., *A Room with a View* (London: Penguin, 1978)
- Fortescue, William, *France and 1848: The End of Monarchy* (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Freud, Sigmund, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-161
- Gekoski, R.A., 'Freud and English Literature 1900-1930', in *1900 – 1930*, ed. by Michael Bell (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 186–217
- Gibbons, Stella, *Cold Comfort Farm* (London: Penguin, 1938)
- Giles, Judy, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004)
- Gillis, Stacey, 'Consoling Fictions: Mourning, World War One and Dorothy L Sayers', in *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. by Patricia Rae (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 185-197
- Grant, Charlotte, 'Reading the House of Fiction: From Object to Interior 1720-1920', *Home Cultures*, 2 (2005), 233-250
- Graves, Robert and Hodge, Alan, *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London: Penguin, 1971)
- Green, Anna Katharine, *That Affair Next Door*, 1897 (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, ebook)
- Hall, Lesley A., 'Feminist Reconfigurations of Heterosexuality in the 1920s', in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, ed. by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 135-149

- — *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000)
- Hardy, Thomas, *Selected Poems*, intro. by Tom Paulin (London: Faber and Faber, 2001)
- Hargreaves, Tracy, 'I Should Explain He Shares My Bath: Art and Politics in *The Years*', *The Journal of the English Association*, 50 (2001), 83-198
- Harman, Claire, *Sylvia Townsend Warner* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989)
- Hastings, Selina, *Rosamond Lehmann* (London: Vintage, 2003)
- Heidegger, Martin, 'Being Dwelling Thinking', in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. by Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 100-109
- — 'Poetically Man Dwells', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 1971)
- Hemyng, Bracebridge, 'Prostitution in London', in *London Labour and the London Poor: Volume IV, Those that Will Not Work, comprising Prostitutes, Thieves, Swindlers and Beggars, by several contributors*, ed. by Henry Mayhew (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), pp. 210 – 272
- Henke, Suzette, 'Women Alone: The Spinster's Art', in *Herspace: Women, Writing and Solitude*, ed. by Jo Malin and Victoria Boynton (New York: The Haworth Press, 2003), pp. 21-37
- Hillis, Marjorie, *Live Alone and Like It: A Guide for the Extra Women* (London: Duckworth, 1936)
- Hinds, Hilary, 'Ordinary Disappointments: femininity, domesticity and nation in British middlebrow fiction 1920-1944,' *Modern Fiction Studies*, 55 (2009), 293-320
- Holden, Katherine, 'Imaginary Widows: Spinsters, marriage, and the 'lost generation' in Britain after the Great War', *Journal of Family History*, 30 (2005), 388-409
- — *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England 1914-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)
- Holtby, Winifred, *The Crowded Street* (London: Virago, 1981)

- — 'Feminism Divided', in *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby*, ed. by P. Berry and A. Bishop, pp. 47-50
- — 'King George V Jubilee Celebrations,' in *Testament of a Generation*, ed. by Berry and Bishop, 1985, pp. 89-93
- — *Women and a Changing Civilization* (Chicago: Academy Press Limited, 1978)
- Horn, Pamela, *Women in the 1920s* (Stroud: Allan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995)
- Howe, Bea, 'The Sylvia I Knew: A Personal Recollection', *PN Review*, Sylvia Townsend Warner 1893-1978: A Celebration, 8 (1981), 39-40
- Humble, Nicola, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
- Hunt, Alan, *A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Huson, Richard (ed.), *Sixty Famous Trials* (London: Daily Express, 1938)
- Jacobs, Lea, *The Wags of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (London: University of California Press, 1997)
- Jameson, Storm, *No Time Like the Present* (London: Cassell, 1933)
- Jeffreys, Sheila, *The Spinster and her Enemies* (Melbourne: Spinafex Press, 1997)
- Kenney, Catherine, 'Detecting a Novel Use for Spinsters in Sayers's Fiction', in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, ed. by Laura Doan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 123-138
- — *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990)
- Knight, Stephen, 'The Golden Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 77-91
- Konzett, Delia, *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)
- Krafft-Ebing, Richard von, 'Psychopathia Sexualis', in *Sexology Uncensored* ed. by Bland and Doan, pp. 45-47
- Leavis, Q.D., *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978)
- — 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', *Scrutiny*, 6 (1937), 334-340

- — ‘Review of *Three Guineas*’ in *Virginia Woolf The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 409-419
- Lee, Hermione, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997)
- Lehmann, Rosamond, *Dusty Answer* (London: Penguin, 1936)
- — *Invitation to the Waltz* (London: Virago, 2006)
- — ‘My First Novel’, *Listener*, 26 March 1953, 513-514
- — *A Note in Music* (London: Virago, 1982)
- — *The Swan in the Evening: Fragments of an Inner Life* (London: Virago, 1982)
- — *The Weather in the Streets* (London: Virago, 2006)
- Levine, Phillippa, “‘Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should’”: Women in Police in World War I’, *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), 34-78
- Levitan, Kathrin, ‘Redundancy, the “Surplus Woman” Problem, and the British Census, 1851-1861’, *Women’s History Review*, 17 (2008), 359-376
- Lewis, Andrea, “‘Glorious pagan that I adore’”? Resisting the National Reproductive Imperative in Rosamond Lehmann’s *Dusty Answer*’, *Studies in the Novel*, 31 (1999), 357-372
- Lewis, Jane, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984)
- Levack, Brian P., *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2015)
- Liggins, Emma, *Odd Women? Spinsters, lesbians and widows in British women’s fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014)
- Light, Alison, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991)
- — *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (London: Penguin, 2007)
- Linnett, Maren, ‘The Jew in the Bath: Imperiled Imagination in Woolf’s *The Years*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48 (2002), 341-361
- Ludovici, Anthony M., *Woman: A Vindication* (London: Constable & Co. Limited, 1929)
- Macaulay, Rose, *Potterism: A Tragi-Farcical Tract* (London: Collins, 1950)
- Mansfield, Katherine, *Selected Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

- Marshik, Celia, *British Modernism and Censorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Massey, Doreen, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994)
- Mayor, F.M., *The Third Miss Symons* (London: Virago Modern Classics, 1980)
- McFadden, Marya, 'Queerness at Shrewsbury: Homoerotic Desire in Gaudy Night', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46 (2010), 355-378
- Mellown, Elgin W., 'Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey, pp. 103-117
- Melman, Billie, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988)
- Mew, Charlotte, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997)
- Miller, Jane, *Rebel Women* (London: Virago, 1994)
- Montefiore, Janet, 'Listening to Minna: Realism, Feminism and the Politics of Reading', *Arguments of Heart and Mind: Selected Essays 1977-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)
- Mueller, Herbert J., 'Virginia Woolf and Feminine Fiction', in *Virginia Woolf the Critical Heritage*, ed. by Majumdar and McLaurin, pp. 360-366
- Mulford, Wendy, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: life, letters and politics 1930-1951* (London: Pandora, 1988)
- Mullin, Katherine, 'Victorian Bloomsbury', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp. 19-31
- Naipaul, V.S., 'Without a Dog's Chance: After Leaving Mr Mackenzie', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp. 54-58
- Newton, Esther, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', *Signs, The Lesbian Issue*, 9 (1994), 557-575
- Nicholson, Virginia, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2008)
- Nochlin, Linda, 'Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman', *The Art Bulletin*, 60 (1978), 139-153
- Oke, Richard, *Frolic Wind* (New York: Payson and Clark, 1930)

- Oldfield, Sybil, 'From Rachel's Aunts to Miss La Trobe: Spinsters in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf,' in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, ed. by Doan, pp. 85-103
- Oram, Alison, 'Repressed and Thwarted or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Interwar Feminist Discourses', *Women's History Review*, 1 (1992), 413-433
- — *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics 1900 – 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press)
- Parsons, Deborah L., *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Pearce, Lynne, *Romance Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)
- Plain, Gill, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001)
- Plante, David, 'Jean Rhys: A Remembrance', *Paris Review*, 76 (1979), 238-284
- Pollard, Wendy, 'Rosamond Lehmann's Political Philosophy', in *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender Politics and History*, ed. and intro. by Maroula Joannou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.87-99
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, femininity and the histories of art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 70-127
- Porter, Roy, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin, 1996)
- Potts, Thomas, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2007)
- Priest, Ann-Marie, 'Between Being and Nothingness: The "Astonishing Precipice" of Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 26 (2003), Virginia Woolf and Others, 66-80
- Rainey, Lawrence, 'From the Fallen Woman to the Fallen Typist, 1908 – 1922', *English Literature in Transition 1880 – 1920*, 52 (2009), 273-297
- Rapp, Dean, 'The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920-1925', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 24 (1988), 191-201
- Rattenbury, Arnold, 'Plain Heart, Light Tether', *PN Review*, Sylvia Townsend Warner 1893-1978: A Celebration, 8 (1981), 46-48

- Reed, Christopher, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004)
- Reus, Teresa Gómez, and Aránzazu Usandizaga, *Inside Out: women negotiating, subverting and appropriating public and private space* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008)
- Rhys, Jean, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Penguin, 2000)
- — 'The Art of Fiction LXIV', *Paris Review*, 76 (1979), 218-237
- — *Good Morning Midnight* (London: Penguin, 1969)
- — *Letters 1931-66*, ed. by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (London: Penguin, 1985)
- — 'Making Bricks without Straw', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp.35-37
- — *Quartet* (London: Penguin, 2000)
- — *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1981)
- — *Tigers are Better Looking* (London: Penguin, 1972)
- — *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin, 2000)
- Rolfe, Mrs. Neville, 'Sex-Delinquency', in *The New Survey of London Life and Labour, Vol. 9, Life and Leisure*, ed. by Hubert Llewellyn Smith (London: P.S. King, 1935), pp. 287-345
- Rosenbaum, S.R., *Victorian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987)
- Ruskin, John, *Sesame and Lilies*, Project Gutenberg ebook, April 1988, from the 1894 George Allen edition <<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1293/pg1293-images.html>>
- Rzepka, Charles, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005)
- Sayers, Dorothy L., 'Flesh and Blood in Crime Stories', *Sunday Times*, 05 November 1933, p. 7
- — *Gaudy Night* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003)
- — 'Gaudy Night', in *Titles to Fame*, ed. by Denys Kilham Roberts (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937), pp. 73-95

- — 'Introduction to Great Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, London: 1928', in Howard Haycraft (ed and intro), *The Art of the Mystery Story* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947), pp.71-109
- — *Strong Poison* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003)
- — *Unnatural Death* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003)
- Sayers, Dorothy L., and Eustace, Robert, *The Documents in the Case* (London: New English Library, 1984)
- Shiach, Morag, 'Modernism, The City and the "Domestic Interior"', *Home Cultures*, 2 (2005), 251-267
- Shin, Jacqueline, 'Lolly Willowes and the Arts of Dispossession', *Modernism / Modernity*, 16 (2009), 709-726
- Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1987)
- Sickert, Richard Walter, 'The Study of Drawing', *The New Age*, 16 June 1910, pp. 156-7, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/walter-richard-sickert-the-study-of-drawing-r1104303>> [accessed 26th April, 2015]
- Simons, Judy, 'The Vanishing Hero: Men and Modernity in Rosamond Lehmann's "The Weather in the Streets"', *Critical Survey*, 10 (1998), 95-104
- Skelton, Robin (ed.), *Poetry of the Thirties* (London: Penguin, 1964)
- Squier, Susan, 'The Politics of City Space in *The Years*: Street Love, Pillar Boxes and Bridges', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. and intro. by Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 216-237
- Stevenson, John, *British Society 1914-45* (London: Penguin, 1984)
- Stewart, Victoria, 'Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain', *The Space Between*, 9 (2013), 101-118
- — 'True-crime narratives and Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 29 (2011), 16-29
- Strachey, Ray, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1978)
- Struther, Jan, *Mrs Miniver* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1942)

- Symons, Julian, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History* (London: Viking, 1985)
- Taylor, Stephen, 'The Suburban Neurosis', *The Lancet*, 26 March 1938, pp. 759-761
- Thomas, Sue, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999)
- Trull, Mary, "'Odious Ballads": Fallen Women's Laments and *All's Well That End's Well*', in *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Craig A. Berry and Heater Richardson Hayton (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 133-154
- Van Dine, S.S., 'Twenty Rules for Detective Fiction', in Howard Haycraft (ed. and intro.), *The Art of the Mystery Story* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947), pp. 189-193
- Vicinus, Martha, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850 – 1920* (London: Virago, 1985)
- Walkowitz, Judith, R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late -Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- — 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London', *Representations*, 62 (1998), 1-30
- War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914-1920* (London: London Stamp Exchange, 1992)
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. and intro. by Claire Harman (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994)
- — *Letters*, ed. by William Maxwell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982)
- — *Lolly Willowes* (London: The Women's Press, 1978)
- — *Summer Will Show* (London: Virago, 1987)
- Watt, George, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Beckenham: Crook Helm Ltd., 1984)
- Weeks, Jeffrey, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 2nd edition (London: Longman, 1989)
- Wentworth, Patricia, *Grey Mask* (London: Coronet, 1979)
- White, Cynthia, *Women's Magazines 1693 – 1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970)
- Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975)

- — *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962)
- Winniffrith, Tom, *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994)
- Winter, J.M., *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003)
- Wolff, Janet, 'The Invisible *flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory Culture and Society*, 2 (1985), 37-46
- Wood, Ellen, *East Lynne* (Toronto: Broadview, 2002)
- Woolf, Virginia, 'Character in Fiction', in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 37-52
- — *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1961)
- — *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume 1: 1915 - 1919*, intro. by Quentin Bell, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977)
- — *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume 3: 1925-30*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1982)
- — *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume 4: 1931-35*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982)
- — *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 5: 1936-41*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1985)
- — *A Haunted House, the Complete Shorter Fiction* (London: Vintage, 2003)
- — 'Middlebrow' (1932), <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter22.html>> [accessed 10.02.12]
- — 'Modern Fiction', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 6-12
- — *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. and intro. by Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1976)
- — 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 32-36
- — *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Stella McNichol, intro. and notes by Elaine Showalter (London: Penguin, 2000)
- — *Night and Day*, intro. by Suzanne Raitt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- — 'Old Bloomsbury', in *Moments of Being*, pp. 157-179
- — *The Pargiters*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978)

- — *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897-1909* (London: Pimlico, 2004)
 - — 'Professions for Women', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 141-145
 - — *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2000)
 - — *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
 - — *The Sickle Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932-1935*, ed. by Nigel Nicholson (London: Hogarth Press, 1979)
 - — 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, pp. 64-137
 - — 'Street Haunting', in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, pp. 22-36
 - — 'Three Guineas', *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 115-334
 - — *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1992)
 - — *The Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Woollacott, Angela, 'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), 325-347
- Young, Filson, (ed.), *Notable British Trials: Trial of Frederick Bywaters and Edith Thompson* (Edinburgh and London: William Hodge and Company Limited, 1923)