

Veiled Disclosures and Queer Articulations

Readings of Literary and Cinematic Works by Bryher and POOL

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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.

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Abstract

This thesis uses three case studies to consider the creative negotiations that Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman (1894-1983)) and POOL (1927-1933), the experimental film group of which she was a member, deployed in order to represent, and to speak as, dissident sexual subjectivities in the interwar period. I explore their various 'queer articulations' – the attempts to both 'speak out' and 'speak back' – in four literary and cinematic works. I introduce the term 'veiled disclosure' to consider how Bryher and POOL circumvented both social censure and artistic censorship by seeking to address a particular readership – those viewers or readers attuned to difference – while simultaneously concealing their subversive contents from the audience at large. Queer articulation, however, also refers to Bryher and POOL's repeated attempts to forge links, both creative and political, across difference, especially in response to fascist nationalisms.

The first chapter frames my interdisciplinary project in relation to queer feminist theory, and argues for the necessity of using a queer theoretical lens for interpreting Bryher and POOL's work. In my second chapter, I read Bryher's two early 'autobiographical fictions,' *Development* (1920) and *Two Selves* (1923) as an attempt to 'speak out,' rather than come out. In so doing, I argue that Bryher's texts were also an effort to forge a queer reading community not just to remedy her own isolation but that of other 'queer' subjects too. My third chapter explores the impact which cultural censorship had on POOL's 1930 silent film *Borderline*, and, more specifically, how the almost contemporaneous banning of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) informed its production. I read the film as an attempt to 'speak back' to English censors, with Bryher's performance as the nameless manageress being the fulcrum of POOL's retort. In Chapter 4, I focus on Bryher's little-known novella *Manchester* (1935-6), reading it alongside two pieces of film criticism, the writer's 'Dope or Stimulus' (1928) plus 'The Hollywood Code' (1931), which reveal her as a prescient critic of mass culture, especially in relation to the category of kitsch. Alongside functioning as a critique of the homogeneity of Hollywood productions, I argue that *Manchester* was also a call to arms, which encouraged the English population to heed the devastation unfolding in mainland Europe.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ii
<i>Abstract</i>	iii
<i>Contents</i>	iv
<i>Figures</i>	v-vi
Introduction	1-31
Chapter 1: Bryher and the Matter of Queer History	32-53
Chapter 2: Veiled Disclosures and Queer Articulations: Reading Scenes in Bryher's <i>Development</i> and <i>Two Selves</i>	54-119
Chapter 3: Veiled Disclosures and 'Speaking Back': <i>Borderline</i> and the Presences of Censorship	120-164
Chapter 4: 'The End of All the Stories Must Be the Same': Kitsch and <i>Manchester</i> 's Queer Art(iculations)	165-220
Conclusion	221-226
<i>Works Cited</i>	227-237
Publication from Thesis	238-250

Figures

- Figure 1. Untitled ('Two Selves') by Kenneth Macpherson.
c.1928. Beinecke Library. 117
- Figure 2. The manageress (Bryher). *Borderline* still. 123
- Figure 3. The manageress close up. *Borderline* still. 123
- Figure 4. The title page. *Borderline* still. 143
- Figure 5. The POOL logo. Michael King, *H.D.: Woman and Poet*. 144
- Figure 6. Standing up to Thorne (Gavin Arthur).
Borderline still. *Close Up*, VII, 4 (October 1930) 144
- Figure 7. The manageress and the barmaid (Charlotte Arthur).
Borderline still. 145
- Figure 8. The manageress and the barmaid II. *Borderline* still. 145
- Figure 9. Radclyffe Hall by Peter North. *The Graphic*, 30 April 1927.
Heinz Archive Library, National Portrait Gallery, London. 148
- Figure 10. Radclyffe Hall. *The Bookman*, May 1927. Heinz Archive
Library. 148
- Figure 11. Radclyffe Hall. *Daily Mirror*, 13 April 1927.
Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*. 148
- Figure 12. Radclyffe Hall. Heinz Archive Library 148
- Figure 13. Radclyffe Hall. *Sunday Express*, 19 August 1928.
Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*. 148
- Figure 14. Radclyffe Hall smoking. *Sunday Chronicle*, 26 August 1928.
Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism* 150
- Figure 15. Manageress with cigar. *Borderline* still. 150
- Figure 16. Radclyffe Hall. Undated. Lady Una Troubridge, *The
Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall*. 152
- Figure 17. Doing the Books. *Borderline* still. 152

Figure 18. Introducing the manageress. <i>Borderline</i> still.	153
Figure 19. Adah's Letter. <i>Borderline</i> intertitle.	154
Figure 20. 'Paul Robeson enjoying his self-ordained canonization'. <i>Borderline</i> still. <i>Close Up</i> , VII, 2 (August 1930).	158
Figure 21. The Old Lady (Blanche Lewin). <i>Borderline</i> still.	160
Figure 22. Mother Puritannia. <i>Borderline</i> still.	160
Figure 23. Obscuring the Gaze. <i>Borderline</i> still.	161
Figure 24. Barring Mother Puritannia. <i>Borderline</i> still.	161
Figure 25. The manageress looks back. <i>Borderline</i> still.	163

Introduction

My own introduction to the English modernist impresario, poet, film-maker, critic and (historical) novelist, Bryher, the name and authorial signature adopted in 1918 by Annie Winifred Ellerman (1894-1983), came in 2001 via Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester's book, *Freud's Women* (1992), which I read during my third undergraduate year. Though Bryher was not classed as one (of Freud's women), her life-long friend, sometime partner and cinematic collaborator, the American poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961)) was included in the section, 'The Friendships of Women'.¹ Described in her role as psychoanalytic patron and devotee, Bryher figured here only because of her part in organising and funding H.D.'s analysis, rather than as a result of her own creative or critical efforts. This, I was to find, was not unusual, for, until relatively recently, Bryher most frequently featured as a secondary character in literature in two areas, in academic and biographical writing about H.D. or, alternatively, in accounts of interwar modernist 'Sapphic' Paris.² Both women were deeply and passionately involved in the new poetry movement of Imagism, and in the avant-garde literary circles in which it was nourished.

That year I chose to write my dissertation on H.D.'s two short periods of analysis with Freud in 1933-4. This research sunk me further into the two women's lives and work. It was my good fortune to be introduced to Cathy Gere, a research fellow in the History and Philosophy of Science department, who had spent time at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, which holds both Bryher's and H.D.'s archives. Gere lent me her facsimiles of Bryher and H.D.'s correspondence during the latter's analysis, an act of generosity from which this academic affair grew.³ I was fascinated by their lives, their commitment to experimental writing and cinema – they were involved in producing, circulating and criticising texts in both these arenas – Bryher's anti-fascist resistance work, the intellectual curiosity which led them both to pursue psychoanalysis

¹ See Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, John, *Freud's Women* (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp.387-393

² See American poet, Barbara Guest's landmark biography of H.D., *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World* (London: Collins, 1985[1984]). See also Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity and H.D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For accounts of interwar Paris see Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago Press, 1987) and Andrea Weiss, *Paris was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank* (London and San Francisco: Pandora, 1995).

(and earlier sexology), as well as their sustained interest in ancient Greece and archaeology. The correspondence revealed creative lives, whose friendships as well as their artistic and critical endeavours forged an expansive network, whose filaments crossed various national boundaries. It was a continental and transatlantic web of relations. Wonderfully gossipy as well as brimful of the quotidian, crucially, these letters also showed me, though I would not have labelled it so at the time, distinctly *queer* lives, ones which flouted heteronormative conventions. They revealed lives as experimental as the (visual and literary) texts I would go on to read, ones lived alternatively, where different desires were embraced.

Bryher and H.D. first met in 1918, when the twenty-three year old heiress engineered a meeting with the older Imagist poet at the Cornish cottage H.D. was then sharing with the music critic Cecil Gray (the father of the child she was carrying). Having read, and memorised, H.D.'s first poetry collection, *Sea Garden* (1916), Bryher was eager to meet the elusive figurehead of Imagism. It was an event both memorialised repeatedly throughout their lives and an auspicious date – 17 July – they marked each year. Towards the end of her confinement, H.D. contracted the Spanish influenza, which in the years 1918-19 claimed vast numbers of lives across the globe, and was not expected to live. Both mother and child, however, did survive, a fact H.D. attributed to Bryher's devotion during that period. By 1920 the women were living and travelling together – that year they visited Greece and the US – with the married H.D. acting as Bryher's chaperone. Bryher finally secured freedom from her cossetting family in 1921, when she wed the American poet Robert McAlmon (1896-1956) on Valentine's Day in New York. Though the intensity and passion of this early stretch of their relationship would wane by the end of the decade, Bryher and H.D.'s lives were intermeshed until the poet's death in 1961.⁴

By the 1930s, and the period of the correspondence, Bryher was married to Kenneth Macpherson (1902-1971) – her second 'intellectual marriage' – a Scottish artist and writer who was, at the time, H.D.'s lover. The triumvirate even honeymooned together in Venice, and Bryher and Macpherson would go on to adopt Perdita, H.D.'s daughter, in 1928. The three lived together on and off throughout the late 1920 and early

³ Gere's book, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, which reads their correspondence, was published in 2009. See Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁴ For further details of these years, and their lives in general, see Guest, *Herself Defined*. In her preface, Guest observes that: 'After I had reached the first encounter of Bryher and H.D., which was in 1918, I realized that within the chambers of the life I was examining lay another nautilus, Bryher.' Guest, *Herself Defined*, pp.ix-x.

1930s, moving between England, Germany, France, the United States, Monaco, and Switzerland, where Bryher and Macpherson built Kenwin, their Bauhaus-inspired villa, in 1931.⁵ These queer dynamics fed into POOL, the experimental film group which the *ménage à trois* set up and ran collaboratively from 1927 (the year Bryher and Macpherson married) to 1933. The letters, however, also document Bryher's amorous liaison with the well-known Austrian Jewish actress, Elisabeth Bergner (1897-1986), an affair which flourished (albeit one-sidedly) alongside her affection for Berlin, with its exuberant creative, as well as psychoanalytic, circles.

These relationships and interests were afforded by Bryher's incredible wealth, as daughter of the English shipping magnate, Sir John Reeves Ellerman (1862-1933). By his death Ellerman, who was dubbed 'the Silent Ford – the Invisible Rockefeller' in one obituary notice, was the richest man in England as well as a baronet.⁶ A brilliant businessman, Ellerman made his fortune through shipping, though he also became a successful entrepreneur in such diverse arenas as brewing, collieries, property, and the print media – during the First World War he purchased the *Illustrated London News*, *The Sphere* and *The Tatler*, as well as later becoming a major shareholder in the *Financial Times*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, as well as the *Evening Standard*.⁷ Bryher's biographer, Susan McCabe (the work is forthcoming)⁸ also asserts that during the First World War he dabbled in munitions.⁹ Although, she was also business-minded, much to her chagrin, as a woman Bryher was prevented from pursuing a career in business via any conventional route. Instead, her money and acumen would be channelled into a range of alternative publishing ventures, including the Paris-based press, Contact Editions (1922-1928), on which she collaborated with McAlmon, the POOL-run film journal, *Close Up* (1927-1933), and the literary magazine *Life and Letters To-Day* (1935-1950). Alongside both she supported her queer family as well as a host of modernist writers and artists, in addition to Sylvia Beach's Parisian bookshop-cum-lending library, Shakespeare and Company.

⁵ Kenwin (a composite of 'Kenneth' and 'Winifred') was designed by the German architect Hans Henselmann. Guest describes it as 'blunt, crabbed, cubed, eccentric,' terms, which resonate with her depiction of Bryher. Guest, *Herself Defined*, p.202. Kenwin had a purpose built projection room for screening films.

⁶ Cited in W.D Rubinstein, 'Ellerman, Sir John Reeves, first baronet (1862-1933)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, 2006) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32995>. accessed on 14 November 2007.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Susan McCabe, 'Bryher, Female Husband of Modernism: A Critical Biography,' forthcoming.

I was unaware at the time but my introduction to Bryher, H.D. and their circle coincided with the reappearance of Bryher's texts on the western cultural landscape, a shift marked by the reissuing of Bryher's early prose works, *Development* (1920) and *Two Selves* (1923) in duplex form as Bryher, *Two Novels* (2000).¹⁰ The texts were accompanied by an introduction by the British literary critic Joanne Winning and were published by Wisconsin University Press. It was mostly in middle age, however, that Bryher's career as a novelist took off. Between 1949 and 1972 she published eight historical novels, two memoirs, as well as trying her hand at science fiction. Four years after *Two Novels*, the American non-profit publishing house, Paris Press, reprinted one of these later works, her 1965 'science fantasy', *Visa for Avalon*, which was greeted with critical applause.¹¹ That year also saw the publication of Susan Stanford Friedman's edited collection of letters, *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher and their Circle* (2004) (a collection which features the correspondence I had read during my third year, punctuated by a series of excellent contextualising essays).¹² Then, in August 2006, Paris Press simultaneously reissued Bryher's 1963 memoir, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* with *The Player's Boy*, an historical novel first published in 1957.¹³ Moreover, four of Bryher's early texts – a selection of poetry and prose – are now available via the Emory Women Writers Resource Project, an electronic collection of texts by women writing from the seventeenth century through the early twentieth century, which is available to anyone who has access to the internet.¹⁴ We can see these publications as arising from sustained feminist efforts to unsettle and counteract the gender bias of both the mainstream publishing industry and the canons created and sustained by academia.

This has largely been an American-based renaissance of Bryher's texts, which is perhaps unsurprising considering the fact that she left her estate to Yale University, as did H.D. Bryher, who was a keen collector and fastidious file-keeper throughout her life, began the project herself, sifting through and transferring the documents, letters, photographs and manuscripts that comprise the Bryher papers (184 Boxes in all) over to

⁹ See Susan McCabe, 'Bryher's Archive: Modernism and the Melancholy of Money' in *English Now: Selected Papers from the 20th IAUPE Conference in Lund 2007*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Lund: Lund University, Centre for Languages and Literature, 2008), pp.118-25

¹⁰ Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, WI and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

¹¹ Bryher, *Visa for Avalon* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2004).

¹² Susan Stanford Friedman, *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher and their Circle* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2002).

¹³ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2006) and Bryher, *The Player's Boy: A Novel* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Thanks to Lauren Jeska for this information.

the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in the later years of her life.¹⁵ My research has, in part, taken place in the archive; I was fortunate enough to spend a month at the Beinecke, a period, I accidentally discovered towards the end of my visit, which saw an unprecedented number of scholars rootling in the Bryher Papers.¹⁶

The re-emergence of Bryher's texts over the last decade was paralleled by a rise in the availability of POOL's fascinating silent film, *Borderline* (1930), which had, up until then, only been available to viewers willing to search it out in one of three national film archives.¹⁷ On 29 May 2006 I was seated on the slope of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, which had, for the evening, been taken over for the gallery's event, 'The Long Weekend – Abstract Sunday.' We were gathered for the premiere of British jazz musician Courtney Pine's soundtrack for *Borderline*, an event that also marked the BFI's release of POOL's film on DVD.¹⁸ Perched on our cushions we looked down upon a temporary stage, where Pine and his fellow musicians were set up to perform the saxophonist's original score, and above which hung an enormous screen. The space, the size of the venue and the experience of watching the film collectively, plus, of course, the addition of music, produced a totally novel viewing experience for me, one which contrasted starkly with the numerous hours I had recently spent viewing the crackling, faded 8mm copy of *Borderline* in a claustrophobic compartment in the BFI's basement. This was an unprecedented moment of mainstream visibility for the POOL group, which far outstripped the film's original reception in the early 1930s. The BFI's reissuing of *Borderline* came on the heels of Cinemathèque Suisse's release of its version of POOL's feature film on DVD, an edition which, like the BFI's, also featured the Swiss director, Véronique Goël's short film, *Kenwin* (1996).

This cultural renaissance of Bryher and POOL has been accompanied by a concomitant scholarly reassessment of their lives and work. My research, then, comes to fruition during an exciting and fertile period of scholarship on Bryher's texts and life. As I

¹⁵ In comparison, the H.D. Papers comprise 62 boxes.

¹⁶ This trip was also supplemented by the seven weeks I spent at the University of Madison-Wisconsin, under the mentorship of Susan Stanford Friedman. Friedman granted me access to her personal archive of H.D.-related matter, which she had collected over the twenty-year period of her own pioneering research on the poet.

¹⁷ To my knowledge there are only three extant copies of the film. One is held by the British Film Institute in London, another at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the final one is kept at the Cinemathèque Suisse in Lausanne.

¹⁸ Pine had been commissioned as part of an Arts Council England initiative, 'Necessary Journeys', which, according to its website, takes 'its cue from the British Film Institute's Black World initiative, and explores the ways in which art connects with film and the moving image.' See the archived guidebook for the project at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/necessary-journeys. Accessed on 26/02/10.

will go on to consider in more detail in the next sections, these critical projects have mostly arisen from the arenas of feminist, lesbian and gay, and queer theories, and from a re-assessment of the gender (and sexuality) of modernism, to borrow Bonnie Kime Smith's formulation.¹⁹ A spattering of this work, however, has focused on Bryher's historical novels, which again have been reread and filtered through the lens of gender theory.²⁰ My research is similarly driven by an engagement with these transformative politics, and, in particular, by queer theory. I combine this anti-essentialist and anti-exclusionary late twentieth century critical tool with a careful historical eye in order to close read three of Bryher's works, as well as POOL's film (although it was directed by Macpherson here I consider it as a collaborative effort). This interdisciplinary project takes as its material focus a selection of neglected (experimental and popular) visual, literary, and critical texts produced in the interwar period. After situating my research in relation to queer theory in Chapter 1, in my second chapter I consider Bryher's two early 'autobiographical fictions' *Development* (1920) and *Two Selves* (1923). Then, in the third chapter I read POOL's experimental silent film *Borderline* (1930), and finally, in Chapter 4, I focus on Bryher's 1935-6 novella *Manchester*, reading it alongside two pieces of film criticism, the writer's 'Dope or Stimulus' (1928) plus a later piece, 'The Hollywood Code' (1931).

When originally conceived of, this project sought to explore how, via a diverse range of texts, Bryher (and POOL) deployed experimental visual and literary practices in order to forge the means by which to inscribe queer desires and represent dissident sexual subjectivities. It was never, then, intended as a comprehensive study of Bryher and POOL's *oeuvre*, but instead a close contextual reading of four texts, which, in a range of different ways, articulated queerly. Through the paradoxical concept of 'veiled disclosure' – a move, I argue, by which Bryher/POOL revealed to a latent cognoscenti what must remain concealed from the audience at large – it was my intention to explore these efforts to 'speak out' and to 'speak back' in a highly censorious and homophobic period, when homosexual desire was unspeakable. Although only legible to a circumscribed readership these texts nonetheless, I thought, imagined some sort of reading public, rather than being merely private addresses, legible only to a lover or to a close circle of friends. They were efforts to fashion, imaginatively and creatively, queer (reading) communities, however

Borderline's revival, then, was situated within a project which focused on POOL's radical anti-racist comment, which was enabled by the performances of Paul and Essie Robeson.

¹⁹ See Bonnie Kime Scott (ed.), *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

²⁰ See Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women's Historical Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

tenuous and ephemeral their links. While this remains the focus of my second and third chapters the final section of my thesis has necessarily changed.

This latter portion of my research was re-visioned following my visit to the Beinecke Library, and a closer engagement with *Manchester* and the context of its production, when I began to realise that the 1935-6 novella marked a considerable departure from the earlier works I was reading. Although it does arguably encode same-sex desire in its pages – specifically Bryher’s passion for Elisabeth Bergner – this facet of the text is concealed from readers through the writer’s choice of persona – Ernest North – unless they are somehow party to her intimate life. If anything, in this respect, *Manchester* is a private (and ambivalent) commemoration of both this affair and Bergner’s first performance on the English stage. This disjuncture became even more apparent as I began to situate *Manchester* within the context of Bryher’s correspondence and alongside her critical articles from the early 1930s, in which she was beginning to write in a much more didactic and overtly political manner. In her final article for *Close Up*, ‘What Shall you do in the War?’ (1933), for instance, she wrote: ‘Let us decide what we will have. If peace, let us fight for it. And fight for it especially with cinema.’²¹ Thus my final chapter now considers Bryher’s efforts to address a mass audience in the face of the escalating situation in Europe, and the rise of fascism, which she experienced first hand through her frequent visits to Berlin. In a text that poses as popular, and seemingly engages with the desire for a happy heterosexual ending, Bryher queers this normative narrative. Showing an acute awareness of cinema’s unique role in sculpting public fantasies (though, like her contemporary Walter Benjamin, she simultaneously saw it as a potentially revolutionary medium) Bryher critiques cinematic censorship practices which only allow for particular stories to be told, specifically those which were (apparently) successfully resolved by marriage. Such exclusionary practices chime with the fantasies which bolstered the National Socialist dream of a pure, homogenous national body. In Chapter 4 I deploy the term ‘queer articulation’ to think through what we might term Bryher’s collaborative politics in the face of these fascist fantasies, which expunged, initially from the cultural sphere, and then actually, bodies which did not, and were not, ‘fit’: Jews, Romany peoples, people with impairments and queers.

²¹ Bryher, ‘What Shall You Do In The War?’ *Close Up* X, 2 (June 1933; *Close Up* reprinted in 10 volumes. Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thompson Organization, 1969.), p.191. Throughout the thesis, all the citations I take from *Close Up* are drawn from the 1969 Kraus reprint but for the sake of economy I reference only the original dates.

It is important to note that although Bryher quite literally distanced herself from Britain, taking up residence in Territet, Switzerland from 1922, as well as moving mostly in continental artistic circles – primarily those of Paris and Berlin – and that she worked to forge international cultural relations via her editorship and patronage of journals such as *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-Day*, her own works and POOL's film were nonetheless, and perhaps, paradoxically, engaged in critiquing specifically English social mores and conventions. These works intervened in debates about English cinematic and literary censorship, as well as orientating themselves in relation to crucial events in the emergence of public images of modern lesbian and homosexual identities in the English cultural imaginary, namely the Wilde trials and the 1928 obscenity trial of the British aristocratic writer Radclyffe Hall's infamous fifth novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Later on, in the crescendo to World War II (which, Cassandra-like, she predicted) Bryher would repeatedly attempt to rouse the English population from its apathy, urging it to react to the political events taking place outside of its national boundaries.

The specific dates of Bryher and POOL's works – the early 1920s, 1930 and 1935-6 – are therefore significant. They straddle the event which is seen as marking the emergence of a coherent public image or idea of the modern lesbian in England, which, of course, had ramifications for representing or articulating queer female desire. While this event arguably provided a public language of female same-sex desire, at the same time it initiated greater scrutiny of deviant subjects. As the cultural historian, Laura Doan observes in *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001), the obscenity trial of Hall's novel is considered 'the crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian subculture,' an event which resulted in 'a narrow set of cultural signifiers [being grafted] onto an ostensibly legible homosexual body'.²² Doan contends that this occurred via the serial reproduction of photographs of Hall – the new 'face' of lesbianism or inversion – across the English print media. This, in part, resulted from the fact that Hall had so successfully deployed the medium of photography as a means of self-promotion, which meant that there were a plethora of images already in circulation for newspapers to pick from. My third chapter engages specifically with this event, reading POOL's *Borderline* as an effort to speak back to English censors on behalf of the silenced and maligned mannish woman. This is done, I argue, through Bryher's performance as the nameless manageress, who is constructed via a set of signifiers connoting 'Radclyffe-icity'.

²² Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.xii

As has been well documented, female same-sex desire was never legislated against in Britain. A supplement to the *Criminal Law Amendment Law*, which proposed the addition of ‘gross indecency’ between women, was suggested in 1921 but was promptly defeated in the House of Lords on the grounds that it would in fact have the opposite effect. Rather than vanishing away lesbianism instead it would ‘do harm by introducing into the minds of perfectly innocent people the most disgusting thoughts’.²³ Members were concerned that instead of legislating against lesbianism, the proposed amendment would in fact promote this spectral desire. Scholars such as the social historian Jeffrey Weeks have argued that this lack of legal visibility is at the root of the divergence in development between homosexual and lesbian subcultures and associated reform movements in the UK.²⁴ While this may be the case, women’s social and economic dependency on men must also have played a considerable role too. Another consequence of this invisibility, according to Terry Castle, was that it allowed authors to write openly about female same-sex desire, which meant that lesbian authors ‘had no need to resort to the irony and indirection’ that contemporaneous homosexual writers such as Noël Coward did, since they ‘faced no such direct threat to livelihood or personal safety’.²⁵ Indeed, this allowed for, if not incited, Castle suggests, Hall’s polemical novel, which she sees as a stand against this lack of a public lesbian presence.

Although this may have been the case for Hall, I suggest that for many women who desired differently, against the grain of the heterosexual matrix, like Bryher and H.D., the legacy of the Wilde trials, and other legal cases in which homosexual practice was prosecuted, must surely have borne ramifications for them too. In *Between Men* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the threat of homophobia gripped all homosocial bonds in western society, not just homoerotic ones. In response to Alan Bray’s discussion of the co-emergence of homophobia with the molly houses of eighteenth century England, Sedgwick notes the ‘structural residue of terrorist potential, of *blackmailability*, of [all] Western maleness through the leverage of homophobia,’ by which she means that all men, not just those involved in distinctly homosexual subcultures, felt themselves at risk of random homophobic violence.²⁶ Consequently, writes Sedgwick, ‘a relatively small

²³ ‘The Sexual Offences Amendment Bill’, p.15 At:

<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2000/rp00-015.pdf>. Accessed on 03/11/09.

²⁴ See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century* (London: Quartet Books, 1990).

²⁵ Terry Castle, *Noël Coward & Radclyffe Hall: Kindred Spirits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.2

²⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 89. Italics in original.

exertion of physical or legal compulsion potentially rules great reaches of behaviour and filiation.’ She continues: ‘So-called “homosexual panic” is the most private, psychologised form in which many twentieth-century western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail,’ which is at work, she argues, alongside the institutions, which Foucault and others identify as being involved in policing the sexual.²⁷ While social histories of queer sexuality tend either to focus on the formation of discrete homosexual or lesbian identities and subcultures (though Castle’s *Noël Coward & Radclyffe Hall* (1996) is an explicit attempt to counter this critical trend), I would suggest that this threat, not perhaps of blackmail but of some sort of social violence, as well as gripping all male social bonds, as Sedgwick suggests, also trafficked across the boundary of sex, and similarly infiltrated and insinuated its way into the psyches of women who desired differently. Thus, though female same-sex desire was never legislated against, the *Labouchere Amendment Act*, and the blackmail it entailed, must undoubtedly have functioned as a threat for queer women too.

Bryher was certainly aware of the dire implications and life-long reverberations that might result from even the mildest flirtation with deviant subjects and their representations. In a review of a new biography of Richard Burton and his wife, written in 1942, Bryher refers obliquely to the English explorer’s infamous report documenting English officers’ use of a male brothel in Karachi. ‘As “Mirza Abdullah” Burton wandered all over Sind in a dozen undetected disguises,’ she observes, ‘but a report which he made upon certain customs for Sir Charles Napier, fell into other hands and as a result of the shock to official prudery, his career was virtually ended and he returned to England on long sick leave.’²⁸ And, again, she is only able to gesture to another scandal concerning Burton, which erupted as a result of his translation of, and scholarship on, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885), especially his ‘terminal essay’. Bryher writes: ‘It is impossible to realize that he was regarded as a monster because of scholarly notes added to an edition sold in a limited number to private subscribers.’²⁹ Yet, despite this apparently being beyond belief, Bryher herself feels the necessity to explain away her own knowledge of these events. She writes: ‘I can understand something of the Burton persecution – and no wonder that it made him sometimes intemperate of language – because I knew

²⁷ Ibid, p.89

²⁸ Bryher, ‘The Burtons,’ *Life and Letters To-Day* 35 (October 1942), p.20. In the same passage, Bryher refers to this event’s unutterable nature: ‘Miss Burton points out that it took a woman, Ouida, to dare to allude to this story in print, but only after his death.’

²⁹ Ibid, p.23

Havelock Ellis and heard of the difficulties that he had met with in analogous work.’³⁰ The contaminative potential of scandal is clearly at work just as powerfully over half a century later.

Through the concept ‘veiled disclosure’ I explore how Bryher and POOL attempted to negotiate the equally censorious interwar period, and attempted to speak out to a select audience – to any reader attuned to difference – while simultaneously deflecting the hostile gaze of the majority of the audience. Although disclosure suggests revelation, an unveiling of the truth, I also read it as its homophone *dis*-closure, as simultaneously carrying in it the failure to complete or fix meaning. Indeed, the ‘openness’ and plurality of these experimental literary and cinematic works, which refuse realism and the textual ‘closure’ associated with traditional literary forms are important too. Both Bryher and POOL, like contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, can be seen as attempting to democratise reader/author relations.³¹ In my second chapter I also suggest that Bryher offers a different model of reading, one which resists (autobiographical) critical and sexological efforts to unveil the truth of (deviant) subjects. Even in *Manchester*, which bears the trappings of popular romance, and which begins with Bryher’s love-struck, bumbling anti-hero, Ernest North, setting out on a journey to watch his actress amore, Cordelia’s opening night, the narrative resists a so-called ‘happy ending,’ the usual resolution of the genre. This plurality is crucial, since, in my first two chapters, it is precisely the slipperiness of signifiers, the lack of a discrete image of the lesbian that allows for Bryher’s queer articulations. Disclosure also has another meaning, however, relating to ‘emergence’ or ‘liberation’ which is also significant for this project since, as we have seen, it was during the interwar period that the notion of the modern lesbian as a particular type of subjectivity began to take public form and shape.

The ‘veiled disclosure’ turns upon the binaries of knowledge/ignorance and public/private, polarities which, as Sedgwick has shown, had, since the late nineteenth century, become ‘not contingently but integrally infused with one particular object of cognition: no longer sexuality as a whole but even more specifically, now, the homosexual topic.’³² The veiled disclosure, as I conceptualise it, constitutes a breach of the public/private divide but relies on the retention of the bar between knowledge and

³⁰ Ibid, p.23.

³¹ See Brenda R. Silver’s introduction to Virginia Woolf’s ‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’ in ‘Cultural Critique,’ *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) pp. 646-658; and Winning’s discussion of Richardson’s ‘Authors and Readers’ in Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp.37-38

³² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.74

ignorance. To employ a trope that is integral to Sedgwick's study, the veiled disclosure performs a 'coming out', a public emergence – and this is the crucial thing – only to those 'in the know,' to readers/viewers able to discern and interpret the gesture. For the rest, including those who might censure such content, it must be taken at face value.

This thesis wishes to open up a dialogue with these voices from the past – with Bryher, H.D. and Macpherson, amongst others – and to attend to their queer articulations, and, in doing so it seeks itself to become a node in a transhistorical queer articulation or joining. This task, however, is a complicated one. It must grapple with an issue that remains pivotal to both lesbian and gay studies and queer theory – the naming of non-normative sexual subjects, desires and practices in the past, and, following a Foucauldian logic, the knowledge that this leads to the coextensive policing and disciplining that accompanies any move to label, no matter how well intended. I must also acknowledge my own transhistorical desire for both queer community and for different stories, wants which have been the thrust for this research. In my first chapter, alongside arguing for the necessity of using a queer theoretical lens for interpreting Bryher and POOL's work, I also consider Bryher's second incarnation as a historian and historical novelist, and her own relation with both the past (as well as her engagement with the future). Before introducing the little-known Bryher, through tracing the critical responses to her work, I begin by situating this project in the transformation of feminist and gay and lesbian theories and politics that took place in the early 1990s, with the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), and the introduction of a performative theory of gender. This moment contributed too to the 'birth' of queer theory, to which Butler's work is also pivotal.

This interdisciplinary project was undertaken in a gender studies centre (rather than a women's studies one), a point I note since it speaks to its grounding in the theoretical shift which took place in feminist scholarship in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which became known as gender theory. Alongside critiques of the white, middle-class and western bias of feminism, this transformation, or rather fracturing, of feminism (in the singular) also arose from theorists contesting its 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Judith Butler, whose 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, is an important catalyst in this shift, observed: 'I found myself increasingly enraged as a graduate student and young faculty member as countless feminist frameworks seemed either to elide or pathologize the challenge to gender normativity posed by queer practices.'³³ While Butler situated her work within

³³ Judith Butler, 'Against Proper Objects' in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.2

feminism – as ‘continuing the important intellectual tradition of immanent critique,’ though many theorists read it as an out and out attack – Gayle Rubin argued for the necessity of a separate theory to deal exclusively with sexuality.³⁴ Both critiques contributed to the emergence of the feminist-influenced facet of queer theory, alongside contributions by critics such as Eve Sedgwick as well as, briefly, Teresa de Lauretis (who coined the term ‘queer theory,’ but subsequently labelled it ‘a vacuous creature of the publishing industry’).³⁵

In her 1984 essay ‘Thinking Sex’ Rubin argued for the necessity for a ‘radical theory of sex’ and in so doing challenged the assumption that feminism should be the site for such a theory. According to Rubin, to assume that a theory of gender oppression was also the appropriate location from which to develop a theory of sexual oppression failed to distinguish between gender and erotic desire.³⁶ She saw this elision of sex and gender taking place across the spectrum of feminism. For radical feminists, such as Catherine MacKinnon, sexuality was the site at which women’s subordination was consolidated, while in lesbian feminist writing, in which, as Adrienne Rich proposed, the lesbian or the ‘woman-identified woman,’ became the figurehead of feminism, lesbians’ oppression as ‘queers and perverts’ was ignored in favour of their subordination as women.³⁷ Moreover, Rubin also highlighted the moralising streak at work in much feminist writing about pornography and S/M practices, which, perversely, aligned it more closely with right-wing pronouncements on sex. She noted that in speeches made in the early 1980s confirming the Catholic Church’s stance on human sexuality, Pope John Paul II ‘sound[ed] like lesbian feminist polemicist Julia Penelope’.³⁸ In such work, monogamous lesbian sex simply usurped the place of married sexual relations as the most respectable form of sexual coupling, and was just as ferocious in scapegoating other sexual practices and denying sexual pluralism. For Rubin, gender and sexuality, though closely related, constituted ‘two

³⁴ Ibid, p.1. In this piece, Butler maps out the disciplinary struggles taking place between feminism and lesbian and gay studies over the ‘proper objects’ of research, with the latter, in Butler’s example, claiming ‘sex’ and ‘sexuality’ as its terrain, in contrast to ‘gender,’ which was seen as the analytical ground of feminism. Of course, this was complicated by the multiple and over-lapping meanings of ‘sex’, ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’, as Butler draws out.

³⁵ Teresa de Lauretis, ‘Habit Changes. *Response*’ in *Feminism meets Queer Theory* eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997): p.316

³⁶ Gayle Rubin, ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’ in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (London: Pandora, 1992): p.307

³⁷ In illustrating the inclusive embrace of her conceptual terms *lesbian existence* and *lesbian continuum*, Rich conjures H.D. and Bryher, and the former’s description of their collaboration in completing the poet’s vision of the ‘writing-on-the-wall’ in Corfu. See Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,’ *Journal of Women’s History* 15, 3 (2003 [1980]), pp.28-29

³⁸ Rubin, ‘Thinking Sex,’ p.298

distinct arenas of social practice'.³⁹ For this reason, she argued, sexuality required its own theory and politics.

Butler's work challenged an even more basic assumption of Anglo-American feminism (what is known as French feminism was a different story all together – it never utilised the concept of gender), that the relationship between sex and gender is systematic, and, consequently, it also disputed the notion that feminism required a stable 'female' identity category as its political base. According to the sex/gender system, sex was taken as the 'biological raw material' which culture then 'transformed' into gender. This distinction had been crucial to feminism since it allowed scholars to argue that the differences between men and women were not biologically determined but culturally constructed. Radically, Butler argued that both gender *and* sex were culturally constructed; she averred that 'sex itself is a gendered category'.⁴⁰ In Butler's terms, then, sex is not gender's biological foundation but one of its most powerful effects (she would explore this at length in her 1993 book *Bodies That Matter*, her response to the hostile (mis)readings of *Gender Trouble* by many feminist scholars).

At the crux of Butler's work on 'the compulsory order of sex/gender/desire' is the concept of performativity. Drawing on a combination of British linguist J. L. Austin's work on performative speech acts and Jacques Derrida's concept of reiteration, Butler argues that rather than an expression of a core self, (gender) identity is the effect of the recitation or repetition of certain cultural signs and conventions or practices. This begins at birth, with the announcement that 'It's a girl!'. Further, through the act of putting on a dress or makeup, or even visiting a gynaecologist one is 'doing' gender, and doing it 'successfully' and perhaps 'normatively' if you happen to be a woman. In Butler's notion of performativity, identity is that which we do and act out, something which we assemble from existing discursive practices, rather than something we possess or are. Performativity cannot be equated with performance – 'doing' gender is not a voluntary action or role, instead it is *compulsorily* performed. Where performance presumes a subject doing the act, Butler argues that it is through the very recitation of the role that the subject is in fact constituted. She writes: 'In that sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.'⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid, p.308

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p.7

⁴¹ Ibid, p.24

These regulatory practices are guided by what, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler terms the heterosexual matrix. This refers to how these reiterated and resignified practices cohere into a hegemonic system which naturalises the notion that heterosexual desire follows from gender, which follows from biological sex. Butler observes that the term ‘designate[s] that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised.’ It characterises ‘a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.’⁴² This ‘heterosexualisation of desire’ means that ‘certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist”,’ since they are not intelligible in terms of the heterosexual matrix.⁴³ These include any ‘identity’ in which this gender coherence is disrupted – when gender does not ‘follow’ from sex, or in which desire does not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender.

Butler uses the example of drag, alongside butch and femme lesbian styles, to illustrate her argument. Rather than aping heterosexual practice, and thus, as many feminists accused butch-femme couples of doing, sustaining patriarchal power relations, Butler argues that these parodic performances in fact reveal the constructed nature of heterosexuality and the lack of an original sexuality. She writes: ‘The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy.’⁴⁴ Further, it is at such moments of gender trouble, of the disruption and mis-citation – the subversive repetition – of the heterosexual matrix, that political possibility arises. Butler’s work, with its conception of the interrelation of sex, gender and sexuality, rather than a radical separation of sexuality and gender, is the theoretical bedrock of this thesis. As such, I see this contribution as a queer feminist one. Turning back to Bryher, in the next section, I consider what image of her is painted by recent critical responses to her work, before suggesting we read it instead in terms of what I refer to as her queer creative and life practices.

⁴² Ibid, p.151, fn.6. In a 1993 interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, Butler discusses her decision to replace ‘heterosexual matrix’ with ‘heterosexual hegemony,’ in order to introduce ‘the possibility that this is a matrix which is open to rearticulation, which has a kind of malleability’ and to move away from the notion that it was some ‘kind of totalizing symbolic’. Judith Butler, ‘Gender as Performance’ in *A Critical Sense*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1996):p.119

⁴³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.17

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.31

Who Was Bryher?: Critical Mappings

Early feminist scholarship did much to chart the contours of Bryher's life, but always in relation to the shape of H.D.'s, since, as Barbara Guest highlighted in the preface to her 1984 biography of the Imagist poet, having 'reached the first encounter of Bryher and H.D., which was in 1918, I realized that within the chambers of the life I was examining lay another nautilus, Bryher.'⁴⁵ This was the case in both the emergent criticism on H.D., led by scholars such as Friedman and Rachel Blau Duplessis, as well as in the two pioneering biographical accounts of the complex web of female modernist relations, Gillian Hanscombe and Victoria L. Smyers' *Writing for their Lives* and Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank*, both published in 1987. These texts mapped the formative years of Bryher and H.D.'s life-long relationship as well as the various links and contributions they made to the experimental literary circles they helped populate. They construct a portrait of Bryher as a rebellious and wilful young woman, who chose to re-name herself after a wild and scarcely populated isle off the coast of Cornwall, thus shedding her famous patronymic.⁴⁶ At the same time, they impress upon readers just how crucial was the meeting in 1918, which sprang Bryher from the repressive trap of Victorian femininity and daughterly duty. H.D. helped usher the younger woman into the ranks of the literary avant-garde, where Bryher, though shy and socially awkward, began her work behind the scenes of modernism, eventually becoming a crucial node in this network of expatriate Parisian cultural production.

In this literature, Bryher is often cast as H.D.'s foil, as a thick-skinned recalcitrant figure with a 'pugnacious temperament' in contrast to the delicate poet, who showed 'a vulnerability painfully sensitive to rejection.'⁴⁷ In another account, Bryher is the 'masculine' 'Fido' to H.D.'s 'feminine' 'Cat.'⁴⁸ She is the grounded pragmatist and (financial) anchor for the fragile poet-seer, which helped sustain the idea of the heiress as

⁴⁵ Guest, *Herself Defined*, pp.ix-x.

⁴⁶ Accounts differ as to when Annie Winifred Ellerman first adopted 'Bryher.' She was certainly using it by 1918, when she published *Amy Lowell: A Critical Appreciation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918) under the penname 'W. Bryher.' The heiress eventually changed her name by Deed Poll in 1950, and observed in *The Heart to Artemis* that: 'under English law it is incorrect to speak of it as a pseudonym. My passport is issued to me under that name and no legal document is valid that I sign in any other way.' Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.224

⁴⁷ Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, p.37

⁴⁸ Bryher and H.D. played with a range of nicknames for each other, including 'Fido,' 'small dog,' 'Chang,' 'steamroller' and 'flea' for Bryher, and 'Cat,' 'Lynx,' 'Horse,' 'Dryad,' and 'Mog' for H.D., as well as providing epithets for the majority of their circle. For further details see Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, pp.546-578; and Bryher's correspondence in the Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Hereafter, it will be cited as 'Beinecke'.

selfless facilitator and prop in opposition to the poet's artistry and creative brilliance.

Writing of Bryher, Hanscombe and Smyers asserted that 'H.D. was her creative genius, her bright star. She never lost faith in H.D.'s art, in that gift which she knew could never be hers but which she so worshipped.'⁴⁹ And, again, Andrea Weiss contended:

Although she wrote a number of books herself, primarily historical novels and works about education, Bryher's foremost literary priority throughout her life was the support and promotion of H.D.'s creative genius. As Alice did for Gertrude, and Solita did for Janet, so Bryher did for H.D. – she spared no expense or personal sacrifice to ensure that H.D. was always free to write.⁵⁰

This image of Bryher as a supplement to H.D. concretised further thanks to Alice B.

Toklas' observation, made upon the poet's death in 1961, that: 'It is impossible to believe in Bryher without H.D.'⁵¹

Bryher's creative and critical output, however, was extensive, and more varied than Weiss gives credit for; her statement illustrates how, in this early literature, it was granted only glancing consideration. When referred to at all, it was most often used to substantiate the details of Bryher's early years.⁵² Diana Collecott's work, however, departed from this trend, focusing on various texts Bryher produced in the 1920s. Disinterring the manuscript of an unpublished prose poem, 'Eros of the Sea,' from the Bryher papers, Collecott reads Bryher's text as part of an intertextual dialogue with H.D. and as an encoded celebration of her desire for the poet.⁵³ The poem appears again – linked to an alternative ending of the text – in Collecott's interpretation of Bryher's 1923 novel, *Two Selves*, which she reads as a lesbian romance, casting Nancy as the work's heroic quester. The novel's title, Collecott avers, 'has a double meaning: the hero will only heal the 'split' within herself by meeting with another self.'⁵⁴ This other self is a nameless female poet, and thus the text illustrates, Collecott argues, 'Bryher's search for a fictional form in which to write about love

⁴⁹ Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London: The Women's Press, 1987), p.46

⁵⁰ Weiss, *Paris was a Woman*, p. 209

⁵¹ Hanscombe and Smyers, *Writing for their Lives*, p.46.

⁵² Her 'autobiographical fictions,' *Development* (1920), *Two Selves* (1923), and *West* (1925) were cited in conjunction with her later, 'straighter' memoirs, *The Heart to Artemis* (1963) and *The Days of Mars* (1972), to illustrate Bryher's struggle against the constraints of bourgeois womanhood, and the mutual salvation offered by her introduction to H.D.

⁵³ Diana Collecott, 'H.D.'s "Gift of Greek" Bryher's "Eros of the Sea"' in *H.D. Newsletter* 3,1 (1989) pp.11-14.

⁵⁴ Diana Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance' in *Romance Revisited*, eds. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p.131

between women.’⁵⁵ Though she breaks the critical mould in focusing on Bryher, Collecott’s readings nonetheless tether the two women together.

My thesis, like other recent work, however, seeks to tease apart the Bryher-H.D. dyad – or ‘tak[es] [Bry]her out of the shadow of H.D.,’ in Jean Radford’s formulation – and positions the heiress as the focal point of critical study, as well as situating her as a nexus in a range of other relationships.⁵⁶ In ‘A Transatlantic Affair’ (2004), Radford considers Bryher’s formative connection with another female figure central to Imagism, the American poet, Amy Lowell, a relationship which, she argues, ‘casts light on both Bryher and Lowell’s struggles to establish a poetic identity within modernism.’⁵⁷ In her ‘case study in the intertextual network of women writers in this period,’ Radford delineates Bryher’s early identification with Lowell, and reads, amongst other texts, her enthusiastic critical account of her mentor’s poetry and polyphonic prose, *Amy Lowell: A Critical Appreciation* (1918). Despite its hagiographical tone, Radford asserts that in fact, ‘the hero of the essay is not the poet Lowell, but the first-person critic [W.] Bryher,’ and suggests that, here, ‘the idealized object of Bryher’s critical appreciation becomes a part-object of the narrating “I”.’⁵⁸ Highlighting the writers’ similarities, Radford observes that ‘both are passionate about educational reform, both pose the question of access, and both see poetry as central to the development of imagination,’ though the two women diverged on how this was to be achieved. The older poet, Radford tells us, ‘did not share Bryher’s rebellious imperatives,’ and sought instead to work ‘through the modification of existing conventions.’⁵⁹

The early feminist forays into what Makiko Minow suggested in 1989 ‘we may have to learn to call ‘lesbian modernism’’ – texts which initiated the recasting of a mostly white, male, and straight vision of high modernism, and which thus brought a range of female writers, including Bryher and Lowell, in from ‘the canonical wilderness,’ as Winning puts it – fashioned an image of Bryher as accepting of and, on the whole, unconcerned by her ‘different’ sexuality.⁶⁰ Riffing off H.D., Hanscombe and Smyer’s referred to Bryher as one of those women ‘who are more than women, or different from

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.134

⁵⁶ Jean Radford, ‘A Transatlantic Affair: Amy Lowell and Bryher’ in *Amy Lowell, American Modernist*, eds. Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004) p. 44. Here, Radford also refers readers to Toklas’ comment about Bryher and H.D.’s symbiosis.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.47

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.48 & 51. Although when they did eventually meet in New York in 1920 (an event fictionalised in Bryher’s *West*) the two women did not get on, they would stay in contact until the poet’s death in 1925.

what is ordinarily accepted as such'.⁶¹ Citing Bryher's letter describing her single 'consultation' in 1919 with the British sexologist, Havelock Ellis, in which he apparently 'agreed it was most unfair for it to happen but apparently I am quite justified in pleading I ought to be a boy . . . I am just a girl by accident,' the authors state that her 'practical mind accepted the situation and she didn't agonise over the 'unfairness' of her dilemma.'⁶² Indeed, they contend: 'she'd always known.'⁶³ Benstock similarly depicted Bryher as having a transparent and uncomplicated relationship to her same-sex desire, observing that: 'Bryher knew from adolescence that she was lesbian, but to protect herself from the inevitable censure of her parents she was forced to hide her sexual self'.⁶⁴ Despite such scholars' desire to acknowledge and map out the extensive 'lesbian', or 'Sapphic,' contribution to modernism, there was little or no exploration of the terminology used. This interrogation was, however, taken up subsequently, as we shall see, in the criticism of scholars such as Winning and Doan.

Though Benstock and Hanscombe and Smyers sketched Bryher's role as an impresario of modernism it was through Jayne Marek's scholarship on modernist women's work as editors and publishers of 'little magazines,' that Bryher's wide-ranging involvement in interwar cultural production received closer attention.⁶⁵ Tracing her support of, first, Harriet Weaver's Egoist Press, and then her work on behalf of Contact Press with McAlmon, Marek focused primarily upon Bryher's significant contributions to POOL's film journal, *Close Up* (1927-1933). Drawing upon the group's correspondence, Marek underscores Bryher's extensive and multiple roles, as financier, co-editor and reviewer, as well as stressing her dynamism in garnering articles from a broad selection of writers and cinéastes. Marek also, however, considered Bryher's own critical contributions to the journal, highlighting her 'political and social as well as academic aims.'⁶⁶ She noted Bryher's socially-minded approach to the cinema, her belief in its potential for democratisation and the alleviation of social problems as well as its use in education (a life-long interest of hers). The critic comments: 'Her life as well as her published articles expressed a belief in co-operative intellectual work that seemed

⁶⁰ Makiko Minow cited in Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, p.5; Ibid.

⁶¹ Hanscombe and Smyers, *Writing for their Lives*, p.38

⁶² Bryher to H.D., 20 March 1919, reproduced in Hanscombe and Smyers, *Writing for their Lives*, p.38

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Benstock also refers to Bryher's 'morbid fear of heterosexual advances'. Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, pp.312 & 359

⁶⁵ Marek's reassessment of Bryher's work for *Close Up* was originally published as Jayne Marek, 'Bryher and Close Up, 1927-1933,' *The H.D. Newsletter* 3,2 (1989): pp.27-38.

particularly needful at that time and that place.’⁶⁷ In attempting to account for the critical neglect of Bryher, Marek suggests that her ‘characteristic modesty has deflected attention from her work.’⁶⁸ Like Benstock, who cast Bryher as a retiring, almost reclusive, figure, who preferred the quiet of the Swiss countryside to the hubbub of Paris, for Marek, she was ‘an “invisible” woman’.⁶⁹

Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller similarly attempt to counteract Bryher’s lack of visibility in another arena, aiming to ‘make her life and work better known to the psychoanalytic community she helped sustain.’⁷⁰ Drawing on her correspondence, they provide an account of Bryher’s dedication to psychoanalysis; according to her adoptive daughter, Perdita Schaffner, it was ‘like a religion’ to her, ‘which she wanted everyone around her to believe in and to experience.’⁷¹ As was the case with her other interests, Bryher donated considerable funds to various aspects of psychoanalysis, and hoped to aid the cause further by training as a lay analyst herself.⁷² Following the rise of the National Socialist government, she also helped a number of analysts, alongside other Jewish and non-Jewish refugees, flee Germany. Between 1932-39 Bryher helped 105 people escape, including, as we shall see shortly, assisting Benjamin’s (failed) flight to the US.

Magee and Miller outline Bryher’s close, and ‘by today’s standards, [...] entirely unorthodox,’ relationship with her analyst, Hanns Sachs.⁷³ Indeed, it became a mutually dependent relationship, with Bryher soon assuming her ‘familiar role of confidante and caretaker.’⁷⁴ This analytical affair began in 1928, following their introduction via film director G.W. Pabst, during Bryher’s first sojourn in Berlin with Macpherson and Robert Herring. Relations would continue in this vein, with Bryher fitting in sessions during her frequent trips to the German metropolis on behalf of *Close Up*. Indeed, as we shall see in my third chapter, film was a shared passion. Psychoanalysis was yet another facet, then, of the flourishing alternative culture of Berlin that so attracted Bryher, where experiments

⁶⁶ Jayne Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: ‘Little Magazines’ and Literary History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p.128

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.121

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.121

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.116

⁷⁰ Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller, *Lesbian Lives: Psychoanalytical Narratives Old and New* (Hillsdale, NJ and London: The Analytic Press, 1997), p.1. A version of this chapter is available online as Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller, ‘Superior Guinea Pig: Bryher and Psychoanalysis’ at <http://www.laisps.org/GuineaP.html>. Accessed on 26/01/2004.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp.31-2

⁷² Bryher provided support for those undertaking ‘training analyses’ and, following her father’s death in 1933, set up the Hanns Sachs Training Fund to continue this work. This fund also helped those who, having fled Germany, hoped to take up their training in the U.S.

⁷³ Magee and Miller, *Lesbian Lives*, p.7

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.19

in cinema, theatre and art, collided and coalesced with Weimar's queer sexual subcultures.⁷⁵ Through the lens of Bryher's Berlin experience, Magee and Miller outline a moment of possibility, when, they speculate, had circumstances been different, Bryher might have 'become the first lesbian psychoanalyst.'⁷⁶ As was the case with the early biographical criticism, the authors suggest that Bryher 'was curious, but neither distressed nor conflicted about her masculine identifications,' and seemed similarly unconcerned about her 'emotional attachment to H.D.'⁷⁷ Though they make a distinction between Ellis' conceptualisation of inversion and the category of homosexuality, they proceed to state that Bryher found solace in the sexologist's formulation, yet at the same time continue to refer to Bryher, contradictorily, as a lesbian.

Cinematic Collaboration: POOL, Close Up and Borderline.

Until relatively recently the POOL group mostly featured as a footnote in histories of film, with its journal *Close Up* primarily used as a resource for accounts of early European cinema.⁷⁸ Anne Friedberg pioneered the critical redress of the group and its work. Having written her doctoral thesis on *Close Up*, she turned her scrupulous eye to the group's 1930 film *Borderline*, publishing, 'Approaching *Borderline*' in 1986, which offered a much needed account of the production of the little-known film.⁷⁹ Drawing upon information unearthed in the Beinecke, Friedberg also contested the notion that Macpherson was the 'father-creator' of the film, suggesting instead that it be read as a collaborative project, an assertion I take up in further detail in Chapter 3.⁸⁰ Since Friedberg's early article, POOL's feature-length silent production has generated interest from a variety of academics, including historians of black cinema, as well as Paul Robeson and H.D. scholars.⁸¹

A decade on from her early article, Friedberg collaborated with James Donald and Laura Marcus in editing the critical anthology, *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*

⁷⁵ Magee and Miller note that Sachs was amicably acquainted with Magnus Hirschfeld, and was welcome at the Institute for Sexual Research. Ibid, p.8

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.1

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp.12 & 4

⁷⁸ Such as Rachel Low's *History of British Film 1918-1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971) and Jay Leyda's *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973).

⁷⁹ See Anne Friedberg, 'Writing about Cinema: *Close Up*, 1927-1933' (Unpublished PhD thesis. New York, New York University, 1983) and Anne Friedberg, 'Approaching *Borderline*' in *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. Michael King (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986): pp. 369-390. Friedberg's thesis has proved an important source for biographical details concerning the POOL group.

⁸⁰ Friedberg, 'Approaching *Borderline*,' p.380

(1998). This important collection refocused scholastic attention on POOL and sought to make *Close Up* more accessible to scholars and students, as well as illuminating the efforts of the trio. It also situated the journal in its historical moment, providing a range of useful introductory essays, which located the magazine in relation to debates about cinematic censorship, psychoanalysis, and the advent of sound, with POOL members depicted as resistant to this technological advancement.⁸² While in her introduction to the collection, Friedberg refers to POOL's constant movement across national boundaries, as they travelled between Territet, Berlin, Paris, New York and London during the *Close Up* period, little was made of the group's choice to reside in, and base their experimental film project, in Switzerland. Indeed, most scholars attribute the choice to the country being a tax haven for Bryher's fortune. Tirza True Latimer, however, has observed that: 'It is no coincidence that POOL chose politically neutral Switzerland – a country where three tongues shared the status of official language; where German, French, and Italian conscientious objectors had found sanctuary; where the first insurrectionary gestures of Dada continued to resonate – as the seat of their affairs.'⁸³ Bryher herself observed retrospectively in *The Heart to Artemis*: 'Switzerland was the perfect place for our [POOL's] headquarters. It was possible to see French, German, American and English films all in the same week.'⁸⁴

In *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures* (2002) the feminist scholar Maggie Humm considers what she referred to as 'the marginalia of the margins,' the contributions of modernist women in such overlooked visual, or visually related, fields as domestic photography and film journalism. Alongside figures like Colette, Humm provides introductions to the work of *Close Up* contributors, situating Bryher beside Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Richardson and H.D.⁸⁵ Two years later, another treatment of POOL's journal appeared by Paola Zaccaria and Francesca De Ruggieri, '*Close Up* as Co(n)text'. Published in a collection of conference proceedings edited by Marina Camboni, entitled *Networking Women* (2004), this piece is a node in an on-going, collaborative research project, which aims to re-map the modernist period. Its intentions are highlighted in Zaccaria and De Ruggieri's introduction, in which they assert:

⁸¹ See my third chapter for a more detailed consideration of the critical readings *Borderline* has received.

⁸² See section introductions in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, eds., *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998).

⁸³ Tirza True Latimer, "'Queer Situations": Behind the Scenes of *Borderline*.' *English Language Notes* 45, 2 (2007): p.33

⁸⁴ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.290

⁸⁵ Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp.173-176

This essay is conceived as one of the sites on the map we are in the process of drawing to reshape early twentieth-century culture and its lost possibilities. It is also an archeological [*sic*] excavation of the foundations of contemporary culture. Our reading combines the different chronological discursive and cultural layers of yesterday's culture with the help of today's tools of interpretation. We will pursue our task with the purpose of closing the gap between text and co(n)text.⁸⁶

They hope to achieve this through 'taking into account intertextualities and the figure of the palimpsest, that is to say relationality and montage.'⁸⁷ Further, De Ruggieri tells us: 'The metaphor of networking, enables us [to] rewrite the history of *Close Up* by noting the "rizomatic" relationships between the editors, contributors, places, topics and passions that created the magazine.'⁸⁸ Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, it is a methodology that seeks to account for heterogeneity and multiplicity. In order to do this, as Camboni outlines in her own introduction to the collection, the project has developed a hypertextual database, which 'is both a powerful heuristic instrument, capable of revealing unexpected connections, and a dynamic conceptual model, representing *and* creating links among documents.'⁸⁹

In part, what Zaccaria and De Ruggieri offer in their work-in-progress on the film magazine, as Friedberg, Donald and Marcus did four years earlier, is a survey of *Close Up*, which they anchor in the context of the interwar moment, as well as paying attention to the role which POOL's 'intimate friendship' played in the journal's formation and steering its contents.⁹⁰ Yet, the scholars also wish to heed 'the cinematic experience as a journey, without risking misrepresenting it through the semiological and psychoanalytical cinema studies of our age.'⁹¹ They outline the catholicism of the journal, as well as its transnational reach – it had correspondents located in Paris, Berlin, Geneva, London, Hollywood and Vienna – while POOL was also fascinated by what we would now term World cinemas. As the project title suggests, like the early Anglo-American feminist biographical work discussed earlier, the researchers in *Networking Women* are concerned to recover women's 'hidden' contributions

⁸⁶ Paola Zaccaria and Francesca De Ruggieri, 'Close Up as Co(n)text' in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, March 25-27, 2002*, ed. Marina Camboni (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), p.249

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.258.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.264

⁸⁹ Marina Camboni, 'Networking Women: A Research Project and a Relational Model of the Cultural Sphere' in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, March 25-27, 2002*, ed. Marina Camboni (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), p.15

⁹⁰ Zaccaria and De Ruggieri, 'Close Up as Co(n)text', p.266

⁹¹ Ibid, p.269

to modernism in the face of what Renata Morresi refers to as ‘the stolid patriarchal prejudice against the cultural work produced by women’.⁹²

Morresi’s own piece in *Networking Women* traces the ‘contiguous and often intertwining paths’ of Bryher and fellow English shipping heiress, Nancy Cunard, exploring the parallels between the former’s ‘covert’ editorship of *Life and Letters To-Day* (1935-1950) and the latter’s ‘ventures as a cultural activist.’⁹³ Morresi offers an important account of Bryher’s work for the critically ignored *Life and Letters To-Day*. As was the case with *Close Up*, Bryher did much of the legwork, finding and encouraging contributors as well as, according to Morresi, influencing the bent of the editorial (though her POOL colleague Robert Herring was its ‘overt’ editor). The primary connection the Italian scholar makes between the two women is their considerable contribution to modernist literary circles and their fight against fascism. Morresi observes that both were ‘enabler[s] of networks,’ with Bryher’s journal pressing for an internationalism which was unusual at the time. Though initially announcing its intention to eschew politics, *Life and Letters To-Day* was nonetheless advertised as ‘a sort of quarterly *Left Review*,’ and, moreover, by summer 1936, it had publicly retracted this. The editorial stated: ‘we expressed the intention of being non-political [...] it would be useless to maintain now that Spain’s civil war is none of our business. It is everyone’s business.’⁹⁴

Morresi is not alone in her interest in Bryher’s anti-fascist work, which is also an intersection on which Camboni concentrates. In relation to the journal, she has asserted:

[Bryher] launched *Life and Letters To-day*, through which she tried to build a transnational European culture capable of contrasting Nazist and fascist nationalisms, while finding contributors and contributions from different continents and opening up her journal to a transcontinental culture.⁹⁵

Camboni’s critical focus has remained on Bryher, tracking her love affair with Berlin and, as I too consider, Bryher’s brief, but nonetheless influential, intellectual relationship with Benjamin.

⁹² Renata Morresi, ‘Two Examples of Women’s “Hidden” Cultural (Net)Work: Nancy Cunard’s *Onion and Life and Letters To-Day*’ in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, March 25-27, 2002*, ed. Marina Camboni (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), p.371.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ ‘Editorial’ cited in Morresi, ‘Two Examples of Women’s “Hidden” Cultural (Net)Work,’ pp.382-3

⁹⁵ Marina Camboni, ‘Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-American 1890-1939’ in *How2*, 2,1 (Spring 2003): n.p. At: http://www.asu.edu/piperwcwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v2_1_2003/current/in_conference/net_working-women/camboni.htm. Accessed on 26/04/07.

In her introduction to *Networking Women*, Camboni discusses how ‘Individualism’ was one of the paths that researchers have decided to follow, ‘in order to show the relationship linking feminist women trying to build their separate selves, to Emersonian self-reliance, Nietzschean will-power and anarchist individualism.’⁹⁶ Camboni picks this strand up in both of her subsequent essays on Bryher, whose chosen name – ‘the island in the middle of the sea’ – she avers, ‘lends itself as a symbol of her individualism.’⁹⁷ In the first one, Camboni observes:

Berlin, as Paris before it, lends itself to becoming an emblem of a wholly personal change and maturation, politically and artistically. Like Paris, in addition, it is a place through which Bryher realizes herself as the quintessence of the modern woman, the living incarnation of the history of the twentieth century.⁹⁸

She expands on this statement in the second essay, writing:

To be modern was for her [Bryher] first of all to claim for oneself the difference residing in each human being, to be allowed a personal and intellectual development respectful of “individual talents” rather than of social imperatives.⁹⁹

This is confusing.¹⁰⁰ Firstly, Camboni seems to invoke a post-structuralist notion of a subjectivity splintered by difference – a post-humanist and profoundly anti-individualist stance – which then seems to amount to much the same thing as being allowed the capacity for ‘personal development’. Secondly, in both essays, having initially underscored Bryher’s individualism, Camboni goes on to sketch her extensive collaborative work – as a member of POOL and as a benefactor to a wide-range of writers and artists, many of whom Camboni lists – alongside offering a picture of Bryher as someone who was repeatedly motivated to take a stand on events which did not effect her personally. Camboni refers, for instance, to Bryher’s ‘moral revolt against racism in the U.S.’ which ‘made her distribute posters in support of the Scottsboro boys,’ and

⁹⁶ Camboni, ‘Networking Women: A Research Project,’ p.26

⁹⁷ Marina Camboni, “‘Why, Berlin, must I love you so?’”: Bryher in Berlin, 1927-1932,’ trans. Maria Stadter Fox, in *H.D.’s Web: An E-Newsletter* Winter 3 (2008): p.7. At: <http://www.imagists.org/hd/hdsweb/december2008.pdf>. Accessed on 01/09/09.

⁹⁸ Camboni, “‘Why, Berlin, must I love you so?’” p.6.

⁹⁹ Marina Camboni, ‘Bryher and Walter Benjamin: Between Barbarism and Modernism’ in *H.D.’s Web: A E-Newsletter* Summer 4 (2009), p.3. At <http://www.imagists.org/hd/hdsweb/summer2009.pdf>. Accessed on 01/01/2010.

¹⁰⁰ This confusion may in part result from the fact that both of Camboni’s essays have been translated from the Italian, and both have been abridged.

‘against German anti-Semitism’ which ‘made her march with the yellow star of David pinned on her lapel’.¹⁰¹

Using the letter chain, which flowed between Bryher and H.D. from 1927 through 1932 as her guiding thread, in “Why, Berlin, must I love you so?” (a quotation drawn from Bryher’s *The Heart to Artemis*) Camboni plots Bryher’s burgeoning affinity for the city as a ‘pilgrim of art’.¹⁰² It was a site of becoming for her, argues the critic, which tuned and focused her future interests: she felt she belonged. Camboni then proceeds to read this contemporary account against Bryher’s retrospective construction of her Berlin years in *The Heart to Artemis*, which, Camboni highlights, is coloured by the horror of what was to unfold under National Socialism.

In her later essay, Camboni considers ‘the personal, literary, and political links that connected Bryher and Benjamin’.¹⁰³ She begins, once again, in the Beinecke, this time with the single existing letter – dated December 1937 – from Benjamin to Bryher. Curious about the woman who was aiding him, Benjamin had sought out her work and read, ‘Paris 1900’ (1937), Bryher’s childhood memoir, which, he writes to tell her, he enjoyed. A child’s eye perspective of the Great Exhibition in Paris, which Annie Winifred Ellerman had visited with her parents in 1900 at the age of five, Camboni suggests that it resonated with Benjamin, who was at work on his own childhood memoir. Moreover, Camboni finds a further parallel with Benjamin’s work in Bryher’s account, asserting that: ‘In some of her early experiences in Paris, in fact, she discovered her republican, protestant and leftist bent, and the opening of her mind to a deeper transnational identity, thus recovering the “messianic” elements in her own childhood.’¹⁰⁴ While, once again, this observation is made in relation to Bryher’s own personal development, in my next chapter I take up the congruity in Benjamin and his supporter’s work in relation to both writers’ efforts as historians, and their ethical stance in relation to the past. Camboni also touches on Bryher and Benjamin’s shared enthusiasm for cinema, but considers their responses as divergent. Whereas Benjamin’s interest in film as a mass artistic technology was conditioned by his Marxism, according to Camboni, Bryher saw the cinema as having ‘the power not only to support and expand individual appreciation and critical attitude, but to build the spectators’ very individuality.’¹⁰⁵ While Bryher was certainly engaged by the relationship between psychology and cinema, in my fourth

¹⁰¹ Camboni, ‘Bryher and Walter Benjamin,’ p.5

¹⁰² Camboni, “‘Why, Berlin, must I love you so?’” p.25

¹⁰³ Camboni, ‘Bryher and Walter Benjamin,’ p.2

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.9

chapter. I argue, in contrast to Camboni, that Bryher and Benjamin in fact held remarkably similar views on the possibilities, political and otherwise, of the novel medium.

Thus far none of the scholarship issuing from the *Networking Women* research project has fully addressed what is arguably the most ‘hidden’ aspect of Bryher’s life – that facet relating to sexuality. Zaccaria and De Ruggieri make reference glancingly to the intimate nature of POOL’s cinematic collaboration, asserting that ‘homosexual discourse permeates the house [Kenwin], the bonding, the cultural work’ but say nothing about the implications of this.¹⁰⁶ Camboni, who refers to POOL as ‘an unusual family,’ more problematically casts Bryher in a pathological light.¹⁰⁷ Discussing her avid engagement with psychoanalysis, Camboni states that Bryher saw it as ‘a cure-all for everybody and for her problems with sexual identity’.¹⁰⁸ On another occasion, the cultural critic repeats this observation, at the same time as invoking the trope of the ‘wrong body,’ which occupies a central position in transsexual narratives. Camboni writes: ‘She feels herself to be a man in a woman’s body and hopes with his [Sachs] help to get at the roots of her identity problem.’¹⁰⁹ I consider this a misreading of Bryher’s position, which, whether intentionally or not, figures her as *maladif*, as a diseased and disordered subject.

In all the letters and accounts I have read, Bryher never once speaks of wanting to be a man; her desire is always for ‘boyness,’ which, it seems to me, is not the same thing at all. Bryher does not hanker after manhood, implicated, as it is, in various circuits of oppression, but instead yearns for a subject position which is infused with potentiality. Firstly, this is the case because gender matters, and, as Bryher was acutely aware from her own experience, Victorian-Edwardian middle-class boys were considerably ‘freer’ than their female counterparts. And, secondly, because ‘boyness,’ like ‘girlness,’ refers to a position which is defined by its pliability and malleability – it speaks to a process of becoming, before social and cultural norms concretise fully. In this view, children are inherently anarchic and rebellious (a word often used to describe Bryher). Further, Bryher’s sense of difference, in relation to gender and sexuality, did not lead her to turn inwards, in anguish, but instead incited her to rebel against social mores and conventions

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.12

¹⁰⁶ Zaccaria and De Ruggieri, ‘*Close Up as Co(n)text*,’ p.259

¹⁰⁷ Camboni, “‘Why, Berlin, must I love you so?’” p.4. Again, it is possible that this is a result of the work being in translation.

¹⁰⁸ Camboni, ‘Bryher and Walter Benjamin,’ p.4

¹⁰⁹ Camboni, “‘Why, Berlin, must I love you so?’” p.21

– it was there that the problem lay. It is worth noting too that, as Magee and Miller also stress, despite her devotion to psychoanalysis, Bryher was far from uncritical of Freudian practice, a rankling which had much to do with its foundations in a specifically Victorian idea(l) of family.¹¹⁰

Gender and sexuality, however, have been taken up as categories of analysis in relation to Bryher and her work in recent contributions to both the arena of lesbian, or sapphic, modernism, as well as in readings of her historical fiction. Whereas in the first mapping of what, retrospectively, became known as lesbian modernism, scholars did not dwell upon, or offer much consideration of, their use of the term ‘lesbian,’ recent contributions have focused on its contested status. The central problematic concerns who precisely gets included in the category ‘lesbian,’ as well as the related issue of, what Terry Castle terms ‘the no-lesbians-before-1900 myth’ – the naming of same-sex desires and ‘proto-identities’ before the rise of sexual science in the late nineteenth century and the ‘birth of the homosexual’.¹¹¹ It concerns, then, the historical contingency of sexual identity. In their introduction to *Sapphic Modernities* (2006), for instance, Laura Doan and Jane Garrity write: ‘We contend that “sapphism” is a useful term in that it distances us from the more rigid contemporary categories of identity, such as “butch” or “femme,” and reminds us that the claiming of sexual identity [...] is relatively recent.’¹¹² Moreover, in ‘using “lesbian” interchangeably with “sapphist” in this collection,’ they write, ‘our goal is to avoid the clinical tinge of “invert” and to signal the discursive fluidity of female same-sex desire as an emergent cultural category.’¹¹³

In an earlier work, *Fashioning Sapphism*, in which Doan proposes ‘an alternative genealogy of modern English lesbian culture’ by situating Bryher, alongside a range of other figures, within ‘the “constructed narrative” of English modernity through the multiple sites of law, sexology, fashion, and literary and visual representation.’¹¹⁴ Here, Doan traces the influence that sexological models had on ‘lesbian’ writers and their

¹¹⁰ In a letter to her close friend, the Russian analyst, Walter Schmideberg, written sometime in the early 1940s, Bryher outlined her objections to psychoanalysis. She wrote: ‘I feel too much is founded on the Victorian idea of the family. It is very strong and it is very powerful but it is not everything. [...] The Victorian idea of a female marrying and being content with that and pups [children], simply is lamentable today Yet analyze analytical writings and at least three quarters are based really on the nice Victorian picture of an old gentleman, his wife, and half a dozen pups all taking a walk in the woods on Sunday’. Bryher to Walter Schmideberg cited in Magee and Miller, ‘Superior Guinea Pig: Bryher and Psychoanalysis,’ p.13. This observation becomes even more significant in light of her critiques of Hollywood, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

¹¹¹ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.96

¹¹² Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, ‘Introduction,’ in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, ed. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.3

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.4

representations in the interwar period. Her interpretation sits Bryher's *Development* and *Two Selves* alongside both Hall's infamous novel and A.T. Fitzroy's (Rose Allatini's) 1918 novel *Despised and Rejected*.¹¹⁵ Doan argues that aside from medico-juridical practitioners, a number of, mostly, upper-middle class white women and men – so, a select and materially privileged audience – also managed to acquire and consume sexological texts in the early decades of the twentieth century. Such theories, Doan observes, 'provided women such as Bryher with models of sexual identity and a language for their desires'.¹¹⁶ Rather than seeing them as dupes of sexual science, which was the stance most early critics took, Doan reads Bryher, Hall, and Allatini's constructions of their 'invert' protagonists as agentic practices, in which sexological theories were tailored to suit their literary projects, with problematic facets being discarded in the process. I discuss Doan's interpretation of Bryher's protagonist, Nancy, in more detail in my own reading of *Development* and *Two Selves* in Chapter 2.

In her introduction to Bryher's *Two Novels*, Winning situates the writer as a node in the production of lesbian modernism, asserting that in these two early texts she was 'engaged in the process of locating and defining literary language and form with which to represent female and lesbian subjectivity.'¹¹⁷ In my next section, I consider Winning's contention further, relating it to my own project, which argues instead for the necessity of a queer theoretic lens through which to read Bryher's work. In her contribution to Doan and Garrity's edited collection which I discussed above, Winning touches on Bryher's relationship to Paris in a chapter which seeks to 'evidence sapphic modernity by turning to a specific historical and geographical site – Paris between 1916 and 1936'.¹¹⁸ Winning observes that:

The modern city becomes a space in which the sapphist may articulate her desire and her identity, her sense of "becoming modern" [...] Here, we witness one of the first substantial instances of sapphic cultural production and a

¹¹⁴ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.xvii

¹¹⁵ Like *The Well of Loneliness*, *Despised and Rejected* was banned soon after publication. This was not, however, for its representation of the 'intermediate sex' but as a result of its pacifist polemic. Its publisher, C. W. Daniel, was prosecuted 'under the Defence Regulations as "likely to prejudice the recruiting of persons to serve in His Majesty's Forces, and their training and discipline"'. Jonathan Cutbill, 'Introduction' in Rose Allatini, *Despised and Rejected* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1988), n.p.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.128

¹¹⁷ Joanne Winning, 'Introduction' in Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, WI and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.vi

¹¹⁸ Joanne Winning, 'The Sapphist in the City: Lesbian Modernist Paris and Sapphic Modernity' in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, eds. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.20

definitive historical “moment” in which the sapphic begins to imagine itself and, most importantly, partake in the *generation* of modernity.¹¹⁹

At the centre of the literary scholar’s chapter is the rue de l’Odéon, where both Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach’s bookshops were situated, and thus, according to Winning, it was the hub of ‘Bryher’s “map of Paris”’ too.¹²⁰ The English writer was close to both Beach and Monnier, and for a period supported the American’s Shakespeare and Company. Moreover, Beach’s shop and lending library was an important conduit for the sale of Bryher’s own work as well as for the various little magazines she helped to produce. In contrast to Camboni’s suggestion that, for Bryher, being modern was solely about personal discovery and self-realisation, in Winning’s account, we are offered a picture of the writer as partaking, alongside Beach and Monnier, in ‘the generation of modernism,’ in both senses of the term. The bookshop, as Winning observes, ‘is a space of sapphic modernity; a space in which she [Bryher] will find sameness of intellectual endeavor *and* sexuality, rather than difference.’¹²¹

While this was most certainly the case, the rue de l’Odéon was, at the same time, a site traversed by a range of other textual and sexual relationships, ones which, in the case of Bryher, I suggest are best recognised by the open embrace of queer. Moreover, in a retrospective account of Paris between the wars, Bryher herself characterised the city as a zone of difference, one where:

nations and exiles mixed, where roots were torn from security and there was no belief, only despair and a desperate sense of beauty. It was a doomed moment but as such moments are, full of over-awareness, of a word, a sky edge, the colour of a land and the arrogant courage that was felt perhaps in Troy.¹²²

Indeed, it is in the friction caused by this proximity of difference, rather than sameness, which electrifies and animates her depiction of Paris.

Bryher’s description of the French capital, however, might very well have referred to one of the scapes of her later historical fictions, set, as they mostly are during, or in the aftermath, of conflict, with exiles and outsiders as protagonists. Labelling Bryher as a ‘feminist historical novelist,’ Ruth Hoberman has read her three books set in the classical

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.21

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.24

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Bryher, ‘New American Poetry,’ in *Life and Letters To-Day* 20, 18 (February 1939), p.20

period – *Roman Wall* (1954), *Gate to the Sea* (1958), *Coin of Carthage* (1963)¹²³ – as a ‘collu[sion] with Clio [...] as she evokes, under erasure, a world of female power and intimacy.’¹²⁴ In contrast, Sarah Waters, situating Bryher alongside her contemporary, Mary Renault, suggests that both writers have been ignored by (lesbian) feminist literary scholars, because of the ‘“romance” of maleness’ they display in their pages.¹²⁵ Consequently, she avers, a lens that separates gender from sexuality, *pace* Rubin and Sedgwick, may be preferable for the consideration of Bryher’s historical fiction. I consider both these theoretical positions in more depth in my next chapter, as I argue that queer theory is a more appropriate theoretical tool for reading Bryher’s work.

The literature on Bryher offers a fragmented and, at times contradictory, image of the author and her cultural output, perhaps in part because it derives from a range of disciplines. My thesis does not seek to remedy this fragmentation (which, in many respects, is an appropriate form for the author and cinéaste, whose own work frequently favoured the shard or skelf), by attempting to provide a ‘complete’ portrait of Bryher and her *oeuvre*, for that is surely the job of a biographer, and McCabe’s forthcoming work, I have no doubt, will do this admirably. What I do wish to achieve in this thesis, however, is to trace a common thread or thematic across the various fields that her work traverses – the arenas of avant-garde/ modern literature, experimental cinema, and her critical ruminations on popular or mass culture, as well as, briefly, her historical project too. Through the four works, which I consider in the body of my thesis, Bryher, and POOL, I argue, attempted to articulate queerly, to speak out, and back on behalf of dissident sexual subjectivities and their ‘perverse’ desires. Finally, although my research ostensibly takes Bryher as its focus, it is not a monograph, but instead seeks to situate her as a part of various collaborative projects, whether it be in her re-visioning of the reader-text model, via her work with POOL, through her efforts as an anti-fascist resistance worker, or on behalf, as we shall see, of the oppressed classes of history. In order to do this, in my next chapter I return to queer theory, so as to situate my project more firmly within queer-feminist praxis.

¹²³ All but one of Bryher’s historical novels were originally published in New York, with London editions usually following one or two years later. The dates quoted here are the American editions. For full publication details of all Bryher’s novels see Sarah Waters, ‘Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions 1870 to the Present’ (Unpublished PhD thesis. London, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1995), p.232, fn.42

¹²⁴ Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, p. 100

¹²⁵ Waters, ‘Wolfskins and Togas,’ p.215

1

Bryher and the Matter of Queer History

I do not think that the present generation feels literature as we did. They love it, of course, but they have no need of our intense and concentrated passion. They sunbathe at two, have some of their questions answered. It was, however, the sign of our age, the identification students will tag to us, when we are dug out, as the Elizabethans were in the nineteenth century, after the night of forgetting almost sure to come.

— Bryher, 'Recognition Not Farewell' (1937)

Since its emergence in the late 1980s, in the midst of the AIDS/HIV crisis in North America, queer theory, and the urban activist groups with, and from, which it arose, such as Act Up and Queer Nation, have repeatedly stressed their difference from both gay and lesbian studies and the gay civil rights movement. Most obviously this has come through queer's critique of identity or subject-centred politics, its conviction that such claims in effect play back into the hands of disciplinarians. This stance is exemplified in one of the foundational texts of queer theory, Judith Butler's 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' (1990), in which she famously stated: 'I'm permanently troubled by identity categories.'¹ Here, in a Foucauldian vein, Butler argues that 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes,' regardless of whether they are used as normalising categories or for liberal political ends.² In utilising the terms 'lesbian' or 'gay,' scholars and activists simply reaffirm and reify the hierarchical binary 'heterosexuality/ homosexuality,' thereby bolstering the former. Butler's famous essay interrogates the use of the sign 'lesbian' and

¹ Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination,' *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p.14

² *Ibid.*, p.13

attempts to rethink the lesbian and gay political project. She is sceptical of claims made in the name of particular identity groups, arguing that they simply desire to control the sign and to claim it as their own. Instead, Butler proposes utilising the sign's *lack* of clarity – she notes that it is ‘permanently unclear what that sign signifies’ – and allow instead for its free play.³ It is necessary to stress, however, that Butler is not arguing against the deployment of the term ‘lesbian,’ as some scholars suggest. Indeed, she observes that ‘there remains a political imperative to use these necessary errors or category mistakes [...] to rally and represent an oppressed political constituency. Clearly, I am not legislating against the use of the term.’⁴ Instead she offers a logical deconstruction of the oppositional pair, as well as the associated binary ‘copy/original,’ illustrating the mutual dependency and interrelation of the terms. Though Butler neither uses the term ‘queer’ in this early essay, nor in *Gender Trouble* (1990), her emphasis on ‘freeing’ the sign, her resistance to, and deconstruction of, dualities are all emblematic features of queer theoretical praxis, alongside too the rejection of essentialist notions of (lesbian) identity.

The queer critique of identity politics also pivots on the exclusive, and thus exclusionary, nature of subject categories, which shore up difference. As I argued earlier, within the academy, this was instanced by lesbian feminism's rejection of butch/femme bar roles, which were seen as aping heterosexuality and therefore sustaining patriarchal power relations.⁵ Instead queer has tended to focus on acts and practices rather than identities. With its inclusionary embrace, however, queer has become a repository of, and, indeed, is often used as a synonym for, an array of non-normative subjectivities, including intersex, transgender and transsexual peoples. Queer is allied to the abject, excluded and othered, to all those subjects, acts, practices and pleasures which either sit outside of, or trouble, heteronormative relations and institutions.⁶ Judith Halberstam, for instance, writes: ‘Queer temporalities [...] emerge from the specifications of lives lived beyond the hetero-reproductive matrix’ and thus ‘include communities of colour, single mothers, sex workers

³ Ibid, p. 14

⁴ Ibid, p. 16

⁵ Paradoxically, this was despite the fact that the main impetus for the formation of lesbian feminism, alongside other ‘feminisms of difference,’ such as black -, ‘third-world’- and working-class feminism, arose from the exclusion of particular subjects from ‘feminism,’ with its white, western, middle-class, and heterosexual bias. Feminism was also splintered by the ‘sex-wars,’ which revolved around the issues of pornography and censorship, and sexual acts, particularly BDSM practices.

⁶ Many lesbian theorists are sceptical of queer's umbrella-like nature: they see it as eclipsing the specificity of ‘lesbian,’ as well as other categories. This concern echoes lesbian feminism's fears about the elision of lesbian into the term gay during the 1970s and 1980s. See Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,’ *Journal of Women's History* 15, 3 (2003 [1980]): p.28

or transgender people.’⁷ This observation also illustrates queer’s attempts, alongside other anti-exclusionary theories and practices such as (poststructuralist) feminism, to think through coalition-based politics as well as to envision alternative models of community and family.

Queer theorists, however, have tended to view the project, even the notion, of liberation with scepticism, cautious of its tendencies towards normalisation and conformity and its dependency on a linear and progressive notion of history. Nonetheless, as Heather K. Love observes: ‘we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of progress; despite our reservations, we just cannot stop dreaming of a better life for queer people.’⁸ Yet, as Love’s own work in *Feeling Backwards* (2007), which considers the ‘dark side’ of literary modernism, itself attests, this dream cannot, and, moreover, should not be untethered from the history of insult, injury and shame of queer subjects and texts. Though, as Sasha Roseneil has observed, queer denotes ‘that which is strange, odd, eccentric, of questionable character, shady, suspect,’ Love’s project, alongside those of theorists and critics like Lee Edelman, Halberstam and Eve Sedgwick marks a new turn in queer theory, which has focused its attention on the negative emotions arising from queer’s history of shame.⁹ Taking care not to endorse visions of the sad, lonely queer, tortured by their own internalised homophobia, such theorists have argued that the negative aspect of queer history, and its on-going legacy, must not only not be ignored, but that, at this moment of ‘left melancholy,’ it might in fact offer alternative political modes and visions.

This paradoxical facet of queer theory is borne out in the word itself, for, salvaged from a homophobic lexicon, queer was re-appropriated and re-signified for affirmative use.¹⁰ It is not a tame term. In tracing the etymology of the word in *Tendencies* (1994), Sedgwick observes that queer ‘comes from the indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.’¹¹ Queer, then, is animated by the action of inversion or reversal, and, moreover, is itself an example of Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘reverse discourse’. In what has become a crucial, though not uncontested, text for both lesbian and gay studies and queer theory, Foucault famously

⁷ Judith Halberstam, ‘Boys will be ... Bois? Or Transgender Feminism and the Forgetful Fish’ in *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory*, eds. Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin and Mark E. Casey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.104

⁸ Heather K. Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.3

⁹ Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham* (London: Cassell/Continuum, 2000), p.5

¹⁰ See Judith Butler’s ‘Critically Queer’ for her consideration of the term’s resignification. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 223-242

observed that at the same time as late nineteenth century medico-judicial attempts to categorise, police, and, as his argument goes, consequently *create*, perverse subjects: ‘homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “natrality” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.’¹²

So, what does my project want with this anachronistic term and this gritty, confrontational post-structuralist politics? Bryher’s early prose works, and her position in the network of literary modernism, as we have seen, have received most attention from theorists working in the areas of ‘sapphic’ or ‘lesbian modernism.’ This fruitful and important arena of scholarship, which has opened up and troubled ‘modernism,’ unsettling and disrupting its ingrained masculinist, white, heteronormative bent, has been a crucial foundation for this project. Yet, here, I choose to use, and think through, the anachronistic term ‘queer’ instead. In doing this, however, I am not setting up a dichotomy between ‘lesbian’ and ‘queer,’ where the former term is reduced to a condition of fixity and stultification through which queer then becomes the avant-garde and ethereal other. Indeed, my work shares these scholars’ desire to tell different stories and to re-vision the interwar era, bringing neglected figures such as Bryher back under critical consideration. In the first place, I use queer in order to stress this project’s, and my own, grounding in queer, feminist and gender theory, and the fact that this research sees itself as contributing to this interdisciplinary field, rather than being situated within either literary or visual studies, though clearly it is indebted to both.

In her on-going project of mapping the terrain of what she has termed ‘lesbian modernism,’ Winning has included Bryher in this grouping, asserting that in *Development* and *Two Selves* she was ‘engaged in the process of locating and defining literary language and form with which to represent female and lesbian subjectivity.’¹³ In her contemporaneous book-length study, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, in which Winning uses Richardson’s 13-volume *Pilgrimage* as a ‘test case’ to explore and illuminate ‘the territory of lesbian modernism,’ she works through the contested coupling. Winning stresses the non-essentialist nature of ‘lesbian’ and argues for the need to open the term up, writing: ‘I am seeking to pluralize rather than fix the term *lesbian* (and indeed, the

¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.xii

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p.101

¹³ Joanne Winning, ‘Introduction’ in Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, WI and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.vi

term *modernist*').¹⁴ Drawing on Elizabeth Grosz and Sedgwick in particular, Winning posits a 'fragmented dissimulating lesbian subjecthood' which, she argues, 'is necessary to counteract the reductive reading of female modernist lives and texts as straightforwardly heterosexual, bisexual or lesbian'.¹⁵ Nonetheless, in Winning's construction 'lesbian' still refers to a sexual identity, while it seems to me that the texts, and lives, under consideration in my thesis resist such definition, and over run category boundaries, no matter how broadly they are set. For instance, though at times Bryher did deploy the term 'lesbian' in relation to herself, she also used male pronouns and encouraged others to do so. As we saw in my introduction, in an early letter to H.D., in which she describes her first, and only, 'consultation' with the British sexologist, Havelock Ellis, Bryher wrote: 'We agreed it was most unfair for it to happen but apparently I am quite justified in pleading I ought to be a boy, – I am just a girl by accident.'¹⁶ Moreover, Bryher referred publicly to this feeling of 'boyiness' forty years later in *The Heart to Artemis*, when she tells readers that since childhood she had wished to be a cabin boy, a desire also shared by Nancy, her protagonist, in *Development* and *Two Selves*.

Winning's informative and useful introduction to Bryher's early texts speaks to the complexity of thinking through sexual identity in this era. She observes that: 'These novels seem to articulate narratives of identity that can be read either in terms of lesbian sexuality or transsexuality,' and in relation to the latter Winning diagnoses Nancy as suffering 'profound gender dysphoria'.¹⁷ Despite this, Winning then argues that 'it is necessary to consider this configuration of subjectivity in the light of Bryher's avowed lesbian identity,' and proceeds to situate lesbian sexuality in relation to the discourses of psychoanalysis and sexology, frameworks which, as she highlights, interwove same-sex desire and cross-gendered identifications during this period. In relation to Bryher's apparently avowed lesbian identity, Winning next observes: 'it is clear then that Bryher conflates some kind of transsexuality with lesbian sexuality, seeing the two perhaps as a seamless continuum.'¹⁸ Transsexuality and gender dysphoria are both, however, terms derived later in the century, when, as Winning notes too, transitioning to another sex

¹⁴ Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8

¹⁶ Bryher to H.D., 20 March 1919, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Beinecke.

¹⁷ Winning, 'Introduction,' p.xxv

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xxxiv

became a possibility through developments in surgical and medical technologies.¹⁹ More problematically, gender dysphoria is a term used by the medical establishment in order to diagnose transsexuality, and relies on a notion of normative categories of gender and sexuality – it is thus a pathologising term. Thus, instead of trying to squeeze Nancy and Bryher into contemporary identity categories, it seems more useful to consider them both, alongside the figure of the cross-dressed page girl who roves the pages of *Development* and *Two Selves*, as troubling the ‘correct’ lining up of femininity, femaleness, and cross-sex desire, in other words, as figures who queer the (emergent) hetero-reproductive matrix.

My decision to use queer also reflects the fact that this was a period during which, as scholars have argued, the modern homosexual and the modern lesbian were under formation. In relation to this era in the history of sexuality, ‘queer’ then seems an appropriate designation for the 1920s and early 1930s. Following Alan Sinfield, Laura Doan has referred to this period as a ‘moment of indeterminacy,’ when ‘the categories of sexuality [were] less sharply delineated; most important, lesbianism in any formulation was not yet generally connected with style or image. This very ambiguity,’ she argues, ‘in fact, facilitated the emergence of subcultural development.’²⁰ For similar reasons, Susan McCabe has asserted that “‘queer’” is thus more appropriately a modern or modernist category than a contemporary one.²¹ Moreover, queer is befitting too for a period in which, as we have seen, sexological and psychoanalytical theories of same-sex desire were intertwined with cross-gendered aesthetics or practices. This was a distinctive feature of the case studies of both Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, and fed too into Freud’s notion of the ‘masculinity complex’.²² Ellis’ category of inversion was a capacious one, which incorporated a range of ‘queer’ identities, including what we would now refer to as transgender, though, as Sally Hines has argued, Ellis had a separate category – that of

¹⁹ The term ‘Gender Dysphoria’ was coined by N. Fisk in 1973 and is currently listed in the *DSM IV* as a symptom of Gender Identity Disorder (GID), the term which replaced ‘transsexualism’ in 1994. See Zowie Davy, ‘Transsexual Recognition: Embodiment, Bodily Aesthetics and the Medicolegal System’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis. Leeds, University of Leeds, 2008), p.24

²⁰ Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.xiv

²¹ Susan McCabe, ‘Whither Sexuality and Gender? “What That Sign Signifies” and the Rise of Queer Historicism’ in *Pacific Coast Philology* 41 (2006), p.28

²² See Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Jack Hunter (New York: Creation Books, 1997); Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897) and Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979). See also Lucy Bland and Laura Doan’s edited collection *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

Eonism – for practices of transvestism.²³ In the small section dealing with female inverts, comprising just six case studies, Ellis averred that: ‘The commonest characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity or boyishness.’²⁴

Further, while Winning’s expanded notion of ‘lesbian’ might include the various affective relationships in the networks and texts of lesbian modernism that she traces, it does not account for the triangulations and intimate cross-sex relationships that Bryher was involved in during the interwar period as well as across the span of her life. I use queer, then, precisely because of its elasticity, which is useful here since it embraces the mixed-sex queer circles Bryher and H.D. both moved in, which included a range of intimate and emotional relations, both same-sex and cross-sex. Further, as I suggested in my introduction, Bryher and H.D.’s own relationship was repeatedly crosscut by close affiliations with others, figures such as Bergner, as well as Bryher’s two husbands, McAlmon and, particularly, Macpherson. These queer formations radically unsettle and resist the heteronormative narrative of romance, marriage and reproduction. McCabe has argued, in relation to her own on-going research on Bryher, that ‘this more fluid model,’ offered by a theory based on identifications rather than identity, provides ‘a means of perceiving the “ghost effects,” the queerness of lesbian figures in modernism.’²⁵ These cross-sex queer dynamics also fed into Bryher’s writing, in which, as I argue in Chapter 2, she drew upon and refigured tropes and signifiers with a homoerotic heritage, such as the Greco-Roman myths of Zeus and Ganymede, Narcissus and Artemis and Endymion, in order for her protagonist Nancy to ‘speak out’. In so doing, Bryher, I argue, put into play more fluid and unstable economies of desire.

Sarah Waters locates similar dynamics at work in Bryher’s historical novels, which, she asserts, reveal a fascination with male romances, and, indeed, offer a ‘‘romance’ of maleness’ in their pages.²⁶ In considering what she terms feminist critics’ ‘squeamishness’ at ‘confronting the homosexual interests of women writers’ in relation to both the output of Bryher, and her close contemporary, Mary Renault, Waters, following Sedgwick, suggests that ‘feminist theory may be an inadequate or even irrelevant tool with which to tackle issues of sexual oppression’ and, moreover, may in fact obscure ‘the important allegiances and identifications formed not between women, but between lesbians and men (gay or

²³ Sally Hines, *TransForming Gender: Transgender Practices of Identity, Intimacy and Care* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007), p. 10

²⁴ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 1936), p.244

²⁵ McCabe, ‘Whither Sexuality and Gender?’, p.28

²⁶ Sarah Waters, ‘Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions 1870 to the Present’ (Unpublished PhD thesis. London, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1995), p.215

otherwise).²⁷ Further, Waters suggests, it ‘obstructs discussion of those lesbian writers whose work, while perhaps not ‘gynocentric’, nevertheless contains radical sexual and social commentaries.’²⁸ In attempting to counter the critical diffidence and discomfort, Waters reads a selection of Bryher’s historical novels, observing that ‘it is in their enactment of this kind of resistance to heterosexual imperatives that Bryher’s novels most consistently request admission to the gay, and even the lesbian, canon. Indeed, *queer* might be a more appropriate, though anachronistic, description of their collective evasion of the demands and definitions of ‘reprosexuality’, their faith in the transformative energy of erotic dissidence.’²⁹ Waters, however, does not go on to explore this statement.

All the texts under consideration in this thesis show a concern with exclusion and an awareness of the multiple nodes through which it works, particularly the interrelations of gender, sexuality and ‘race’ and ethnicity. Although her chosen name, ‘Bryher,’ drawn as it was from the smallest inhabited of the Scilly Isles, might suggest an affinity with ‘islanding,’ and, moreover, an association with separatist communities, such as (the fantasy of) Sappho’s women-only school on Lesbos, in practice Bryher’s critical contributions, alongside her considerable efforts as a patron, show repeated attempts to forge links *across* difference. Like many of her contemporaries, she had hopes for silent cinema as an *Esperanto*, which had the potential to unite war-ravaged Europe, forming links across national boundaries. In *Borderline*, what I term POOL’s queer politics of representation is interconnected with its provocative and powerful anti-racist statement. In my fourth chapter, I consider how queers and Jews become paired in their shared role of ‘other’ to fascist constructions of pure national bodies.

Critical opinion has tended to cast Bryher, in opposition to H.D., as a writer *manqué*, as committed to avant-garde literary circles yet failing to produce anything ‘original’ in her own right. H.D.’s biographer Barbara Guest was certainly guilty of this. In the single paragraph she gives over to discussing Bryher’s (extensive and wide-ranging) creative output, Guest erases Bryher’s early work, collapsing it all into the genre of boys’ adventure books. Guest states:

she wrote splendid adventure stories. They were historical novels with settings in which a lone boy, faced by danger, would conquer all. There was always a battle and there was always a boy. Bryher’s novels are excellent examples of historical fiction upon which children can build their early concepts of history.

²⁷ Ibid. Sedgwick is herself drawing upon Gayle Rubin’s call for a separate theory of sex in ‘Thinking Sex’.

²⁸ Ibid, pp.229-230

²⁹ Ibid, p.237

The pathos was that she believed they were adult books. She could never understand why editors would tell her to put sex in her books so that they would sell. She knew sex existed, but she could not find its place in her novels. There Bryher was wiser than her editors. Her brother's boy adventure stories, which she so loved to read, never had sex in them. Why bother? It was the action that mattered.³⁰

As Waters has observed too, Guest seems to have been unaware that Bryher's historical novels were in fact also taken by critics as adult books, and, moreover, that they enjoyed wide and favourable critical attention, as well as being repeatedly reissued.³¹ Two of Bryher's contemporaries also thought enough of her prose to contribute prefaces to two of her novels. Edith Sitwell, who was by then a close friend, contributed a preface to the 1964 edition of the historical novel, *The Fourteenth of October* (1953). Sitwell wrote: 'The book contains such excitement as this, but it is also a wonderful quintessence of the beauty of sight and sound, distilled through the heart, mind, and senses of a poet – but of a poet who is a born novelist [...] This book is, to my mind, a masterpiece.'³² This reverberates with Amy Lowell's assertion over forty years earlier in her preface to the American edition of Bryher's first novel *Development* (1920), that Nancy/Bryher 'is evidently a writer born.'³³ Rather than this critical neglect being related to Bryher's failure to produce 'literary-enough' works, I suggest that her texts' resistance to feminist and lesbian – and lesbian feminist – reclamation is a consequence instead of their category blurring, of her and their inability to 'fit' into either feminist or lesbian scholarship.³⁴ With the advent of queer and gender theory, however, both Bryher's life and works have become a legitimate and legible focus for scholarly attention.³⁵

³⁰ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p115

³¹ See Waters, 'Wolfskins and Togas,' p.233

³² Edith Sitwell, 'Introduction' in Bryher, *The Fourteenth of October* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp.6&7

³³ Amy Lowell, 'Preface' in Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning. (Madison, Wisconsin and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.8. In a private letter to Bryher, Sylvia Beach also made favourable reference to the unique nature of Bryher's prose, stating: 'I'm sure someone could do an essay on your sentence construction – which is quite individual. I don't know of any other author who makes the same subtle-simple effects.' Sylvia Beach to Bryher, 27 December 1969, Bryher Papers, Series II, Box 72, Folder 3869, Beinecke.

³⁴ In her exploration of the overlapping cultural work of Bryher and Cunard, Renata Morresi makes a similar statement, asserting that both women's consignment to 'oblivion' might in part result from 'the fluid and sometimes exploding quality of the work that overflows the boundaries of genres and disciplines'. Renata Morresi, 'Two Examples of Women's "Hidden" Cultural (Net)Work: Nancy Cunard's *Onion* and *Life and Letters To-Day*' in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, March 25-27, 2002*, ed. Marina Camboni (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), p.372

³⁵ Moreover, Jean Radford draws a useful distinction between Lowell and Bryher's literary praxis. Where the former 'counsel[s] patience and contingencies,' the latter, 'both in social and sexual contexts, identifies with an oppositional strategy ("there had to be rebellion"),' terms which invite comparison with features of a

In a recent piece, 'Bryher's Archive: Modernism and the Melancholy of Money,' (2007) McCabe makes a similar suggestion in relation to Bryher's neglected position in the web of literary modernism. She contends that 'the unusual extent of disparagement, neglect and discounting of Bryher has more to do with her transgressive "husband" role in curating modernism than with her actual character.'³⁶ McCabe is referring to the fact that, as we saw earlier, Bryher has often been cast as shy and retiring, keen to take the backseat, and as modest about her significant contribution to avant-garde literary circles. Instead, suggests McCabe, it is the 'unusual character' of Bryher's donations and contributions to funding modernism that 'to some extent accounts for her curious absence in literary histories.' Though she does not say so explicitly, McCabe certainly intimates that this scholarly disinterest has something to do with a discomfort concerning Bryher's sexual and gender dissonance. McCabe pairs Bryher with another wealthy heiress and important patron of modernism, the American Imagist poet, Amy Lowell, (who, as we have seen, Bryher knew and respected) and suggests that their gender transgressions as female patrons were at the root of the disdain levelled at them throughout their careers (famously, Ezra Pound disliked both women). Rather than just offering a means of detecting the 'ghost effects' of lesbian figures in modernism, as McCabe suggested in an earlier piece, the theoretical shift in gender and queer studies means that such 'unusual contributions' are transformed into sites of critical interest.

Finally, in arguing for the use of a theoretical lens not based on identity, I want to pause over Barbara Guest's revealing account of her interview with the elderly Bryher at Kenwin in the late 1970s. In the preface to her biography of H.D., Guest observes:

In her eighties, Bryher would give only an oblique substance to the Lady of the Lake [H.D.] who once had reigned alongside her over Kenwin. A careful listener can, of course, catch the invisible throw. And once or twice I did so. But there was no major revelation about H.D. or herself. I do not know what she believed she was shielding, I wish she had talked openly to me. This book might have been different spelled from her own lips. It was necessary to paste the H.D.-Bryher story together with the dry ink and typewritten letters and a dubious reliance on intuition. I expect Bryher was by nature secretive, and

queer political practice. Jean Radford, 'A Transatlantic Affair: Amy Lowell and Bryher' in *Amy Lowell, American Modernist*, eds. Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p.51

³⁶ Susan McCabe, 'Bryher's Archive: Modernism and the Melancholy of Money.' *English Now: Selected Papers from the 20th IAUPE Conference in Lund 2007*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Lund: Lund University, Centre for Languages and Literature, 2008), p.119

probably suspicious of any intruder in her history. It was evident she liked to control; a verbal slip or allusion once escaped, she would examine its loss.

It was what Bryher withheld that lent my research its determination. From then on I entered into her conspiracy. Beyond those sharp eyes lay much experience and a shrewd guess at a world she spent her life trying to place into focus. I discovered scraps of her knowledge within her correspondence with H.D., which began in 1918 and ended with H.D.'s death in 1961. More than scraps, whole tablecloths. I dwell at length on Bryher, because I wish to prepare the reader to find encapsulated within this biography of H.D., without any formal sentiment of mine, the story of Bryher.³⁷

As a biographer Guest is bent on the pursuit of truth, which, it seems to me, although she does not say so overtly, is here closely knit to the truth of sexuality, to the details of Bryher and H.D.'s relationship. Indeed, Guest's description of her frustration at Bryher's refusal to speak explicitly about her own life and that of H.D.'s is tellingly structured by the dynamics of the closet, by the relation of concealment and revelation, and, by its close fellow, the confessional. Yet Bryher declines Guest's invitation for intimate dialogue and answers instead obliquely and through tight lips. She refuses to be incited to speech. But what does this refusal mean?

I want to suggest that Bryher's refusal shows a resistance to being interpellated into contemporary categories of sexuality. It is a refusal to fall under the rubric of gay liberation, which is the framework for sexuality Guest offers. Guest's frustration lies in Bryher's refusal to speak openly about what she has already projected onto the elderly writer – the category of lesbian – at a moment, the late 1970s, when same-sex desires and relations were not only no longer unspeakable and benighted but were beginning to gain a legal footing and to embrace the notion of pride. It was the height of sexual liberation and a period too when gays and lesbians were sloughing off the slurs and stepping into the light. Guest is therefore confused: 'I do not know what she believed she was shielding,' she writes, 'I wish she had talked openly to me.' This refusal to be incorporated by late-70s sexual categories might also be read as a dis-ease with the notion of liberation and progress. Bryher, after all, had lived through a period of relative queer freedom and community – moving in the queer subcultures of both 1920s Paris and Berlin – only to see these artistic enclaves dismembered by the rise of fascism and National Socialism. Bryher's refusal also, then, shows caution, I suggest, about a narrative of progress, of a march towards the realisation of more egalitarian social relations, indeed, it carries with it an awareness of the precariousness of any (legal) gains, how the *volte face* may be

³⁷ Guest, *Herself Defined*, pp.x-xi

breath-takingly quick. This is also, then, the knowledge of the reversibility of reverse discourse, an awareness of the unstable and potentially ephemeral nature of queer ‘liberation.’

Queer History?

The schism between lesbian and gay studies and queer theory has left its mark on historical research too. The question mark in my subtitle gestures to the critical discomfort between the two terms, ‘queer’ and ‘history,’ the second of which is most often conjoined with ‘gay and lesbian’. In part, this has revolved around queer theorists’ depiction of lesbian and gay history as sluggardly and as lacking nuance, particularly in its uncritical use of the term ‘history’. In a recent roundtable discussion conducted via email, Carolyn Dinshaw has highlighted the on-going nature of this problem in response to what she sees as Lee Edelman’s construction of “‘history” as a straw man.’ She writes: ‘I bring this up because I think it points to a problem in the field of queer history: some very searching theoretical work on history and historicism has appeared over the last fifteen years or so, but there’s a tendency – at least among us literary scholars – to continue to critique “history” (meaning old style historicism) as if this work had never been done.’³⁸

The searching theoretical work to which Dinshaw refers has most often taken Foucault’s post-structuralist interventions in history, particularly his methodology of genealogy, as a guide (work which was itself indebted to Friedrich Nietzsche), while Walter Benjamin’s materialist philosophy of history has also been an important source for rethinking historicism. Though in other respects their work differs greatly from each other, both theorists rejected the traditional idea of history as progressive and continuous, as well as the notion that historians can ever know directly ‘how things really were’. They both rupture the idea of a linear march to the present, undermining the notion that existing conditions are the inevitable outcome of the past (Benjamin), and therefore that the past in some way anchors the present (Foucault). For Foucault this concerns revealing the instability of existing circumstances, and thereby unseating the fallacious notion of a coherent and fixed subjectivity. He writes:

³⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw et al, ‘Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,’ *GLQ* 13:2 (2007): p.186

Necessarily we must dismiss those tendencies which encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on “rediscovery,” and it emphatically excludes the “rediscovery of ourselves.” History becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself.³⁹

Similarly, Benjamin theorised a model of history that took difference into account, not, however, that of the divided subject, but of the multiple possibilities present in every moment – what he termed messianic power – potentials ‘covered over’ by the narrativising tendencies of historicism. Observing that ‘[t]here is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,’ Benjamin stressed that these documents exist to tell their version at the price of the suppression of the various potentials of the past, and, in doing so, silence the raft of other stories.⁴⁰ Instead, Benjamin offered the concept of the ‘dialectical image,’ an incendiary collision of the past with the present, which would ‘blast [open] the continuum of history’.⁴¹ Though, as we have seen, Bryher and Benjamin collided in their own moment (and, indeed, were both subsequently forgotten for much of the twentieth century), I shall take Benjamin’s work up in more detail in the next section, when I consider Bryher’s own revisioning of the past and their shared sense of responsibility to its ‘oppressed classes’.

The second point of contention between lesbian and gay history and queer theory has circled around the issue of naming subjects and desires in the past, particularly in periods before the ‘birth’ of the modern homosexual. In the context of her work on the sculptural practice of Sarah Bernhardt, art historian Miranda Mason detects just this distinction in Halberstam’s critique of lesbian history and the queer theorist’s Foucauldian and Sedgwickian inspired methodology of ‘perverse presentism.’⁴² Mason, whose own project works through the challenge of considering whether ‘lesbian queerness can be written *as if* it is transhistorical,’ highlights the reductiveness she feels has been levelled at the term ‘lesbian’.⁴³ In Halberstam’s construction – which aims ‘to judge the meaning of sex in any given historical location and to trace the development of notions of identity and sexual

³⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,’ in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), p.88

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’ in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et al (Cambridge, Mass. & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.392

⁴¹ Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History,’ p.395

⁴² See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp.50-9

⁴³ Miranda Mason, ‘Making Love / Making Work: the Sculpture Practice of Sarah Bernhardt’

selves from within discourses of acts and pleasures’ – Mason detects ‘disdain for the labouring (art) historian,’ and gets a sense that ‘Data is dirty’.⁴⁴

While I think Halberstam is in fact sensitive to the difficulties of naming subjects, and, unlike many queer scholars, highlights her debt to lesbian historians such as Martha Vicinus, Mason’s discussion flags up the mutual hostility that has arisen between lesbian historical efforts and queer-influenced work. In such debates, lesbian history, in the eyes of queer, has mired itself in the stagnant pool of identity politics, while, in Mason’s view, queer sets itself up in opposition, as experimental and ethereal – it does not want to muddy itself with the matter of history. This observation is another manifestation of the more general critique that queer, alongside other poststructuralist theories, is disengaged from the ‘real’ world, that it fails to take into account the materiality of lived lives. Despite her significant attempt to address precisely this in *Bodies that Matter*, both Butler and *Gender Trouble* continue to be cited as illustrations of queer theory’s neglect of the body and materiality. This is evidenced, for instance, in Vicinus’ statement:

For Butler, the performance of gender, and especially present day butch/femme and drag, offer a more viable politics in our postmodern world than identity-based politics, which depends upon privileging one identity over another. I want to turn this argument on its head, and suggest that we historicize lesbian images, which then seem both less fluid and more fixed than Butler’s paradigm suggests. To argue that our subjectivity is constructed through discourse, as she does, is to evade the question of how this discourse itself comes about. We know that there was a language for sexual deviancy before the sexologists, but not one of sexual identities. How this linguistic and attitudinal change occurred cannot be answered by recourse to metaphor or abstraction, but only through careful historical analysis.⁴⁵

This paragraph illustrates what Steven Angelides suggests has in part informed the distinction between the two fields under discussion here. He attributes this difference to ‘an implicit and unproductive distinction between social constructionism and deconstruction,’ which, he argues, exists ‘despite the fact that it is history or, more specifically, an understanding of the historical specificity of Identity, that conditions both of these fields.’⁴⁶

(Unpublished PhD thesis. Leeds, University of Leeds, 2007), p.8

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 9&10. The phrase is borrowed from Gayle Rubin.

⁴⁵ Martha Vicinus, ‘Fin-de-Siècle Theatrics: Male Impersonation and Lesbian Desire’ in *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930*, ed. Billie Melman (New York: Routledge, 1998), p.166

⁴⁶ Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.9

Recently, however, these distinct positions have begun to be muddled. For instance, in her 2005 review of three academic texts which trouble this divide, 'To Be or to Have', McCabe, Bryher's biographer-to-be, coins the term 'queer historicism' – a portmanteau of queer and new historicism – to identify 'a critical trend of locating "identifications" (rather than identity), modes of being and having, in historical contexts.'⁴⁷ She extends this definition: 'Queer historicism, as I see it, arises out of a desire to analyze and situate historical texts as cultural material, fusing the work of excavation with the recognition that sexualities are socially constructed and can take multiple forms.'⁴⁸ It is also a methodology that McCabe herself deploys in a follow up piece, 'Whither Sexuality and Gender?' which takes the same material focus. Here, she illustrates her critical stance through the example of her own work on Bryher, observing, as I cited earlier, that 'this more fluid model' offers her 'a means of perceiving the "ghost effects," the queerness of lesbian figures in modernism.'⁴⁹

In other recent queer historical work, undertaken by scholars such as Love, Dinshaw and Valerie Traub, there has been a move away from pursuing 'effective history' (Foucault's term) to what Love terms 'affective history'.⁵⁰ The frame of the debate has thus shifted from considering whether lesbian or gay people existed at certain points in the past, to questioning why scholars care so much. Rather than asking 'was so and so a lesbian?' the focus has instead moved to consider in what way queer scholars engage emotionally with figures of the past. This recent work in queer history has been influential to my exploration of Bryher's own relationship to the past, to which I now turn my attention. Before moving on to the three chapters, which form the main body of my thesis, then, this chapter ends with a consideration of Bryher's own historical praxis.

Bryher as (Queer) Historian

Although my research focuses on four texts produced by Bryher and POOL during the interwar period, here, I briefly consider Bryher's later identification as a historian, and her work as an author of historical fiction. In a paragraph in *The Heart to Artemis*, which, considering her obvious commitment to both experimental literature and cinema,

⁴⁷ Susan McCabe, 'To Be and to Have: The Rise of Queer Historicism' in *GLQ* 11, 1 (2005): p.120

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.121

⁴⁹ McCabe, 'Whither Sexuality and Gender?' p.28

⁵⁰ Love, *Feeling Backwards*, p.31

seems astounding for its about-face, Bryher recounts the moment she realised that she had been on the ‘wrong path’:

We crossed the Arctic Circle on a bus and as I watched the reindeer moving between the birches, I knew that, apart from my refugees, I had been following the wrong path. I did not belong to the literary movements nor even to a particularly intellectual group. I was an Elizabethan who needed action and the sea. I should only become a writer when I had returned to my proper material and I wondered why I had wasted so much time.⁵¹

This ‘proper material’ was the matter of history. Turning away from the forward-thrusting artistic ‘isms’ of the 1920s and 1930s, and relinquishing her place in the ranks of the avant-garde, Bryher chose to focus her attention on the past.

It was in the run up to the Second World War, writing in her own journal *Life and Letters To-Day*, that Bryher first labelled herself publicly as a historian. She began one article, ‘The Calendar’ (1939), with the statement: ‘*I write as a historian. My business is to record and not to judge.*’⁵² After the war, Bryher would go on to pen eight successful historical novels, projects which meant that, as she described to Norman Holmes Pearson, she ‘needed to know how people acted in everyday life, what they ate, how they drew their swords, what they shouted at each other’.⁵³ Though both statements suggest a belief in an objective (and transparent) relation to the matter of history, Bryher was in fact highly sensitive to the selective and provisional nature of the historical record, how it was anything but neutral.

In her 1963 memoir, as well as referring readers to her devotion to Artemis, Bryher also speaks of her commitment to Clio, the muse of history. Bryher invokes Clio seven times in 362 pages, yet, strikingly, it is most frequently in relation to the *failure* of this relationship. In the first summoning of ‘her mistress,’ Bryher’s younger self is blind to Clio’s offer, while thrice more she felt she had been ‘deserted’ by her muse, and in her final summoning, Bryher simply forgets her, taken over by the adventure of her own life.⁵⁴ Clio, then, may have been her mistress but it was a troubled servitude. This is most obvious in a passage in which Bryher reflects directly on the impossibility of accessing

⁵¹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2006), p. 337

⁵² Bryher, ‘The Calendar,’ *Life and Letters To-Day* 21 (June 1939), p.21. Italics in the original. Similarly, an article published a year earlier had opened with the claim: ‘I write as a historian.’ Bryher, ‘The Crisis: September,’ *Life and Letters To-Day* 19 (November 1938), p.1

⁵³ Bryher to Norman Holmes Pearson, reprinted as ‘Afterward’ in Bryher, *The Player's Boy* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2006), p.199

⁵⁴ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, pp.49, 61, 115, 333 & 339

the past, of directly knowing ‘how things really were,’ to borrow from Benjamin. She writes: ‘We can imagine another age but we cannot leave our own however much we try to transpose ourselves. The centuries pass, a little colour remains but the truest hopes and fears of our ancestors will always be just off focus in the way that we can remember childhood but can never re-experience its emotions.’⁵⁵ This photographic metaphor represents the impossibility of a transparent relationship with the past. It reveals a double failing: we cannot see clearly, however much we desire to, because the past is out of focus, but doubly because the frame is not positioned adequately: it is what is just beyond it that is of real interest, Bryher suggests.

In a remarkable passage, also drawn from *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher recounts the origins of her historical desires:

It was near Euryelus and the ancient walls that I knew Clio for my mistress and that ecstasy, in the Greek and terrifying sense of that word, seized me by the throat. I saw a vision and could hardly breathe. History from Tyre and Carthage to the Pillars of Hercules spun in front of me, waiting for an interpreter, not in separate, narrow lengths but in a single, flowing together wave.⁵⁶

Twenty-five years earlier, in ‘Egypt 1903’ (1938), her retrospective account of her first visit to Egypt as a young girl, Bryher had deployed similar imagery: ‘I could see the past, not as a flat photograph but as a stereoscopic film.’⁵⁷ Like the cinematic image, Bryher recognises, the past is gone – it can only ever be a re-presentation – yet nonetheless it continues to haunt us. Bryher’s imagery, moreover, resonates with Benjamin’s observation in ‘On the Concept of History’ that: ‘The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at an instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.’⁵⁸ As this phrase suggests, new mass technologies, such as cinema, and, in particular, the avant-garde technique of montage, played a pivotal role in Benjamin’s re-conceptualisation of history.

Benjamin’s final essay, ‘On the Concept of History,’ was written in 1940 – a moment when he, and his generation, faced the prospect of being wiped out – and, resultingly, it went unpublished in his lifetime. Comprising 18 discrete sections or

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.61

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.128. Ruth Hoberman has connected this passage with Mary Butts’ depiction of ‘history beckoning her.’ Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women’s Historical Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.90

⁵⁷ Bryher, ‘Egypt, 1903: Part III. The Nile,’ in *Life and Letters To-Day*, 18 (Spring, 1938), p.66

⁵⁸ Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History,’ p.390 Similarly, Radford makes a connection between Bryher’s historical fiction and Benjamin’s work in general. See Radford, ‘A Transatlantic Affair,’ p.55

fragments, the essay has been taken as a historical methodology for his unfinished Arcades project, and offers a philosophy of history which attempted, amongst other things, to account for the ‘others’ of history, to ‘fight for the oppressed past.’⁵⁹ As we have seen, it is a historical methodology deeply sceptical of a progressive, universal historicism, which Benjamin saw as implicated in fascism. He writes:

There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.⁶⁰

In silencing the other stories, the other documents of culture, historicism offers a tale of victors and the powerful, thus ignoring the ‘struggling, oppressed classes’.⁶¹ Benjamin’s contention that history did not just comprise the ‘homogenous, empty time’ of historicism but of ‘time filled full by now-time’ – the messianic freezing of time – provided the means of brushing history against the grain and of ‘blast[ing open] the continuum of history’.⁶²

In place of an “eternal” image of the past,’ associated with historicism, Benjamin’s methodology offered instead a ‘unique experience of the past,’ which, as Uros Cvorovic has stressed, can only take place at a specific moment, since ‘for Benjamin historical objects can only *enter legibility* at certain times, and we can only read them in relation to certain objects from the present only at certain times.’⁶³ My thesis suggests that this is the *now-time* for Bryher, when, through the possibilities opened up by queer theory, her work and life suddenly, and explosively, become legible. Thus, we are able to discern the resonance of that particular moment for offering a different queer story.

Benjamin’s philosophy of history has proved of considerable importance to a range of scholars, including those working from a queer historical perspective, not only because it offers a vision of history distinct from a progressive cycling of epochs, but because of the ethical stance he articulates in relation to the past.⁶⁴ Benjamin writes:

⁵⁹ Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History,’ p.396

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.392

⁶¹ Ibid, p.394

⁶² Ibid, p.395

⁶³ Uros Cvorovic, ‘Dialectical Image Today’ *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 22, 1 (February 2008): p.90. Italics in original.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Vanessa R. Schwartz, ‘Walter Benjamin for Historians,’ *The American Historical Review* 106, 5 (December 2001), pp.1721-42; Roderick A. Ferguson in Dinshaw et al, ‘Theorizing Queer Temporalities,’ p.180; and Love, *Feeling Backwards*, particularly pp.147-152. In his 2009 book, *Cruising Utopia*, José Estaban Muñoz, however, chooses to ‘work with the more eccentric corpus’ of Ernst Bloch rather than Benjamin’s ‘more familiar takes on time, history or loss.’ Commenting upon this decision, Muñoz

Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voice we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones? Don't the women we court have sisters they no longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming is expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply.⁶⁵

We owe a debt to the past, and thus have a responsibility to past generations, who, consequently, have a claim on our messianic power, on our capacity to explore the other stories and consider the possibility of what might have been. This responsibility to the past, however, does not come without pain, as is represented in the figure of Benjamin's backward-facing angel of history. Blown forward by the violent storm of progress, he strains helplessly against its force, yearning to 'stay, awaken the dead, and to make whole what has been smashed.'⁶⁶ As Love observes: 'He is damaged both by the horrible spectacle of the past and by the outrage of leaving it behind.'⁶⁷ The angel desires to redeem past horrors but cannot and has thus become a resonant figure for historians and critics attempting to work with the traumas of the past.

Bryher too felt a responsibility to the past but, unlike Benjamin, never articulated an overt methodology nor outlined a specific ethical stance. She was certainly alive to the fact that the historical record was biased – that it was marked deeply by violence – and produced in accordance with prevailing ideologies, which were masculinist, white, nationalistic, western and heterosexual. Consequently, only certain stories – those predominantly from the victor's perspective – are told (a doctoring which in some respects tallies with the particular stories told by the cinema thanks to 1930s censorship practices, which I explore in Chapter 4). In her historical fiction Bryher depicted the marginalised and un-commemorated, the forgotten and unknown, giving voice to the 'others' of history and thereby offering a creative antidote to the selective and partial nature of the historical record. As Waters observes: 'Where Renault is fascinated with the agents of historical change, Bryher imagines, and *gives voice to*, its subjects.'⁶⁸

writes: 'I have resisted Foucault and Benjamin because their thought has been well mined in the field of queer critique, so much so that these two thinkers' paradigms now feel almost tailor-made for queer studies. I have wanted to look to other sites of theoretical traction.' José Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), p.15

⁶⁵ Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History,' p.390

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.292

⁶⁷ Love, *Feeling Backward*, p.148

⁶⁸ Waters, 'Wolfskins and Togas,' p.236. My italics.

Where Benjamin's was a Marxist-inspired redress of history, and thus had the oppressed working classes at its centre, recent scholarship has read Bryher's fiction as a remedy to the exclusions and silences caused by (hetero)patriarchy, and as a response to women's lack of presence – and voice – in the past. Reading Bryher's three novels set in the classical period, Hoberman contends that she 'collude[d] with Clio [...] as she evokes, under erasure, a world of female power and intimacy.'⁶⁹ Indeed, both Hoberman and Radford have situated Bryher's novels in the context of the feminist anthropological work which was undertaken in the early years of the twentieth century, linking her respectively to Jessie L. Weston and Jane Harrison.⁷⁰ Hoberman also highlights a more personal debt, reminding us that Margaret Murray was Bryher's hieroglyphics teacher.⁷¹

Bryher's *Gate to the Sea* (1958) is set on the island of Poseidonia, which, since the death of Alexander in 323 BCE, had been ruled by the Lucanians. The narrative unfolds over 24 hours, on the only day in the year when the enslaved population is free to speak its own language and worship in its own temple. Discussing this novel, Hoberman has stressed how Bryher 'creat[ed] multiple – sometimes conflicting – narrative perspectives, implying that no single version is sufficient,' and, moreover, that she exposed 'the role power plays in how stories get shaped.'⁷² Such 'undercutting' of historical discourse is, as Hoberman observes, crucial for the practising 'feminist historical novelist' since otherwise she merely replicates the fact of her own oppression.⁷³ Radford also foregrounds Bryher's attention to how historical narratives are moulded. She notes that in the novelist's introduction to *The Coin of Carthage* (1964) Bryher highlights how 'since the Romans destroyed the Carthaginian libraries, the familiar stories about Hannibal are based on Roman sources and that this is "as if England had been defeated in 1940 and we were trying to describe the last hours of London only from enemy accounts."⁷⁴

In contrast to Hoberman's specifically feminist interpretation, Waters has argued that Bryher envisioned a much broader social re-mapping. She averred that 'if Renault was [John Addington] Symonds' twentieth-century heir, Bryher was, perhaps, [Edward] Carpenter's: like him she privileged the ancient manly institution of comradeship, but placed it at the heart of an extensive vision of social transformation involving issues of

⁶⁹ Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, p. 100

⁷⁰ See Radford, 'A Transatlantic Affair,' p.55 and Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, p.7

⁷¹ Bryher acknowledges her debt in *The Heart to Artemis*, pp.158-161 & 174-179

⁷² Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, p.92

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Radford, 'A Transatlantic Affair,' p. 55

class, gender and nationalism, as well as sexuality.⁷⁵ Waters is not alone in connecting the pair, and this, in some respects, more expansive vision of social transformation. Tirza True Latimer has asserted that: ‘Bryher shared Edward Carpenter’s belief that the borderline position occupied by members of the “intermediate sex” represented an ideal middle ground – not completely estranged from nor completely implicated in the prevailing social schema – where polarized factions (racial, sexual, or political) might be led to make peace.’⁷⁶

Bryher’s mid-century shift to the matter of the past was not, then, the clean break with her earlier experimental work that she seems to suggest in *The Heart to Artemis*. Instead, we can read it as another project attempting to speak back, this time against the barbarism of the historical record, and on behalf of the oppressed classes of the past. It was not, however, solely done in the name of the past, for, as Waters has suggested, historical fiction has in fact been a crucial genre for circumventing homophobic censorship, and thus for allowing comment to be made on present conditions. She argues that ‘historical representation has allowed lesbian and gay men to intervene in sexual debate when more obviously ‘contemporary’ dissident voices were being publicly silenced.’⁷⁷ Historical fiction has, then, as much to say about the present as it does the past.

I end this chapter by returning to Bryher’s refusal to be engaged in conversation by H.D.’s biographer, Barbara Guest. In doing so, as well as refusing to be positioned in relation to contemporary identity categories, as I argued earlier, Bryher simultaneously forced Guest to scour the archive for her answers, encouraging her to interpret and, at times, invent the stories of the two women’s lives. Bryher’s refusal to ‘speak’ was not, then, all encompassing, as was the case for the figures such as Walter Pater and Willa Cather, whom Love traces in her book. It was not a total rebuttal, for, as Guest herself acknowledges, the material available to her in the archive contained not mere scraps but ‘whole tablecloths of knowledge’.⁷⁸ Alongside her historical fiction, then, Bryher’s careful efforts to conserve the material traces of both her own, and H.D.’s, life and creative practices, I suggest, were attempts to counteract the exclusions of the historical record, to evidence different lives and different economies of desire. Here, not only do we have a queer archive but a brimming one. In Guest’s account, however, the elderly writer

⁷⁵ Waters, *Wolfskins and Togas*, p.238

⁷⁶ Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/ Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p.36. See also my third chapter, for Andrea Weiss’ connection between Bryher’s performance as the manageress and Carpenter’s notion of the intermediate sex.

⁷⁷ Waters, ‘Wolfskins and Togas,’ p.1

⁷⁸ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p.xi

appeared ambivalent to the address of the researcher. Bryher's diligent preservation of the matter of her work and life reveals, I argue, in contrast to this, a powerful desire to reach out to the future. Rather than the story of liberation and identity-based politics, however, which is the lens Guest brought to her life, what the archive evidences is a moment which vibrates with a specifically queer energy.

In my epigraph, which is drawn from Bryher's 1937 commemorative essay, 'Recognition Not Farewell,' written to mark the death of her contemporary Mary Butts, Bryher anticipated both her generation's descent into obscurity, as well as their resurrection. She writes:

I do not think that the present generation feels literature as we did. They love it, of course, but they have no need of our intense and concentrated passion. They sunbathe at two, have some of their questions answered. It was, however, the sign of our age, the identification students will tag to us, when we are dug out, as the Elizabethans were in the nineteenth century, after the night of forgetting almost sure to come.⁷⁹

When this lost generation is unearthed, the marker it will be tagged with, Bryher contends, the *identification* it will be allotted, is its intense passion and love for literature. This is because, she avers, unlike the present generation, her own did not have the freedom to show their flesh or to have their questions answered. Literature in some way constituted both the answer and a salve for such restrictions, thus becoming not just the object of their intense and concentrated passion but the means of its very production. It is in her writing and in her collaborative cinematic work that Bryher speaks, and, moreover, speaks desirefully. Moving on to the body of my thesis, I use three case studies to explore these various 'queer articulations' and 'veiled disclosures'.

⁷⁹ Bryher, 'Recognition not Farewell,' reproduced in *A Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts*, ed. Christopher Wagstaff (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Co, 1995), pp.5-6. The article also doubled as a review of Butts' recently published autobiography, *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* (1937).

2

***Veiled Disclosures and Queer Articulations:
Reading Scenes in
Bryher's Development and Two Selves***

Expression to her meant life.

— *W. Bryher, Development (1920)*

*Keep the mind straight. Nothing else mattered. It was very
funny. Only they had shut the girl round the corner up.
Easy enough to call anyone queer. Good thing perhaps –
this disassociation trick. If you spoke straight out your
thoughts they called you queer and shut you up.*

— *Bryher, Two Selves (1923)*

In the early summer of 1920 *Development: A Novel by W. Bryher* was published by the London-based Constable & Company. In December it was issued in the US by Macmillan, with the addition of a preface by the American Imagist poet, Amy Lowell.¹ Then, some time after late August – I have been unable to determine when exactly – a second edition was issued by Constable, this time supplemented by Lowell's essay.² Constable was a successful publishing house, which, while it did not specialise in literature – its wide-ranging output included history, memoir, technical and scientific titles, as well as poetry

¹ W. Bryher, *Development: A Novel by W. Bryher* (London: Constable and Company, 1920 1st & 2nd edition); New York: Macmillan, 1920). Throughout the chapter I quote from the University of Wisconsin Press' 2000 reprint of Bryher's autobiographical novels, Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), in which the two texts are published as a duplex. I attribute page numbers to *Development* and *Two Selves* separately, however. These appear in the body of the chapter as 'D' and 'TS' respectively.

² In her 1963 memoir *The Heart to Artemis* Bryher states that within a few weeks of its initial UK publication another printing was required. See Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2006), p. 224. A letter dated August 13 1920 from Constable and Co mentions the need to reprint *Development* and suggests adding Amy Lowell's introduction, which had been written for the American edition. See Constable's letter of 13 August 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3106, Beinecke.

and novels – did, in 1920, feature such recognisable names on the modernist landscape, as Katherine Mansfield (*Bliss and Other Stories*) and George Bernard Shaw (*Captain Brassbound's Conversion*).

As we saw in my introduction, this was not the first time that Annie Winifred Ellerman, then twenty-four, had used the authorial signature, 'W. Bryher;' in 1918, an enthusiastic study of Lowell's poetry had been issued under the same penname.³ Nor was it the last time she would use it. Her second poetry collection, *Arrow Music* (1922) was attributed to W. Bryher, as were a handful of critical pieces published around the same time.⁴ It was, however, a transitional stage on route to Ellerman's most truncated signature – 'Bryher' – which shed the final association with her given name, thus not only casting off her famous patronymic but simultaneously refusing the two-name structure of marital exchange, which requires women to take their husband's surname (indeed, by 1921 Ellerman had contracted her first 'intellectual marriage' to the American writer Robert McAlmon). 'Bryher' was the name which the author used from 1923 – when she published her second autobiographical novel, *Two Selves* – until her death in 1983 (although she only formally changed it by Deed Poll in 1950). It was both her authorial signature and the name she was known by amongst friends, as well as being used in more formal situations too. Indeed, Bryher stated emphatically in *The Heart to Artemis* (1963) that 'under English law it is incorrect to speak of it as a pseudonym.'⁵ In this chapter, I refer to both the author and the historical subject as 'Bryher'.

Although her chosen name evokes an island community, and thus gestures to a desire for separation, in this chapter I argue that the author was in fact attempting to enact precisely the opposite. I suggest that both *Development*, and Bryher's subsequent novel, *Two Selves* (1923), comprise an effort to articulate queerly, to speak out – rather than come out – as a subject who desired differently. In doing so, Bryher, I suggest, sought to forge a queer reading community to remedy the social isolation experienced both by herself and other queer subjects. Indeed, as we shall see, the act or practice of reading recurs in her texts. Yet, as my two epigraphs, both of which are drawn from Bryher's protagonist, Nancy, suggest, the desire for expression clashed with the fear of being 'called queer' and 'shut up'. Introducing the concept of the veiled disclosure, I explore the creative negotiations Bryher undertook in order to produce her queer articulations – the oblique

³ W. Bryher, *Amy Lowell: A Critical Appreciation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918).

⁴ W. Bryher, *Arrow Music* (London: J. & E. Bumpus, 1922); W. Bryher, 'The Girl-Page in Elizabethan Literature.' *Fortnightly Review* 113 (1920): pp.442-52; W. Bryher, 'Spear-shaft and Cyclamen Flower.' *Poetry* 19 (1922): pp.333-37.

utterances and potential joinings – in this censorious period. Before moving on to examine two particular scenes of reading, the autobiographical and the sexological, in order to contextualise Bryher's project further, in this introductory section I map out the critical reception (both in the early and late twentieth century) of *Development* and *Two Selves*.

According to Bryher it was the English journalist and editor, Clement Shorter, who helped her secure her first publishing deal with Constable.⁶ From 1891, Shorter edited the *Illustrated London News* and went on to found the magazines, *The Sphere* (1900) and *The Tatler* (1903), all three of which, Bryher's father, John Reeves Ellerman, purchased during the First World War.⁷ In 1920 Ellerman was also a major shareholder in four national papers, which, alongside the Ellermans' connection with Shorter, perhaps goes some way to explaining why Bryher's first novel received such a wealth of critical attention.⁸ Critical and readerly interest peaked in early July as *Development* became embroiled in an on-going debate about girls' schools and educational reform, which led to a flurry of letters in the *Daily Mail*, even garnering a contribution from Angela Brazil, the popular author of school girls' stories, such as *A Harum-Scarum Schoolgirl* (1919) and *A Princess of the School* (1920).⁹ Bryher attributes the second printing of *Development* to this furore.¹⁰

The narrative of *Development* traces the growth and maturation of a fictional protagonist, Nancy, from the age of four to eighteen, a period that parallels the birth and adolescence of the twentieth century. *Development* comprises three 'books', the first of which – 'Epic Childhood' – features various episodes in Nancy's unusual childhood, as she travels extensively with her parents in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Her love affair with the 'South' – which encompasses Italy, Spain, but most crucially, Greece – begins here. At fifteen this exhilarating freedom is suddenly and painfully curtailed, as

⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.224

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See 'Biographical Note' to the Clement King Shorter Papers held at the Special Collections Department of University of Delaware Library at <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/findaids/shorterc.htm>. Accessed on 17 November 2009.

⁸ The newspapers were the *Financial Times*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and the *Evening Standard*. See W.D Rubinstein, 'Ellerman, Sir John Reeves, first baronet (1862-1933)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, 2006) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32995>. Accessed on 14 November 2007.

⁹ For accounts of the furore see Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.224; and Joanne Winning, 'Introduction' in Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.xxi; as well as Bryher's own collection of newspaper clippings in Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Folders 3110-1, Beinecke. Diana Collecott, in her reading of *Two Selves*, draws a parallel between a particular scene of banter and Brazil's schoolgirl novels. See Diana Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance' in *Romance Revisited*, eds. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p. 134

¹⁰ See Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.224

Nancy is sent to ‘Downwood’, a two-year period covered by the appositely titled, ‘Book II: Bondage’.¹¹ Nancy observes:

Downwood was a dust-heap of dead individualities. The girls filed out, face after listless face. It was unbearable to think that these would leave and others take their place, to be ground to the same pattern by the same machine, and nobody moved, nothing was done to alter or improve. (D114)

This restrictive mould is the expectation that upper-middle class women need only be educated for marriage, for the roles of wife and mother. Girls’ schools, Bryher’s text simultaneously reveals and criticises, offer limited horizons for young women, as well as working as integral cogs in the reproduction of the gendered status quo.

It was the school chapters that caused the furore in the *Daily Mail* and which Bryher eventually chose to defend. She responded to accusations of misrepresentation and fictionalisation by asserting their basis in fact, stating in her letter to the newspaper that: ‘I went to ‘Downwood’ in May 1910 and left in 1912. Every incident in the school portion of my book ‘Development’ is founded on actual fact.’¹² Nancy, then, is the fictional persona of Bryher. *Development* is a retrospective account in which Bryher invests Nancy with a critical consciousness which she herself, as Annie Winifred Ellerman, would, and could, not have possessed. Nancy ‘speaks back’ retroactively on behalf of Annie Winifred Ellerman.¹³

The final section of *Development*, ‘Transition,’ follows Nancy’s first post-school year, moving from her initial excitement at her release from captivity to her realisation that life outside the boarding school is just as cramped and confining for a young woman in Edwardian society, as that inside. Indeed, from the very start of *Development*, Bryher’s text highlights the rift between Nancy’s desire ‘to be a boy and go to sea’ (D 24) and the external pressure to conform to an upper-middle class ideal of normative femininity: ‘a wet draggling skirt made impediment at each step. Would she were out in a boy’s suit, free

¹¹ ‘Downwood’ resonates with Charlotte Brontë’s grim school, ‘Lowood,’ in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Indeed, in her preface to Bryher’s first novel, Amy Lowell asks: ‘Is *Development* the granddaughter of *Jane Eyre* or *Obermann*?’ Amy Lowell, ‘Preface’ in Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, Wisconsin and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.7

¹² Bryher cited in Winning, ‘Introduction,’ p.xxii

¹³ It is an interesting aside, I think, that a number of Bryher’s close contemporaries would similarly break the repressive mould instituted at Queenswood School, Eastbourne. Bryher’s close friend, Dorothy Pilley Richards (1894-1986), became a well known mountaineer while the slightly younger Martita Hunt (1900-1969) went on to be a famous stage and screen actress on both sides of the Atlantic, and is perhaps best known for her performance as Miss Haversham in David Lean’s *Great Expectations* (1946). See Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.143

and joyous and careless as a boy is.’ (D 138). As we shall see, this gendered schism becomes even more evident in *Two Selves*.

Development is fragmented and episodic in nature. As one reviewer noted, ‘Like the parents, the incidents are so tenuous that almost anybody will be able to say that the book has no plot,’ and instead we are steeped in Nancy’s passionate and deeply affective engagement with the world.¹⁴ Everything is seen through Nancy’s eyes. It is an existence infused with colour, at once both impressionistic and imagistic. Moreover, *Development* is concerned with perception: in Nancy, Bryher offers an interpretation of life that is highly visual, indeed, as I will explore later on, she boasts the unusual faculty of being a ‘colour-hearer’ and thus of seeing different hues when she reads. *Development* maps Nancy’s intellectual growth, the maturation of her feelings, and her particular insights. This unique perspective comes from a distinctly feminine subject position, one enforced by traditional social understandings of gender difference, yet one that is simultaneously in revolt against these constraints.

Although everything is filtered through Nancy’s perceptions, however, as Clemence Dane brings to attention in her review, ‘she [‘W. Bryher’] will not let the child speak for herself,’ and while as readers we are party to Nancy’s thoughts, they are screened from the (few) other textual figures.¹⁵ Nancy is not only, then, an isolated and hidden figure, but, in relation to the social environment conjured in the text, a voiceless one too. For all of the geographical expansiveness of her early travels, the text is, at the same time, insular, solipsistic, and, in the school chapters and afterwards, claustrophobic. *Development* is like an echo chamber, resounding with Nancy’s trapped thoughts.

Nancy, however, draws solace and a measure of freedom from her engagement with Western literature. She is an insatiable reader and knowledge seeker, and *Development* is textured with lines and extracts from an assortment of literary sources, which are woven into and between Bryher’s own lines. *Development* is a bricolage, as Dane picks up in her observation that Bryher/Nancy (in this review, as in a number, the writer and her protagonist seem to merge into one another) is like the Caddis Fly in Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies* (1862-3): ‘hard at work plastering her own cramped shell with sticks, and straws, and bright pebbles, and bits of other people’s gold, and bits of other people’s

¹⁴ Unattributed, *Sketch* 11 August 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke.

¹⁵ Clemence Dane, ‘A Champion of Childhood,’ unattributed, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

rubbish.’¹⁶ Yet, however limited, ‘the building instinct is there,’ and Nancy yearns to write too: ‘The intervals of her reading Nancy filled with her own manuscript, wrought neither of imagination nor remembered stories but of the one experience she knew from end to end — herself.’ (D 169).¹⁷ Living, reading and writing are intertwined and interrelated in Bryher’s text. The final chapter, ‘Visual Imagination,’ is a meditation on creativity and artistic production. Almost epigrammatic in fashion, it stresses the need for both freedom and experience in order for both to flourish, neither of which, as we have seen, are available to Nancy as an upper-middle class young woman. She asks: ‘What was England but a wallpaper of rigid pattern in art, in education, in life?’ and continues by observing: ‘False realities stamped — pink buds or decayed leaves — upon the acquiescent papers of their minds.’ (D 177). The visual element of Bryher’s text – and Nancy’s consciousness – is evidenced here, as social realities are transformed into images, into pink buds and decayed leaves. In response, Nancy offers an alternative image, a geographic one, animated by life: ‘As long as winds breathed and dawn flowered there was her own South to welcome her, the South itself to answer her “Beauty lives”’ (D 177).

Lowell’s preface also frames *Development* in terms of the protagonist’s desire to write, stating that ‘Nancy is evidently a writer born’ and stresses her singularity, as well as her separation from society, observing that: ‘this brooding child needed human contact if ever mortal did.’¹⁸ Lowell muses upon literary genre too, wondering first whether *Development* was an ‘autobiographical novel [or] the autobiography masquerading as a novel,’ and later observed that ‘our, author, or her puppet, is a baffling and intriguing personality.’¹⁹ Finally, she completely collapses the distinction between Nancy and Bryher when she labels *Development* an ‘illuminating bit of autobiography.’²⁰ Indeed, its relationship to the genre of life writing proved to be a point of concern for the majority of critics.

Despite being subtitled *A Novel* and despite the fact that it features a protagonist called Nancy and is written in the third person, the general consensus was that *Development* was autobiographical. According to the reviewer in the *Saturday Review*, for instance:

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lowell, ‘Preface’, pp. 8&10

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.7&12

²⁰ Ibid.

Genuine autobiography is not easy to disguise, and though Miss Bryher writes throughout in the third person, one never has any doubt that this self-centred, passionate record of a young girl's mental and emotional development is a veritable human document.²¹

In 'Hypertrophy,' the critic in *The Athenaeum*, commented acerbically: 'This book is described as a novel; we should prefer to call it a warning [... an] absurd autobiography of a poor stuffed owl, with its beak or nose in the air.'²² In the *Times Literary Supplement* it was described as 'an essay in autobiography, a note-book rather than a novel,'²³ and, similarly, in *The Graphic*, 'J.M.B.' called it both an 'essay in autobiography' and an 'unusual essay in fiction'.²⁴ Other reviewers, like Lowell, collapsed Bryher and Nancy into each other.

At the extreme end of this interpretation were the notices which cast *Development* as a diary and read it as devoid of any literary intent or crafting. The reviewer in the *Daily News*, for instance, believed that it was 'written without any art at all, and with no more distinctive style than a girl would use in her diary,' while in the *Weekly Dispatch*, it was noted disdainfully that '[t]he rage for self-revelation has now spread even to our flappers.'²⁵ Shorter himself tagged the novel, 'the most remarkable example of self-revelation by a girl since the famous diary of Marie Bashkirtseff'.²⁶ Twinning Bryher's text with the infamous name, 'Bashkirtseff,' was most certainly a publishing ploy and, indeed, an advertisement exclaimed: 'A New Marie Bashkirtseff: *Development* by Winifred Bryher'.²⁷ This phrase was also emblazoned on the novel's dust jacket following its second printing. I return to the critical discomfort over *Development*'s troubling of genre later in the chapter.

There were a few reviewers, however, who did comment upon the text's experimentalism and its nod to various avant-garde circles. Louis J. McQuilland, writing

²¹ Unattributed, *Saturday Review*, n.d. Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

²² 'Hypertrophy,' *The Athenaeum*, 30 July 1920, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

²³ 'Development,' *Times Literary Supplement*, n.d. Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

²⁴ 'J.M.B.,' 'Miss Bryher's 'Development: The Autobiography of a Precocious Girl,' *The Graphic*, 19 July 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

²⁵ 'Development,' *Daily News*, 14 July 1920; *Weekly Dispatch*, 18 July 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

²⁶ Unattributed, 'A Young Girl's Self-Revelation,' n.d. Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke. The Russian feminist artist, Marie Bashkirtseff (1859-1884), kept a journal from the age of twelve, which was selectively published following her death at twenty-six of tuberculosis. Upon its publication in France in 1887 (and later in England in 1890) it caused a critical furore. See Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, 'New Introduction' in Marie Bashkirtseff, *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff* (London: Virago, 1985), pp. vii-xxx; and Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Pandora, 1992).

in the *Daily Express*, noted that ‘While the French Parnassians played with vowels, Nancy, the mouthpiece of M. Bryher in this affected but quite interesting volume, pirouettes with consonants,’ and ended pointedly: ‘Everyone writes *vers libres* now, except the poets.’²⁸ Another critic, presumably reviewing the first edition of the book, suggested that Nancy would benefit from reading Amy Lowell’s polyphonic prose. Others, however, likened Nancy to Dorothy Richardson’s Miriam Henderson in her *Pilgrimage* series, framing the work both in terms of Richardson’s literary experimentalism as well as Miriam’s New Womanhood. Writing in the *London Opinion*, James Douglas, for instance, observed in his usual sardonic tone: ‘W. Bryher, nevertheless, is a very clever creature, and she may be Dorothy Richardson for all I know.’²⁹

Although at the end of the book readers are told that ‘The author has in preparation a second volume to be entitled *Adventure*, in which the story of *Development* will be continued’(D 177), it was a book entitled *Two Selves*, which appeared three years later in 1923, under the authorship of ‘Bryher’. The novel’s affiliation with her 1920 text, however, was highlighted in another note to the reader: “This is a continuation of *Development* published some three years ago.” (*Two Selves* n.p.) This second volume was issued by Bryher and McAlmon’s Paris-based Contact Publishing Company.³⁰ Alongside, *Two Selves*, the press published a range of fellow modernists, including James Joyce, Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein. Contact and *Two Selves* were embedded in the modernist and Sapphic milieu of left-bank Paris, where, as we saw in my introduction, Bryher mixed with Monnier and Beach, Man Ray, Kiki and Berenice Abbott amongst others. This shift in both publisher and location, away from the British literary mainstream into the territory of the Parisian avant-garde and high modernism, no doubt contributed to

²⁷ Unattributed advertisement, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder, 3111, Beinecke.

²⁸ Louis J. McQuilland, *Daily Express*, 19 [?] 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box, 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke. Stéphane Mallarmé was of huge significance to Bryher. She dedicated *The Heart to Artemis* to the French symbolist poet, as well as beginning her memoir with the statement: ‘When I was born in September, 1894, Dorothy Richardson’s Miriam was a secretary. Mallarmé had just retired and was no longer teaching English to French schoolboys.’ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.1

²⁹ James Douglas, ‘NANCY,’ *London Opinion* 17 July 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box, 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke. Similarly, the reviewer in the *Spectator* observed: ‘Nancy – who is the author – has a mind like Richardson’. Unattributed, ‘Two Novels,’ *Spectator*, December 11 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box, 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke. Indeed, Bryher had long admired Richardson’s work, and would, in a matter of years, deploy her Parisian connections, namely Beach, to contact the British author, which initiated a life-long friendship. Moreover, Joanne Winning draws a direct correlation between Nancy’s fractured subjectivity in *Two Selves* and Miriam’s experience of ‘a splitting of selves in gender and sexual terms.’ She adds further, that ‘this image of “two selves,”’ might also be read in relation to the twinning of Richardson and ‘her creation Miriam Henderson’ so that ‘Miriam becomes a screen onto which Richardson can project social and sexual dissent.’ As we shall see, this was similarly the case with Bryher’s use of Nancy. Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.69.

the critical indifference shown to the novel. *Two Selves* received a single review in the *Manchester Guardian*, in which Nancy was again found tiresome – ‘an arrogant egoist’ – and which, once again, situated Bryher’s work in the realm of life writing, observing that: ‘Bryher’ is a young woman, or a remarkable imitation of one, and it is difficult to avoid the identification of the narrator with the author.’³¹

Two Selves takes up Nancy’s narrative where *Development* left off, with Downwood ‘a memory two years old and [yet] her soul was no farther.’ (TS 189). Over eleven chapters, beginning with ‘Two Selves’ and ending in ‘Meeting’, we follow Nancy as she sullenly attends tea parties and suppers, while trying to pursue a modicum of freedom through fencing and learning Greek and Arabic. As the title suggests, the conflict between Nancy’s desires and external expectations and pressures has worsened. It begins:

Two selves. Jammed against each other, disjointed and ill-fitting. An obedient Nancy with heavy plaits tied over two ears that answered ‘yes, no, yes, no,’ according as the wind blew. A boy, a brain, that planned adventures and sought wisdom. (TS 183).

The novel follows her attempts to keep herself afloat and, ultimately, to break free from the stultifying position as an upper-middle class young woman. The mantra Nancy chants to herself throughout *Two Selves* runs: ‘Write a book and make them understand. Write a book. And find she had a friend.’ (TS 221). At the bleakest moment of the narrative, Nancy contemplates suicide:

Shrug one’s shoulders and watch the sea. If there were no other way, walk forward. Into the waves. Life was straight and death was straight but between them was a lie. Life one loved. The gulls, the wind. But if it were impossible to have truth otherwise, go forward. Till the water clashed into the ears. Arms at the sides, the Viking way. (TS 286)

Nancy, however, draws back from the maw and shortly after this, while holidaying in Cornwall, she engineers a meeting with a nameless female poet, who figures as the narrative apotheosis: ‘A tall figure opened the door. Young. A spear flower if a spear could bloom.’ (TS 289). As H.D. scholar, Diana Collecott, observes in her reading of *Two*

³⁰ Bryher, *Two Selves* (Paris: Contact Publishing, 1923).

³¹ A.N.M., ‘Two Selves,’ *Manchester Guardian* 18 January 1924, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box, 81, Folder 3256, Beinecke.

Selves as lesbian romance, in which Nancy is cast as the heroic quester: ‘The entire trajectory of the plot is traced in this transition between ‘two selves’ and ‘two lives’.³²

This was not the reader’s last meeting with Nancy, who would appear again in Bryher’s *West* (1925), where, along with her friend, the American poet, Helga Brandt, she ranges North America, from New York to the West Coast, where they visit an artists’ colony and encounter California’s nascent film industry, before heading eastwards again, back to Europe. Like *Development*, *West* was issued by a London-based publisher, Jonathan Cape. Founded in 1919, by 1925 Cape was already a prominent British publishing house, with an emphasis on arts and literature, and, only three years later, it would publish Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). *West*, like *Development* before it, received favourable critical attention and was reviewed widely.³³ In the same year, Nancy made her final appearance in the short prose piece ‘South,’ which appeared in McAlmon’s *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (1925).³⁴ Like *West*, it features Nancy travelling, this time by boat to Greece, accompanied once again by Helga and a melange of fellow passengers. In both of the 1925 texts Nancy is no longer split into ‘two selves’ and is instead rendered as a social being: other characters are introduced into the narrative and Nancy speaks with a public voice. Though both texts feature Nancy, *West* and ‘South’ are notable departures from the formal and stylistic innovations of *Development* and *Two Selves*, and, following Joanne Winning and Wisconsin University Press, I read the two earlier texts as a discrete pair.

So, to summarise, we have a flux across the channel, between the marginal, modernist and *queer* centre of Paris and – in this particular instance – the mainstream literary hub of London (and, in *Development*’s case, New York too). We have two books well-received and issued by large publishing houses and one volume, plus a short piece, which were effectively self-published and which were critically ignored. This is intriguing. Why would Bryher choose to issue her second novel with a small press on the continent, when her first had been so well received, and even required a second printing? Was it simply because Constable & Co. rejected it? Or, was it a considered choice, perhaps made because publication in Paris meant a more select audience and, moreover, one removed from familial connections? In this instance, the archive does not provide an

³² Collecott, ‘Bryher’s *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance,’ p.131

³³ For reviews of *West* see Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 88, folder 3277, Beinecke.

³⁴ Bryher, *West* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1925). In the same year Cape also published a geography book by Bryher: see Bryher, *A Picture Geography for Little Children. Part one: Asia*. Illustrated by M. D. Cole. (London: Jonathon Cape, 1925). Bryher, ‘South’ in *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (Dijon: Contact, 1925). ‘South (from a book now being written)’ was also issued in *This Quarter* 1, 1925, pp.182-93.

answer. Suggestively, however, in an episode towards the end of *Two Selves*, Nancy tells her friend, Doreen, that her own book was refused by a publisher and that she was advised to ‘give it a romantic ending and take it back.’ (TS 283). Nancy rebuffs this idea, saying: ‘I don’t feel romantic. And I have to feel things before I can write them.’ (TS 283). With these questions in mind, I now move on to consider the very different critical reception which *Development* and *Two Selves* received at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Despite Bryher’s own efforts to have *Development* (but neither *Two Selves* nor *West*) reissued in 1952 by her American publishers, Pantheon Books, all of her early texts remained out of print until 2000, when *Development* and *Two Selves* were reissued by the University of Wisconsin Press.³⁵ Published in duplex form as *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, it was edited and introduced by the British literary scholar, Joanne Winning. This publication took place, then, within an academic arena, and was a result of the growing critical interest in Bryher, which arose from two overlapping sites – firstly, from work by scholars involved in the re-assessment of the gender (and sexuality) of modernism. And, secondly, thanks to the rise of gay and lesbian studies, queer and transgender theories, which offered novel frameworks for reading and interpreting texts which had not fitted into (lesbian) feminist theorising (as H.D.’s had done).

On the back cover of *Two Novels*, the publishers suggest that the book straddles a range of genres, listing: ‘Literature/Gay & Lesbian Studies/ Women’s Studies/ Autobiography’. A quotation from Collecott situates it more firmly in the second and fourth categories, asserting that the book: ‘Offers rare insights into gay life in the first quarter of the twentieth century.’³⁶ Further down the back cover, Susan Stanford Friedman comments: ‘Bryher’s novels have a strong place in the history of lesbian and transgendered writing. This volume is sure to be a useful tool for modernist studies, women’s studies, and queer, gay, and lesbian studies.’³⁷ (TN, back cover). Such interpretations, which locate Bryher’s texts in the realm of lesbian writing or autobiography, are not, however, limited to the academic arena. After expressing delight at seeing Bryher’s early texts back in print, an anonymous Amazon review playfully referred to *Development* as the ‘story of

³⁵ After thanking her for the opportunity to read *Development*, Kurt Wolff (of Pantheon) replied: ‘I think the problem with the book for the average reader would lie in the fact that the story is so exclusively focused on Nancy, and in that you, I am sure for good reasons, did not give anything of the atmosphere of the girl’s ambiente, no father, no mother, brother, sister, home.’ Kurt Wolff to Bryher, 29 September 1952, Bryher Papers, Mass GEN 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3108, Beinecke. I return to Nancy’s isolation later in the chapter.

³⁶ Diana Collecott cited in Bryher, *Two Novels*, back cover.

³⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman cited in Bryher, *Two Novels*, back cover.

the artist as young dyke'.³⁸ Although raising the spectre of Bryher's contemporary, James Joyce, this (mis)quotation was in fact borrowed from film scholar B. Ruby Rich, who was describing artist Sadie Benning's early 'autobiographical' video work, such as *Me and Rubyfruit* (1989) and *If Every Girl Had a Diary* (1990a). It is a pertinent connection since Benning's work, like Bryher's two texts, filches and pilfers gleefully from a disparate range of texts in order to forge the means to tell, creatively and differently, the story of a young lonely queer subject.³⁹

Set alongside the contemporary critical reception of Bryher's texts, these comments invite a number of questions. What accounts for this critical difference? How do these texts so clearly signify lesbian (life) writing to later readers, when this was certainly not legible to earlier ones? While Nancy was variously described as 'appalling',⁴⁰ 'not exactly an ordinary girl',⁴¹ a 'queer child',⁴² 'a freak' and 'a sedulous ape,'⁴³ terms which, admittedly, seem highly suggestive now, she was never read explicitly as lesbian, invert or as any category which might have inferred female same-sex desire. Yet, coincidentally, two English critics who feature prominently, and not for any good reason, in the history of lesbian writing, reviewed Bryher's novel. Clemence Dane (the penname of Winifred Ashton (1888-1965)), whose *Regiment of Women* (1917) is similarly set in a girls school just before the First World War, and which offers a damning depiction of charged relationships between school girls and their female teachers, failed to detect a similar threat in *Development*.⁴⁴ In a mostly sympathetic review, the worst Dane has to throw at Nancy is 'prig'.⁴⁵ Secondly, we have James Douglas, who would, only eight years later, vociferously attack Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, claiming infamously that reading it would be worse for children than a dose of prussic acid. His critical hyperbole effectively

³⁸ 'A customer,' amazon.com web page for Bryher's *Two Novels*, at http://www.amazon.com/Bryher-Novels-Development-Lesbian-Autobiographies/product-reviews/0299167747/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1. Accessed on 10/12/2009.

³⁹ B. Ruby Rich, 'New Queer Cinema,' reproduced in *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michelle Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004 [1992]), p.22. Rich wrote: 'With an absolute economy of means, Benning constructed a *Portrait of the Artist as Young Dyke* such as we've never seen before.' Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Observer*, June 27 1920, and *Evening Standard*, August 4 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke.

⁴¹ *The Bookman*, August 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke.

⁴² Polygon Amor, *Women's Supplement*, August 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke.

⁴³ Douglas, 'NANCY,' Beinecke.

⁴⁴ Despite the predictably depressing ending there is pleasure to be found in the text, which, as Alison Hannigan also notes in her introduction to Virago's *Lesbian Landmarks*' edition of 1995, repeatedly undermines Dane's moral lesson, particularly in her depiction of the arch fiend of the novel, egomaniacal teacher, Clare Hartill. See Alison Hannigan, 'Introduction,' in Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women* (London, Virago Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ Dane, 'A Champion of Childhood,' Beinecke.

started the chain of events which led to the novel's banning in late 1928 (we will meet both Douglas and Hall again in my next chapter, which considers this pivotal moment more closely). Douglas was less enamoured of Nancy than Dane, labelling her 'a funny fish [...] a freak,' and, paying no attention to Bryher's critique of the current state of girls' education, argued perversely that Nancy needed to be schooled into uniformity. He averred that education was exactly what she required: it was 'the machine which forces you to be, not like yourself, but like everybody else'.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Douglas failed to detect the sort of Child- and nation-threatening menace that he would denounce in Stephen Gordon later in the decade. Indeed, unlike Hall's novel, neither *Development* nor *Two Selves* were banned.

Perhaps the most obvious response to the question of this difference in critical reception is the fact that in the teens of the twentieth century, as Jodie Medd has argued, lesbianism was 'not the love that dare not speak its name, but a love that *has no name* or does not know what name to speak'.⁴⁷ Accordingly, female same-sex desire was less unspeakable than *unknowable*. For the majority of the British population, then, love between women was simply unimaginable. Indeed, as I discussed in my introduction, female same-sex desire was never legislated against in Britain for exactly this reason. In this respect, then, the difference between contemporary and twenty-first century interpretations of *Development* concerns knowledge, and, more precisely, who exactly knew what, and when. In the early 1920s, then, there was no coherent public image of the lesbian. As Doan and Winning have both argued, and as I shall take up in my next chapter, a coherent concept of the lesbian or invert would begin to concretise through the English media's circulation of photographs of the dapper dresser, Radclyffe Hall, during the obscenity trial of *The Well of Loneliness* in late 1928. Nonetheless, this chapter imagines that there might have been a number of readers who would have been sensitive to Nancy's 'difference'.

As the discussion which took place in the House of Lords reveals there were a selection of people who clearly did 'know' about female same-sex desire: those figures who were involved in legislating on and disciplining sexuality, and particularly its deviant manifestations. Alongside the judicial arena, there was also the nascent science of sex or sexology, with its sprawling classificatory systems, which taxonomised and labelled a vast

⁴⁶ Douglas, 'NANCY,' Beinecke.

⁴⁷ Jodie Medd, "'The Cult of the Clitoris': Anatomy of a National Scandal,' *Modernism/Modernity* 9,1 (2002): p.47

array of non-normative subjecthoods. But this new knowledge was heavily policed and considerable efforts were made to confine and contain such books and treatises as Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) and Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds' *Sexual Inversion* (1887) to 'correct' readerships, in other words, to white male middle class professionals working in the medico-juridical arenas. Despite such efforts, however, as Doan has argued in *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001) it was during the interwar period that sexological ideas began to spread gradually to a (select) non-medical readership. Moreover, as we saw in my introduction, Doan traces the influence that sexological models had on 'lesbian' writers and their representations in this period, a consideration which sets Bryher's *Development* and *Two Selves* beside Hall's infamous novel and Rose Allatini's 1918 novel *Despised and Rejected*.⁴⁸ Alongside other recent projects, Doan illustrates that aside from these medico-juridical practitioners, a number of, mostly, upper-middle class, white women and men – so, a select and materially privileged audience – also managed to acquire and consume sexological texts. Even so, thanks to this recent scholarly reassessment of sexology, work that has included re-issuing sexological writings, considerably more is now known about the pseudo-science than would have been in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁹

This critical difference between contemporary reviewers and early twenty-first century ones also undoubtedly has much to do with the development of feminist, lesbian and gay, transgender and queer theories over the last couple of decades. Novel critical frameworks have been developed which mean that Bryher's texts are now of scholarly interest, and are now legitimate objects of research. This, then, concerns a shift in institutional notions of what actually constitutes knowledge.

In a similar vein, we must attribute at least part of the critical difference to the fact that more is now known about Bryher's life and milieu. Thanks to the archival work undertaken by Guest, Benstock, Hanscombe and Smyers in the 1980s, the details of Bryher's life are now readily available to interested readers (even if in these accounts her life is overshadowed by H.D.'s). Consequently, we know Bryher lived and loved queerly, and that knowledge necessarily affects our interpretation of her texts. We possess the 'key' to unlock her *romans a clef*: we know that Helga Brandt is a version of H.D., Miss Lyall, Amy Lowell and so on. We know too that the narrative of *Development* and *Two*

⁴⁸ See Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp.126-250

Selves draws heavily upon Bryher's own experiences as a young woman. There are also the later, 'straighter' memoirs, *The Heart to Artemis* and *The Days of Mars*, which corroborate this, revisiting Annie Winifred Ellerman's girlhood, and telling a similar tale, only in the public voice of Bryher, the seasoned historical novelist.

As a result of such critical endeavours, we know too that H.D. and Bryher were in some way both 'saved' by their meeting in July 1918, a moment which they not only celebrated annually but which both women revisited repeatedly in their work across their lives. As Collecott has noted: 'theirs was not only a relationship between writers but a writing relationship.'⁵⁰ While *Development* and *Two Selves* (as well as *West*) clearly are a tribute to H.D., here, I will not be reading Nancy's narrative as a text penned for the poet's eyes only. Instead, I argue that Bryher's texts are an attempt to engage the attention of a wider audience of queer readers, or anyone who reads for difference, by which I mean, anyone invested in resisting normative or mainstream interpretations and modes of textual consumption, or, as Nancy herself puts it, they are for 'someone with a mind' (TS 263). As my reading illustrates, however, such readers would also have required a significant level of knowledge too.

This critical difference, however, might also, I want to suggest, be a consequence of Winning/Wisconsin's decision to couple *Development* and *Two Selves* by publishing them as a duplex. In other words, it is to do with the suturing together of a narrative whose telos then becomes a meeting with a woman, an event which, the texts suggest, allows Nancy to write, and which heals her split self. If this is the case, it goes some way to explaining Bryher's fracturing of her protagonist's narrative over two – and, in total, four – separate prose pieces. It also offers an explanation, I suggest, as to why she issued *Two Selves* through her own press in Paris (that interwar queer and modernist retreat), thus fragmenting Nancy's queer trajectory, and veiling it from potentially hostile eyes. As a

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds. *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998) and Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ivan Crozier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁵⁰ Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance', p.129. Bryher's early texts attest to the balsam of love, and are a tribute to H.D., whose poetry is present from the beginning. A line from H.D.'s long poem 'The Gift,' published in her first poetry collection, *Sea Garden* (1916), functions as the epigraph for 'Epic Childhood': 'The world is yet unspoilt for you' (D 19). While, a verse from the lengthy 'The Islands,' which was published in the poet's second collection, *Hymen* (1921) opens 'Book III: Transition' (in other words this fragment was a literary debut). *Hymen* was itself a gift to Bryher – its dedication ran: 'For Bryher and Perdita'. H.D., *Collected Poems: 1912-1944*, ed. Louis L. Martz. (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), p.101. Bryher's use of H.D.'s poetry continued in *Two Selves*, with lines from an early poem 'Priapus,' (later retitled 'Orchard' and collected in *Sea Garden*) woven into the body of Bryher's own text. Bryher's autobiographical novels also attest to the healing properties of words and to Nancy's experience as a reader of H.D.'s poetry.

trilogy (and a bit) Nancy's tale was most readily available to a particular group of readers, notably those who lived in, or visited Paris, and who frequented the rue de l'Odéon, where both Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach's bookshops were situated, and through which Bryher's text would have been sold and circulated. Indeed, by 1923, Bryher was not only good friends with Monnier and Beach, but had trawled the Parisian bars and cafes with McAlmon, as well as having met the city's famous residents, such as Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. It is suggestive too that while Bryher does refer to both *Development* and *West* in her later memoirs, *Two Selves* is never mentioned.

Finally, this difference might also in part derive from the experimentalism of Bryher's texts and her refusal of realism (though, as I will go on to discuss, this striking facet of *Development* was repeatedly covered over by a number of critics, who sought instead to position the book as straight autobiography). Winning has argued that writers such as Stein, H.D., Bryher and Virginia Woolf, 'avoid censure by employing fragmented, dissimulating techniques of modernism [...] as a kind of "escape route" for lesbian representation.'⁵¹ Modernist writing techniques, Winning suggests, acted as 'a kind of "cover" to avoid censure.'⁵² As an example, Winning compares Woolf's 1928 playful, fantastical biography, *Orlando* – dubbed the longest love letter in history, by Sackville West's son, Nigel Nicolson, and which went on to be Woolf's best seller – with the fate of Hall's 'meritorious and dull [and realist] book'.⁵³

In what follows, I explore the discontinuity between recent confident pronouncements of Bryher's books as a form of lesbian life writing and this earlier 'ignorance' or critical failure to see the same. To be clear, though, as I stated earlier, I too shall be arguing that Bryher's texts are an effort to 'speak out,' only not with the clarity and surety that these recent observations do. Towards the end of *Development*, Nancy exclaims: 'Expression to her meant life. She was willing to fail, prepared to fail, but to choke with poems she could not utter was intolerable with anguish' (D 149).⁵⁴ I argue that Bryher repeatedly performs what, in *Two Selves*, Nancy refers to as, 'a disassociation trick,' for, as her protagonist astutely observes: 'If you spoke straight out your thoughts they called you queer and shut you up.' (TS 286). Bryher thus undertakes a paradoxical

⁵¹ Joanne Winning, 'Writing by the light of *The Well*: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Modernists,' in *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, eds. Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.375

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3 1925-1930* (London: Penguin, 1980), 31 August 1928, p.193

⁵⁴ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.187

act of what I call ‘veiled disclosure,’ which attempts to address a latent cognoscenti while simultaneously concealing her subversive utterances from the majority. Bryher is forced, then, to articulate queerly, to speak crosswise or obliquely. She performs this cunning sleight of hand, I argue, by weaving a collection of intertexts into the web of her textual mantle, which both reveals yet simultaneously conceals her different desires, as she draws upon various contemporary genealogies of fe/male homosexuality, including the sexological, the literary and the classical.

Before offering my own interpretation of *Development* and *Two Selves*, I spend the following sections considering two particular scenes of reading – the autobiographical and the sexological, which in many ways share founding beliefs – in order to further contextualise Bryher’s texts. Here, I also investigate the construction of what I term Nancy’s ‘hidden self,’ who is the site and means of her veiled disclosures and queer articulations.

Autobiographical Un/Veiling

In 1920, the same year that *Development* was published, British journalist Orlo Williams’ ‘Some Feminine Autobiographies’ was printed in *The Edinburgh Review*.⁵⁵ In his review of three recent autobiographies by celebrated late Victorian cultural figures – the English suffragette and composer, Ethel Smyth (1858-1944), the North American poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919) and the English soprano and composer, Liza Lehmann (1862-1918) – Williams offers his thoughts on what constitutes the genre. Accordingly, he requests that readers reject those journals and reminiscences which ‘are shown as happening to a body that we have not seen, and touching a personality into which we are not allowed to penetrate.’⁵⁶ Williams’ paradigm for autobiography was, of course, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782), in which the French writer, according to Williams, ‘stripp[ed] his soul naked’ and offered himself up shamelessly to readers.⁵⁷ Rousseau famously began his lengthy self-examination with the lines: ‘I have resolved on

⁵⁵ Orlo Williams (1883-1967) was a British literary critic, who went on to write prolifically for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Eight years later, he would produce a sympathetic review of Hall’s novel for this journal. Though published anonymously, thanks to the TLS’s new electronic archive we now know it was penned by Williams (in their excellent collection, *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, Laura Doan and Jay Prosser reproduce the piece as anonymously authored.)

⁵⁶ Orlo Williams, ‘Some Feminine Autobiographies,’ *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 231 (1920), p. 303

⁵⁷ *Ibid* p.305

an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself.’⁵⁸ As Rita Felski has noted, Rousseau’s *Confessions* constituted ‘the first celebration of unique individualism’ and, as such, is considered the originary moment of what we now understand as modern autobiography.⁵⁹ The genre relies on the legitimacy of, and capacity for, self-knowledge – it hinges upon the laying bare of the self – and is therefore, scholars such as Georges Gusdorf argue, inherently connected to the formation of bourgeois subjectivity and individualism.⁶⁰ As well as requiring a sovereign subject, modern autobiography also relies upon a belief in the continuity between the written word and the ‘the *name* of the author on the cover,’ a set of relations examined by Philippe Lejeune, and which he terms ‘the autobiographical pact.’⁶¹ Lejeune writes: ‘The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity [the (“identicalness”) of the *name* (author-narrator-protagonist)], referring back in the final analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover.’⁶² That is, it is the pact made with the reader that the author, narrator and protagonist are one and the same. In this measure, autobiography, perhaps more than any other literary genre, leans most heavily upon the sovereignty of the author and upon her capacity to reveal the truth of the self/text.

Williams considered that women mostly failed to produce ‘successful autobiography.’ He argued that this was because they were unable to ‘objectify themselves into an absorbing whole to the extent which is essential’ despite, apparently, being more narcissistic than men.⁶³ Williams asserted that this was a result of the ‘greater secretiveness of women with regard to themselves,’ and continued: ‘they cling passionately to their last draperies even among themselves, and naturally regard the voluntary assumption of even the noblest state of nudity in public as an act of self-violation.’⁶⁴ There is a slippage in metaphors here: while Williams’ suggests that Rousseau’s *Confessions* was an attempt to reveal his soul, for female autobiographers to succeed it seems it is not their souls that

⁵⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen. (London: Penguin, 1953), p.17

⁵⁹ Rita Felski, ‘On Confession [1989]’ in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p.83

⁶⁰ See Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography [1956],’ trans. James Olney in James Olney (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.28–48

⁶¹ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin and trans. Katherine M. Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.14

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Williams, ‘Some Feminine Autobiographies,’ p.306

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.306. It is tempting to read the ‘sex change’ scene in *Orlando*, in which Orlando is attended by the Ladies Purity, Chastity and Modesty, as Woolf’s riposte to critics such as Williams. See Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 95–7

require unveiling but their bodies. It is a slippage, therefore, which feeds on, and sustains the Cartesian dichotomy, with its gendered inflection: male soul or mind/ female body. Moreover, Williams shifts the metaphorical terrain of autobiography from its origins in painting – Rousseau tells us that he seeks to display a *portrait* of himself – to the sculptural, specifically to the female nude of Western art practice and history.

Just over a decade after Williams' article was published, Woolf addressed this same issue in her speech to the London branch of the *National Society for Women's Service*. This 1931 talk formed the basis of her (much pared down) essay, 'Professions for Women' (1942), and features the debut of the Angel of the House, the ideal Victorian female figure who frustrates women artists and writers, scuppering any chance of creativity. And, even if one bloodies one's hand slaying the angel, says Woolf, there is yet another obstacle to be faced. As Woolf's novelist informs the figure of her imagination:

I cannot make use of what you tell me – about women's bodies for instance – their passions – and so on, because the conventions are still very strong. [...] I will wait until men have become so civilised that they are not shocked when a woman speaks the truth about her body.⁶⁵

Here, Woolf observes that not only are women unable to speak the truth about their own bodies, it is men who (having been transformed into internal censors) prevent them doing so. In an inversion of Williams' argument, she avers that it is men who are too prudish – too easily shocked – to cope with women's private lives. In Woolf's account, discussion of female sexuality is rendered taboo under Edwardian mores, whose masculine sentinels thus make self-revelation and exploration an impossible task for women writing in the interwar period.⁶⁶

In light of both Woolf's address, and my second epigraph, Williams (hetero)masculinist assumptions, and his ignorance of the implications of gender (or any sort of) difference, are revealed. Moreover, while seeming to proffer advice (for both female writer and reader) on producing (or consuming) 'successful' autobiography, in fact,

⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, 'Speech Before The London/ National Society For Women's Service, January 21 1931' in Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), pp.xxxix-xi. Woolf pared this speech down considerably and it was published posthumously in *The Death of the Moth, and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942). See also Laura Marcus' consideration of *Orlando* in *Auto/Biographical Discourse* for further discussion of Woolf's thinking on the representation of women's bodies. Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 116-121

⁶⁶ Woolf's novelist-cum-fisherwoman warns her imagination that if she pushes too forcefully against convention she will become 'shrivelled and distorted,' since in doing so she – the novelist – would become a

Williams, in figuring women autobiographers as nudes clutching at their veils, relegates them back to the art gallery and museum, thus confining them once more to the position of inactive object of the critical – and, here, overtly masculine and heterosexual – gaze. This is a no win scenario: women must either content themselves with producing substandard autobiography, or, in order to succeed, must, he suggests, effectively relinquish the (active) role of writer or artist and resume their position as object of the male critical gaze.

In her unstinting drive to be a great artist, a desire articulated throughout her diary, Marie Bashkirtseff clearly failed to produce successful autobiography under these terms. Indeed, Williams was quick to dismiss her journal, observing that the ‘close mesh [of autobiographical criticism] will also reject the periodical hauls which Marie Bashkirtseff exhibited as the fruits of trawling in the disturbed but shallow waters of her soul.’⁶⁷ For later readers, and particularly for feminist scholars, Bashkirtseff’s diary has come to signify a struggle over femininity, yet, for Williams her fight with the angel of the house merely translated as the possession of a disturbed and shallow soul. Indeed, the social censure that Woolf foresaw for her female writer in 1931 was out in full force forty years earlier, at the publication of Bashkirtseff’s diary, which was greeted with a critical furore. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock attribute this to the artist’s complete break with the normative concept of bourgeois womanhood.⁶⁸ They write:

Never before had a woman so openly revolted against all that woman was meant to be – where she should have been self-sacrificing, she was egotistical; where she should have longed for home and hearth, she desired knowledge and education; where she should have patiently waited for marriage, she equivocated about that option; where she should have been content to live as some man’s wife she longed to be famous for herself.⁶⁹

Now, Bashkirtseff’s autobiographical construction and Bryher’s protagonist do share a number of similarities, for Nancy, too, ‘wanted knowledge, loved it, longed for it’ (D 110) and sought not just to write but to be recognised publicly as an author. Indeed, there is a further parallel to be drawn between the repeated critical diagnosis of Nancy’s precociousness and of Bashkirtseff’s narcissism and egotism. As we have seen, by its second printing, though subtitled, *A Novel by W. Bryher, Development* was billed as ‘the

preacher rather than a writer. Woolf, ‘Speech Before The London/ National Society For Women’s Service, January 21 1931,’ p.xxxix

⁶⁷ Williams, ‘Some Feminine Autobiographies,’ p. 306

⁶⁸ Bashkirtseff’s diary was reissued repeatedly in the early twentieth century, in both French and English.

⁶⁹ Parker and Pollock, ‘New Introduction,’ p.vii

most remarkable example of self-revelation by a girl since the famous diary of Marie Bashkirtseff⁷⁰ and as ‘A New Marie Bashkirtseff: *Development* by Winifred Bryher,’ a move which put to rest critical concern about W. Bryher’s gender.⁷⁰ Yet, it seems to me, that this attribution is a misnomer, for what Bryher’s text clearly does *not* do is disclose, in fact it thoroughly and repeatedly resists this. While in her ‘Preface,’ Bashkirtseff promises the truth of herself – ‘Rest assured, therefore, kind reader, that I reveal myself completely, entirely,’ she promises⁷¹ – Annie Winifred Ellerman purposely veiled herself with the gender ambiguous signature, ‘W. Bryher’, and, moreover, constructed a fictional protagonist, Nancy, in place of the autobiographical ‘I’. In other words, as well as obscuring the authorship of the text, she thoroughly rent the autobiographical pact, which, unlike Bashkirtseff, she had never actually made. If anything, in fact, both *Development* and *Two Selves*, I would suggest, are concerned not with revelation but with its opposite. They deal instead in *concealment*.

This is borne out in what is perhaps the most striking similarity between Bashkirtseff and Bryher’s texts – their reference to split subjectivities. Bashkirtseff observes that ‘the woman who is writing and her whom I describe, are really two persons,’ while Nancy, as we have seen, is also represented as a fractured and awkward identity:⁷²

Two selves. Jammed against each other, disjointed and ill-fitting. An obedient Nancy with heavy plaits tied over two ears that answered ‘yes, no, yes, no,’ according as the wind blew. A boy, a brain, that planned adventures and sought wisdom. (TS 183).

Bryher’s choppy, staccato prose combined with her truncated sentences further foreground the splintered subject position of her protagonist. Nancy’s ‘real’ self lies concealed, suffocating under a despised mask of femininity, an ‘encrustation of conformity’ (TS 242). Similarly, Bashkirtseff wrote that ‘I have nothing of the woman about me but the envelope and that envelope is diabolically feminine.’⁷³

On one level, we can read both Bashkirtseff and Bryher’s constructions as speaking to the notion that to live freely and to create – or, even, to *desire* to – was deemed masculine in their lifetimes. Nancy, like Bashkirtseff, is at war with the bourgeois notion of femininity, the expectation that middle class women be demure and retiring, and devoid

⁷⁰ Unattributed advertisement, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder, 3111, Beinecke.

⁷¹ Marie Bashkirtseff, *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff*, trans. Mathilde Blind (London: Virago, 1985), p.xxxi

⁷² Bashkirtseff cited in Parker and Pollock, ‘New Introduction,’ p. ix

⁷³ Ibid.

of passion or any mode of activity. As has been amply discussed by various feminist critics, a disjuncture therefore exists between the subject positions of 'woman' and 'writer/artist' in western culture.⁷⁴ Nancy's desire to be a boy, then, can be interpreted as her desire for the social privilege that attends masculinity, for the freedom to pursue whatever she wants in life.

In an early reading of *Two Selves*, Friedman couples Bryher's text with Lowell's 1922 long poem, 'The Sisters,' in her discussion of what she terms this 'specifically female form of fragmentation'.⁷⁵ Friedman interprets Nancy's two selves as 'a metaphoric representation of her surface capitulation to convention and her hidden resistance to it'.⁷⁶ Friedman, then, understands Nancy's split subjectivity, and her desire for boyishness, as a (covert) rebellion against the restrictions of traditional Edwardian notions of femininity.⁷⁷ In a later essay on women and autobiography, Friedman developed this contention further (but not in relation to Bryher's texts), utilising Sheila Rowbotham's *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973) to discuss how women develop a dual consciousness: 'the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription'.⁷⁸ Friedman draws a comparison between Rowbotham's formulation and W.E.B. Du Bois' discussion of the dual consciousness of the African American who lives in a dominant white culture in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and suggests that both are useful for understanding the role which alienation plays in the identities of *any* group existing at the margins of a culture. In one way or another, dual consciousness, then, might be seen as a feature of all minority or oppressed subjectivities, of all 'the havenots in a world of haves'.⁷⁹ The split self arises from the biased, and perhaps even hostile, image society holds of the subject, alongside the subject's corrective self-imag(in)ing. What is striking, however, about Nancy's double consciousness is, as Friedman noted too, that Bryher's protagonist must actively *conceal* her own sense of self, her resistance to convention, and it is this, I shall argue, that colours the construction as queer rather than just a specifically female form of fragmentation.

⁷⁴ See for instance, Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, p.99.

⁷⁵ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.35

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ As her caption on the back cover of *Two Novels* suggests, however, by 2000 Friedman had shifted to a reading that allowed for a range of possible queer interpretations, including ones using both transgender *and* lesbian theories.

⁷⁸ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice' in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 [1988]), p.75

Together, the narrative of *Development* and *Two Selves* describes a duplicitous existence, one in which Nancy must censor the truth about herself, her desire to be a boy, write a book and find a friend. To those who populate the texts, Nancy ‘passes’ as a dutiful, if precocious and inquisitive, daughter, her mask of femininity taken for her natural face. Readers, in contrast, are granted access to Nancy’s thoughts and longings, which voice different desires. Importantly, Nancy does not long for a (male) lover, marriage or family – ‘Marriage,’ she intones, ‘Girls married to escape. But she hated men.’ (TS 264) – but instead yearns for ‘someone with a mind’ (TS 263). It is worth pausing over this intriguing statement, for, what precisely does Nancy mean? What, I wonder, constitutes ‘someone with a mind’? Is it just a knowledgeable and erudite person? Or is it, perhaps, someone who has developed the capacity to think differently, who has broken out of the snare of convention? I explore the implications of this statement in the following pages. But, to return to Nancy’s two selves, it was precisely through this construction of her sundered protagonist, I suggest, that Bryher managed to lever open a space which enabled her to level a blow at Edwardian social mores, as well as to introduce a means of articulating same-sex desires.

Indeed, this is hinted at in an unsettling passage, towards the end of *Two Selves*, which also provides one of my epigraphs, in which Nancy describes the moment she was sundered:

Something had cleft her from herself. She was two personalities now, sitting on the sand. Something, like an axe, had hit her and taught her to keep hidden in herself. Because people found out what you cared about and hurt you through it, when you would not agree with them.

Keep the mind straight. Nothing else mattered. It was very funny. Only they had shut the girl round the corner up. Easy enough to call anyone queer. Good thing perhaps – this disassociation trick. If you spoke straight out your thoughts they called you queer and shut you up. (TS 285-6)

Our discomfort is heightened by Bryher’s use of the third person, which compounds Nancy’s estrangement from herself, and by the dispassionate fashion with which she describes her wounding. In the second paragraph, Bryher’s protagonist counsels herself (since there is no one else to): ‘Keep the mind straight,’ she tells herself, ‘Nothing else

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.76

mattered'. It is an act of survival, for Nancy is acutely aware of her difference and of the necessity of concealing it.

For present day readers, Nancy's injunction to keep the mind straight – to keep herself ordered and well, so as to care for herself – is shadowed, uncannily, by its contemporary meaning: it seems to remind the present day reader that in order for such a pretence to work, Nancy must keep up this play of normality, of straightness, of heterosexuality, otherwise she truly is in trouble. Moreover, Bryher's pairing of 'queer' and 'straight' in this extract is highly suggestive. And, although for early twentieth century readers 'queer' would not have borne the same meaning – would not explicitly have referred to someone who desires their own sex – here, the pejorative tinge of the term, and the fact that it functions as a marker of difference – of otherness – means that it nonetheless works in a similar way: as a threat.⁸⁰ And, it is a threat, the text suggests, weighty enough to result in Nancy's incarceration, or, at the very least, the muffling of her voice, which, as we have seen, amounts to the same thing. It is a warning, then, which evokes the centuries old patriarchal practice of controlling women through confining them as mental patients, but, crucially, it is also freighted, I suggest, with the fact of Oscar Wilde's imprisonment fourteen years earlier for 'gross indecency,' an event whose vibrations were still being felt in the interwar period, and far beyond. Moreover, Bryher's reference to being called queer reverberates with the indictment that led Wilde to initiate legal proceedings against the Marquess of Queensberry, who left a calling card at his club accusing Wilde of 'posing as a 'Somdomite [*sic*]'.⁸¹

Although the homophobia of British society had coagulated into a toxic precipitate ten years earlier, with the passage through parliament of the *Labouchere Amendment Act* (1885), it was the three Wilde trials in spring 1895, which brought homosexuality to both the English media's attention and to public consciousness. As Alan Sinfield has argued, it was a critical time – he terms it a 'queer moment' – for the formation of the modern public image of the homosexual, a distillation inherently connected to the Wildean features of effeminacy, dandyism and aestheticism.⁸² Despite the fact that female same-sex desire was never legislated against in Britain, for those women who did desire differently, such cases

⁸⁰ In a discussion which suggests that 'queer' did in fact bear such connotations as early as the late nineteenth century, Denis Flannery has noted that the term 'operated, with some sexual force, in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* [...] where it is linked with "blackmail," which would, according to [Elaine] Showalter, have immediately suggested homosexual liaisons'. Denis Flannery, 'The Appalling Mrs Luna: Sibling Love, Queer Attachment, and Henry James' *The Bostonians*' in *The Henry James Review* 26:1 (2005), p.18

⁸¹ Cited in Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London and New York: Cassell, 1994), p.2

⁸² *Ibid.*

must, as I argued in my introduction, have borne ramifications for them too. As well as gripping all male social bonds, as is Sedgwick's contention, the threat of homophobia, I argued, also trafficked across the boundary of sex, and infiltrated and insinuated its way into the psyches of women who desired differently. Indeed, Stein spoke to this, when she observed:

I had never conceived the possibility of anybody being in prison, anybody whose business it was not naturally because of natural or accidental crime to be in prison . . . Oscar Wilde and the Ballad of Reading Gaol was the first thing that made me realise that it could happen, being in prison.⁸³

Like Nancy, Stein is concerned by the threat of being shut up, yet these lines also subtly register her disbelief, and simultaneous critique, of the fact that 'anybody whose business it was not naturally [...] to be in prison,' like Wilde (or herself), could conceivably end up there. Nancy's split self, I argue, vividly evidences the violence that this realisation entailed for subjects who desired differently, forcing them to conceal their queer desires. Yet in her construction of Nancy's damaged and wounded subjectivity, I suggest that Bryher simultaneously offered a powerful critique of these restrictive social mores.

As a result of the Wilde trials, and the heightened scrutiny of deviant subjects they engendered, habitual disguise and queer selfhood were thus necessarily imbricated at the turn of the twentieth century. As Tracy Hargreaves has observed, this is neatly caught in an exclamation by the American author, Xavier Mayne: 'The Mask, ever the Mask! It becomes the natural face of the wearer'.⁸⁴ Indeed, this is further attested to in John Addington Symonds' *Memoirs*, to which I now turn, as a text that provides a productive foil to the project of Bryher's autobiographical novels. Begun in 1889, here, the late Victorian essayist and poet figured himself as a masked persona, a double identity:

The distinction in my character between an inner and real self and an outer and artificial self, to which I have already alluded, emphasized itself during this period [at Harrow]. So separate were the two selves, so deep was my dipsychia, that my most intimate friends there, of whom I shall soon speak, have each and all emphatically told me that they thought I had passed

⁸³ Gertrude Stein cited in Susan McCabe, 'To BE and to Have: The Rise of Queer Historicism' in *GLQ* 11(1), p.126

⁸⁴ Xavier Mayne cited in Tracy Hargreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p.45. Mayne was the pseudonym of the American writer Edward Irenaeus Stevenson (1858-1942), whose books included *The Intersexes* (1908).

through school without being affected by, almost without being aware of, its particular vices. And yet those vices furnished a perpetual subject for contemplation and casuistical reflection to my inner self.⁸⁵

Like Bryher's construction of Nancy, Symonds figures his younger self as riven into 'two personalities,' with the 'inner and real' one synonymous with the self who, as he had confided to readers earlier on, had 'inborn craving after persons of my own sex'.⁸⁶ Moreover, as is also the case with Nancy, who suffocates under an 'encrustation of conformity,' Symonds' seemingly natural face is in fact a mask. He writes: 'I allowed an outer self of commonplace cheerfulness and easy-going pliability to settle like crust upon my inner and real character'.⁸⁷ And it is such a convincing performance that it hoodwinks even his closest friends who had thought him oblivious to the 'particular vices,' which had in fact sustained this inner self.

In 'The Double Lives of Man' (1993), Ed Cohen has explored how Symonds and other late Victorians, whom he terms 'ec-centric' subjects, forged new narrative techniques in life writing in order to represent what had previously been unrepresentable. He argues that they succeeded through constructing double lives. Cohen writes: 'Symonds notion of "dipsychia" is most critical, since it foregrounds the necessity for splitting open the dominant characterization of (bourgeois male) subjectivity in order to engender a narrative affirmation of sexual and emotional intimacies between members of the same sex.'⁸⁸ This is different, then, from Friedman's notion of double consciousness, which arises from the difference between cultural notions or representations of the 'havenot' subject and their own sense of self. In contrast, Cohen asserts that Symonds' construction of this dual self is the very means by which he is able to represent himself as a subject who desires differently. As Symonds observed in a letter to his friend, classicist Graham Daykins: 'There does not exist anything like it in print; & I am certain that 999 men

⁸⁵ John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984), pp.95-6

⁸⁶ Symonds, *Memoirs*, p.63. Though there is not the space here to pursue it fully, there is an interesting comparison to be made between both Nancy's and Symonds' split selves and the dual self that Vita Sackville-West depicts in her memoir of 1920, which she refers to as her 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde personality'. As her allusion to Robert Louis Stevenson's novella suggests, this oscillatory version of her queer self is represented as tainted and corrupt, rather than as the repository of the true self. Vita Sackville-West, *Portrait of a Marriage* ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p.38.

⁸⁷ Symonds, *Memoirs*, p.82

⁸⁸ Ed Cohen, 'The Double Lives of Man: Narration and Identification in the Late Nineteenth-Century Representations of Ec-centric Masculinities,' *Victorian Studies* 36, 3 (Spring 1993), p.362

out of a thousand do not believe in the existence of a personality like mine.⁸⁹ There was, then, no existing cultural representations of personalities like Symonds, of subjects whom we would now term homosexual or gay, for the writer to rebuff or contest – his was a virgin attempt. Moreover, Cohen even suggests that ‘we could perhaps anachronistically nominate Symonds’ *Memoirs* as the first “coming out story”’.⁹⁰

Yet, Symonds’ self-representation would not see light for almost a century, a fact which concerned him even while he was avidly engaged in its composition. Symonds observed to Dakyns that: ‘This is a foolish thing to do, because I do not think they will ever be fit to publish.’⁹¹ Nonetheless, he proceeded with the project, commenting in the same letter that ‘I have never spoken out. And it is a great temptation to speak out’.⁹² Almost immediately afterwards, however, his ambivalence reared again, when he acknowledged that such a need could never be satisfied, since ‘it would be hardly fair to my posterity if I were to yield up my vile soul to the psychopathological investigators.’ Here, the desire to ‘speak out’ vies with the need to censor and conceal his ‘strangely constituted’ character, a tug and pull, which was arguably resolved through his collaboration with Havelock Ellis on the project of *Sexual Inversion*. His memoir, however, would not be published until 1989.⁹³

Although Symonds and Bryher’s constructions of split subjectivities share striking similarities, the texts from which they derive do not. *Development* and *Two Selves* are an obvious departure from the typical realist Victorian autobiographical mould, epitomised, for instance by both Symonds’ *Memoir* and Ethel Smyth’s popular two-volume *Impressions That Remained*, which was published in 1919, just a year before *Development*. In the latter, letters are reproduced verbatim and the minutiae of a well-regarded musician’s life are seemingly caught and displayed. As well as sketching herself, Smyth

⁸⁹ Letter from Symonds to Graham Dakyns, cited in Phyllis Grosskurth, ‘Introduction’ in John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p.16. The figure 999 is also what the Lord Chancellor comes up with in his discussion of the ‘anti-lesbian’ clause of 1921: ‘I would be bold enough to say that of every thousand women, taken as a whole, 999 have never ever heard a whisper of these practices.’ Lord Chancellor cited in Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.132

⁹⁰ Cohen, ‘The Double Lives of Man,’ p.362

⁹¹ Letter from Symonds to Graham Dakyns cited in Grosskurth, ‘Introduction,’ p.16

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ In her ‘Foreword’ to Symonds *Memoirs*, Phyllis Grosskurth explains that when Symonds’ literary executor, Horatio Brown, died he left Symonds’ manuscript to the London Library with instructions that it was not to be published for fifty years after his death. Moreover, in the same paragraph in Brown’s will, he states: ‘The rest [of Symonds’ papers] had better be destroyed. It is the safest and simplest way.’ See Phyllis Grosskurth, ‘Foreword’ in John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p.10

paints a vivid portrait of her milieu, populated by a jostling crowd of family, friends and colleagues. In stark contrast, Bryher's books are laconic, slim volumes, whose central figure is an unknown and lonely girl, while their episodic and fragmentary nature draws our attention to the fact that just as much of Nancy's life is being withheld as is being disclosed. Aptly, one reviewer likened *Development* to cinema, the most evanescent of mediums, describing her work as 'Vivid as a cinematograph, as crudely broken as a film'.⁹⁴ This attribution accurately captures the formal experimentalism of her text, its difference from, and resistance to, traditional realist narrative. Indeed, it was, in part, this feature of Bryher's texts, I argue, which concealed (while revealing) its subversive content, that allowed the author to speak out while Symonds' own articulations must remain shut up for another century.

Nancy's tale, moreover, is no incipient 'coming out' story, a narrative which hinges upon a retrospective construction of a discrete lesbian or gay identity, who then steps forth from the closet. As a branch of autobiography, the coming out story similarly relies upon the disclosure of the self and on the capacity for this self to tell itself (truth)fully. It is a narrative, therefore, which adheres to the rubric of the 'autobiographical pact,' which, as we saw above, was simply not the case with Bryher's two works. Moreover, although Bryher does set up a distinction between Nancy's outer and inner selves, thus apparently 'revealing' the hidden self to readers, while screening it from other textual figures, Bryher's imagistic prose resists such easy penetration. No outright declaration is made here for, as Nancy stressed, speaking straight out would bring the retribution of being shut up. Apparently, taking this into account, Jean Radford has suggested instead that *Two Selves* 'can be read as a *coded* coming out'.⁹⁵ Yet, this contention, it seems to me, is just as problematic. Firstly, it insists upon a transparent and direct relationship between Nancy and Bryher: Nancy is Bryher or her mask. Secondly, the act of 'coming out' is inherently connected to 1970s gay liberation, and thus to a post-Stonewall, identity-based politics. In stating that *Two Selves* can be read as a coded coming out, Radford suggests not only that it is clear what sort of identity Nancy is (when, indeed, it is not), but also invokes the notion of a transhistorical lesbian identity.

⁹⁴ *Southport Guardian*, 8 September 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 82, Folder 3112, Beinecke. As we shall see in my next chapter, this description seems uncannily to anticipate POOL's own experimental film, *Borderline* (1930).

⁹⁵ Jean Radford, 'A Transatlantic Affair: Amy Lowell and Bryher,' in *Amy Lowell, American Modernist*, eds. Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p.53

In looking to the past through an identitarian lens, which searches for sameness, or as Foucault put it, for ‘the consoling play of recognitions,’ we end up reading the past in terms of the present.⁹⁶ Such research not only tends to secure and shore up what we (think we) know now but also has, in Butlerian terms, the effect of reaffirming and reifying the hierarchical structure of the homosexual/heterosexual binary, and thus bolstering the latter. It also obscures efforts to map the formation of this binary, which, in the early twentieth century, was still labile and flexible. As I consider in my next section, Doan and Winning instead situate their discussions of Bryher’s *Development* and *Two Selves*, within the discourse of sexual science, and in particular draw upon Ellis’ theorisation of sexual inversion. The category of female invert, as I observed in my introduction, is a repository for a range of present day queer identities and practices, including what we now term lesbianism, homosexuality, transgender and transsexuality. It is also the case, however, that the structure of the hidden self, which invokes the notion of a ‘true’ inner self, rubs up against Nancy’s affinity for the contrary and disruptive figure of the Elizabethan cross-dressed girl-page, who roams the pages of Bryher’s text, as we shall see shortly. Like the category of the invert, s/he is a figure who undermines the fixity of the heterosexual matrix, as well as troubling the notion of stable identity categories.

In fact, rather than ‘seeing’ Nancy at all, rather than the self-portrait of autobiography or the coming out story, what readers are in fact offered is Nancy’s voice, which seeks to: ‘Write a book and make them understand. Write a book. And find she had a friend.’ (TS 221). Nancy’s twin desires – to communicate and to find a friend (a relationship, the phrasing suggests, which would be brought about *via* the act of writing, and, who would, therefore, be someone capable of ‘reading’ Nancy correctly) are a means of remedying her terrible isolation. *Development* and *Two Selves*, I argue, are Bryher’s attempt to accomplish just this. Through her works she sought to address, and thus forge, a community of queer readers (indeed, we might recall that McAlmon and Bryher chose ‘Contact’ for the name of their press). Rather, then, than coming out, I want to think about speaking out, though, of course, this could only be done cross-wise and obliquely, as a queer articulation.

In the next section, I consider Bryher’s use of sexology, which, as scholars from Foucault and Weeks on have observed not only provided a language of desire for queer subjects but whose texts also contained the first instances in which the queer

⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,’ in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), p.88

autobiographical voice was heard. Importantly, however, I argue that Bryher's deployment of sexology in her performance of veiled disclosure also contains an inherent critique of its interpretative methods and its scrutiny of the bodies of deviant subjects.

Queer Voices and Sexological Reading Scenes

Beginning with the early feminist re-visionings of literary modernism, Bryher, and her early texts, have repeatedly been contextualised within a sexological framework, with particular reference being made to the letter she wrote to H.D. following her single consultation with Ellis in 1919 (a year in which Bryher was avidly engaged in writing *Development*). It is thus worth repeating the extract here. On March 20, Bryher wrote to H.D. telling her that she and Ellis had discussed the topics of 'colour-hearing and cross-dressing,' and, then:

we got to the question of whether I was a boy sort of escaped into the wrong body and he says it is a disputed subject but quite possible and showed me a book about it [...] We agreed it was most unfair for it to happen but apparently I am quite justified in pleading I ought to be a boy, – I am just a girl by accident.⁹⁷

In her introduction to *Two Novels*, Winning draws an analogy between this extract and a scene from Hall's infamous novel, writing: 'There is a curious mirroring between Ellis's act of introducing Bryher to sexological narratives, which provide a kind of revelation about her sexual identity, and the revelation experienced by Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928).'⁹⁸ Winning is referring to the moment when Hall's protagonist 'unwittingly stumbles across a copy of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* in her father's study,' a scene which I consider in more detail in my next section. Winning proceeds to argue that Stephen 'shares with Nancy a profoundly unsettled gender identity, regarding both her body and her emotional constitution as masculine'.⁹⁹ Indeed, as we saw in my introduction, Winning noted more specifically that Bryher's 'novels seem to articulate narratives of identity that can be read either in terms of

⁹⁷ Bryher to H.D., 20 March 1919, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Beinecke.

⁹⁸ Winning, 'Introduction,' p.xxviii

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.xxix

lesbian sexuality or transsexuality,’ and in relation to the latter she diagnosed Nancy as suffering ‘profound gender dysphoria’.¹⁰⁰

Firstly, as I argued earlier, transsexuality and gender dysphoria are both terms derived later in the century, when, as Winning notes too, transitioning to another sex became a possibility through developments in surgical and medical technologies. Although in sexological categories like inversion we may discern both the roots of modern lesbian *and* transsexual identities, as Judith Halberstam cautions us: ‘It is, of course, also inadequate simply to label [such women] pretranssexual; what they were, in fact, were women who wanted to be men before the possibility of sex change existed.’¹⁰¹ In considering them otherwise, Halberstam notes, we fall into ‘the trap of simply projecting contemporary understandings back in time’.¹⁰²

Secondly, gender dysphoria is a term used by the medical establishment in order to diagnose transsexuality, and relies upon a notion of normative categories of gender and sexuality; it is thus a pathologising term. While Bryher’s construction of Nancy’s two selves might seem to evoke the wrong body trope, which occupies a central position in transsexual narratives, no reference is in fact made to Nancy’s body within the texts. Although Bryher’s protagonist repeatedly refers to her discomfort in feminine attire – ‘a wet dragging skirt made impediment at each step’ (D 138) – and to the fact that she suffocates under an ‘encrustation of conformity’ (TS 242), as well as desiring to wear masculine clothing – ‘Only when she could sit in her fencing breeches and read did she feel at ease’ (TS 210) – no mention is made, unlike in *The Well of Loneliness*, of being discomforted by her own flesh. Instead, it seems to me, that Bryher casts society as dysphoric – as wrong – through its restrictive adherence to gender conventions, which prevent Nancy dressing and behaving as she wishes. Bryher reveals that it is society which is diseased in its need to repress and punish all those subjects, including potentially Nancy, who do not (and, thus, are not) fit. Nancy, who unsettles this apparently ‘natural’ lining up of sex, gender and sexuality, is a queer figure who Bryher deploys to cause ‘gender trouble’.¹⁰³

Like Winning, who argued that Bryher was ‘engaged in the process of locating and defining literary language and form with which to represent female and lesbian subjectivity,’ Doan reads *Development* and *Two Selves* in order to demonstrate ‘the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.xxv

¹⁰¹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p.87

¹⁰² Ibid, p.52

usefulness of sexology for the modern lesbian writer.¹⁰⁴ Rather than reading the extract above as a kind of revelation, however, Doan observes that ‘Regardless of whether Bryher knew or accepted the connection between boyishness and inversion, she expressed relief when writing afterwards to H.D.,’ since, ‘it reaffirmed her sense, if not of inversion, of the naturalness of “boy-ness”’.¹⁰⁵ While Doan is careful not to suggest that Bryher positioned herself as an invert, she does note that ‘Bryher would recycle [the] phrase [‘I am a girl by accident’] in *Development* (“this accident of being a girl”)’.¹⁰⁶ In her interpretation of Bryher, Hall and Allatini’s novels, Doan argued that ‘Literary negotiation of the dominant writings on sexuality and intersecting theories became the site of a sophisticated and complex refashioning, in effect, a wildly eclectic free-for-all.’¹⁰⁷ Indeed, her reading suggests that Bryher (and, indeed, Hall) fashioned their protagonists from a mixture of both Ellis’ and Edward Carpenter’s theories, thereby purposely casting them as superior subjects. Carpenter’s conceptualisation of the ‘intermediate sex’ elevated queer subjects above other members of society. He asserted that the ‘double nature’ of members of the intermediate sex gave them a ‘command of life in all its phases, and a certain freemasonry of the secrets of the two sexes which may well favour their function as reconcilers and interpreters.’¹⁰⁸ Carpenter’s polemical essay therefore inferred that ‘Uranians’ were themselves the locus for cultural regeneration and the path forward for the recuperation of a degenerating British society (which was a position antithetical to the majority of sexologists, as we shall see). According to Doan, Nancy’s elevation came through her possession of the unique faculty of colour-hearing.

In *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis suggested that, ‘we may compare inversion to such a phenomenon as colour-hearing, in which there is not so much defect as an abnormality of nervous tracks producing new and involuntary combinations’.¹⁰⁹ Doan avers that ‘Bryher eagerly seized on Ellis’s simile (inversion is like color-hearing), but refashioned the figure of speech into a metaphor (color-hearing is inversion), thus, in the process, colouring Nancy as an invert.’¹¹⁰ As his statement suggests, in contrast to Bryher’s use of it (in Doan’s argument), Ellis drew an analogy between colour-hearing and inversion in order to

¹⁰³ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ Winning, ‘Introduction,’ p.vi; Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.130

¹⁰⁵ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.147

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.144

¹⁰⁸ Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (London: George Allen & Co, 1912), p.38

¹⁰⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 1936), p.317

¹¹⁰ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.149

stress that the latter was *not* symptomatic of degeneration, as practitioners such as Krafft-Ebing argued, but was instead a consequence of inherited variation. Indeed, Ellis (and Symonds) conceived of the project of *Sexual Inversion* as a stand against the draconian *Labouchere Amendment Act*.

Although in his conviction that inversion was not pathological Ellis did differ from Krafft-Ebing, in his contention that the ‘commonest characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity or boyishness,’ the British sexologist was not only aligned with his Austrian colleague, but with the majority of sexological writers, for whom same-sex desire was conflated with gender inversion.¹¹¹ For sexologists this was corporeally evidenced, with masculinity being indelibly stamped on the lesbian or inverted body. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, for instance, Krafft-Ebing noted that in ‘the extreme grade of degenerate homosexuality [...]he women of this type possesses of the feminine qualities only the genital organs; though, sentiment, action even external appearance are those of the man.’¹¹² In Case 156 ‘*Lesbianism: ‘S.J.’*’ Krafft-Ebing registers surprise that although his patient was ‘thoroughly feminine and modest’ with ‘[f]eminine pelvis, large breasts’ she bore ‘no indication of a beard’.¹¹³ As these extracts suggest, *Psychopathia Sexualis* comprises painfully intimate reports documenting the scrutiny that the lesbian or invert body endured. The ‘last draperies’ were literally removed in this instance.

Yet, despite this problematic facet of sexology, following Foucault, many scholars have argued that sexological texts were important and productive sites for self-recognition and self-enlightenment for a number of queer subjects living at the turn of the twentieth century.¹¹⁴ Bryher would herself highlight this fact publicly 40 years later in *The Heart to Artemis*, when she referred to Ellis’ ‘campaign against ignorance,’ which, she contended, ‘opened new ways and relieved the anxieties of hundreds of uneasy minds’ (though she fails to figure herself as one).¹¹⁵ Ellis’ patient, ‘Miss V.’ was one such uneasy mind. ‘Throughout her early life up to adult age,’ Ellis tells us, ‘she was a mystery to herself, and morbidly conscious of some fundamental difference between herself and other people’.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.244

¹¹² Richard von Krafft-Ebing cited in Esther Newton, *Margaret Mead Made me Gay* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), p.182

¹¹³ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Jack Hunter (New York: Creation Books, 1997), p.178

¹¹⁴ See Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, chapter 5, pp.126-250; Hargreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature*, pp.27-33 & 39-67; and Suzanne Raitt, ‘Sex, Love and the Homosexual Body in Early Sexology,’ in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp.150-164.

¹¹⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, pp.199 & 287

¹¹⁶ Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, p.229

Books provided the means of self-recognition for Miss V. who noted that she had ‘read a book where a girl was represented as saying she had a ‘boy’s soul in a girl’s body.’¹¹⁷ The applicability of this to myself struck me at once’.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Ellis’ patient, Miss M. tells him that she ‘would like to help to bring light on the subject [of inversion] and to lift the shadow from other lives,’ the implication being that this is exactly what Ellis’ work does.¹¹⁹

While these scenes of reading do appear to have provided insight and recognition, the two women remain isolated figures who must consume such illicit subject matter surreptitiously, behind closed doors. Indeed, we might wonder, who exactly had access to such esoteric and closely guarded knowledge? Taking this issue up in her analysis, Doan ‘cautiously retrace[s] sexology’s gradual emergence and circulation among a certain small group of writers, artists, and other professionals, probably quite unrepresentative of public culture’.¹²⁰ As members of the privileged, white middle-upper classes, writers like Hall and Bryher’s social connections facilitated their access to sexological texts; as of yet it did not have a public audience. Moreover, even the hybridised and vernacularised accounts produced by the likes of Hall, Bryher and Allatini, which might very well have disseminated such knowledge more widely, were effectively rendered invisible, with two of the four novels being banned. Only Bryher’s *Development* and *Two Selves* deflected the censorial gaze. It is therefore unsurprising, I think, to find that although, as Doan argued, Ellis ‘provided women such as Bryher with models of sexual identity and a language for their desires,’ nowhere is this lexicon evident in Bryher’s texts.¹²¹ Indeed, the only hint of sexological terminology comes by way of a review of *Development* in the *New Republic*, in which Constance Mayfield Rourke inadvertently refers to the novel as a ‘difficult, *inverted* book’.¹²²

I suggest, however, that this was not simply because Bryher needed to conceal the subversive content of her work – her queer articulation – but because her texts constitute an implicit critique of sexology too. For, Nancy is not a sexological ‘type’ and nor is *Development* a case study. Bryher annuls the type-casting of sexology, which constructed female inverts as a category who were differentiated from the ‘normal’ woman primarily through the mark of masculinity, which was seen as being inscribed on the body of the

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.229

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.232

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.229

¹²⁰ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.130

¹²¹ Ibid, p.128

¹²² Constance Mayfield Rourke cited in Winning, ‘Introduction,’ p.xviii

deviant sexual subject. Like the genre of autobiography, which, according to critics such as Williams, required an unveiling and objectification of the self for the critical gaze, sexological writings quite literally required the revelation of the naked body, with the ‘truth’ of the deviant subject’s self being stamped indelibly on the flesh. It was, then, an interpretative practise that relied on the visual, and upon the penetrating critical gaze. Here, the unveiled body is deemed the source of meaning, the ultimate signified of perverse desire and subjecthood. In contrast, in *Development* and *Two Selves* Nancy’s external appearance is never described, instead, as we saw earlier, Bryher’s protagonist simply expresses her discomfort in feminine attire or, conversely, her desire to wear masculine apparel. Consequently, we have no idea what she looks like.

Further, rather than being the object of the sexological gaze, Nancy usurps Ellis’ role. As I noted earlier, as readers we see through Nancy’s eyes, a fact highlighted in the following lines, when Bryher writes: ‘It was as if Nancy sat, seeing, in a room with the blind’ and ‘as if her whole being were concentrated into an eye’ (TS 213). Indeed, these phrases recall Bryher’s close friend, English writer Norman Douglas’ description of Ellis as ‘a man with one eye in the country of the blind’.¹²³ Moreover, in a letter to Walter Schmideberg, discussing her views on lay analysis (although we might take it as evidence of her stance on (sexual) science as a whole, I think), Bryher observed: ‘I would not allow more than one in ten analysts to be doctors. They pretend to be impartial scientists, actually they want to reduce things to formulas, photograph them, label them, and suddenly everything is dead.’¹²⁴ The truth that is apparently objectively recorded and displayed in sexual science is not just violent, in Bryher’s account, but deathly.

Instead of referring finally to the ultimate signified of the body of the female invert, Nancy’s sexological ‘traits’ are revealed as signifiers, as they are harnessed in Bryher’s textual practice and deployed alongside various classical and literary intertexts. In her refusal to ‘reveal’ Nancy’s body to the reader Bryher, I suggest, undermines the notion that meaning originates there; the sexological signifiers at play in *Development* and *Two Selves* are thus unmoored from the body of the invert. In doing so, Bryher rebuts one of the founding tenets of sexology, a pseudo-science, like its late Victorian fellows, eugenics, criminology and the science of ‘race,’ which read the truth of the pathologised self on the body.

¹²³ Norman Douglas cited in Barbara Guest, *The Poet H.D. and her World* (London: Collins, 1985), p.122

¹²⁴ Bryher to Walter Schmideberg [n.d.] cited in Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller, *Lesbian Lives: Psychoanalytical Narratives Old and New* (Hillsdale, NJ and London: The Analytic Press, 1997), p.27

Indeed, although Ellis' work was clearly of interest and import to her (the British sexologist would, in fact, make an appearance in the guise of Dr. Harris in 'South,' the final prose fragment to feature Nancy), it was only a passing dalliance, as certainly by 1923, if not earlier, Bryher had laid his theories aside and devoted herself instead to Freudian psychoanalysis. In a letter to Friedman, written towards the end of the writer's life, Bryher exclaimed:

Freud! All literary London discovered Freud about 1920 . . . the theories were the great subject of conversation wherever one went at that date. To me Freud is literary England . . . after the first war. People did not always agree but he was always taken in the utmost seriousness.¹²⁵

Although, both Ellis and Krafft-Ebing are footnoted in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), psychoanalysis offered a radical departure from the nosology of sexological science. Freud's theory of drives rendered desire mobile and allowed for the fact that it 'spoke' in a plethora of ways and languages; psychoanalysis, then, acknowledged desire's various 'queer articulations.' Indeed, this is something I take up in more detail in my next chapter. Freudian psychoanalysis was, moreover, a therapeutic practice in which female patients actually had a voice – it was the 'talking cure' – in contrast to a framework that relied upon the penetrating gaze of the sexologist.

It is important to note, however, that while Bryher, as I have argued, did resist the interpretative lens of sexology, it is evident that Nancy (and her author) did seek the attention of a particular sort of reader. This is evidenced in a deeply erotic scene, which takes place upon Nancy's return to Greece, her homeland, following her years at Downwood:

It was those early years she had picked up olives and anemones. They had been balanced; full. Unsplit. Great blue-purple anemones at Syracuse; Carthaginian poppies. Egypt. Rich, like a vase of many colours breaking one into the other with the symmetry of tides; a vase, a body, waiting for something, perfect but waiting something, a vase painted over with many pictures, many ages, waiting to be lifted, used. Egypt, Syracuse, Carthage, Naples . . . black soil and black olives, gold sand and golden reeds, beautiful, near, friends but lacking something not the one thing in all the South, the lover, the answer one waited. (TS 266-7)

¹²⁵ Bryher cited in Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, p.18

In one of the few references to a body, it is rendered as a text: it is a 'vase painted over with many pictures,' which is primed and waiting to be used. It waits to be filled with meaning by a sensitive reader, the lover, and to be offered the 'answer one waited'. This textual encounter is rendered as a dialogue, one which takes place between lover and beloved, between reader and text. Here, the paired images of body and text (the vase) must wait until someone engages with them, until someone answers them. It is not the text – or body – then which holds meaning, but instead it is produced through the interaction between text and reader-lover. In this passage, the body or text – Nancy, the boy, the brain – is rendered passive: 'waiting, ready to be lifted, used,' to be filled up by the lover. Rather than being fixed, meaning functions through the interaction of images and, crucially, this paragraph suggests, through the reader's interpretation, rather than being held by either Nancy (or Bryher). This vision of an active and creative reader, who brings something to the text/lover, offers an alternative to the penetrative gaze of critics like Williams, who sought only the naked truth.

Rather than following Doan's suggestion, which we considered earlier, that Nancy's possession of the faculty of colour-hearing speaks to her inverted status, I want to explore the notion that it was in fact a metaphor for exactly the sort of reading practice of which Bryher was attempting to conceive. A reading practice, then, which imagined a creative reader, and thus one which rejected the notion that a text holds a particular truth, and instead considered the reader's relationship to it. As the term suggests, when colour hearers listen to music they simultaneously see hues. Listening, then, is also a visual experience. In *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis writes: 'Just as the colour-hearer instinctively associates colours with sounds, like the young Japanese lady who remarked when listening to singing, "That boy's voice is red!" so the invert has his sexual sensations brought into relationship with objects that are normally without sexual appeal.'¹²⁶ Inverts, we might say, are creative lovers.

In Bryher's re-tooled version of colour-hearing, however, it is not listening but the act of *reading* which is infused with colour: Nancy instinctively associates particular colours with particular words or letters. Bryher writes:

Ever since Nancy could remember, all words, as she heard or read them, appeared to her as colour. It was as natural as breathing, so thoroughly an element of her mind that it was only by accident she discovered, at fifteen, they were printed symbols to the multitude, and to speak of them as gold or

¹²⁶ Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*. Ed. Ivan Crozier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.204

crimson merely provoked derision. It was not until nine years later that she found she was simply a colour hearer [...] It was impossible to think of the alphabet as colourless. Often she questioned people, “*What do words mean to you; how do you see them?*” (D 157; my emphasis)

Introducing the possibility that her novel might hold more than one meaning, Bryher brings to our attention that texts signify differently to different readers. In her ‘Preface’ to *Development*, Lowell signposted Nancy’s unique faculty too, writing: ‘To most people, even to most authors, words are chiefly symbols; to Nancy, they have an essence of their own, a vibration in themselves quite apart from their connotations.’¹²⁷ Suggestively, for Nancy, words mean otherwise than they usually do. Indeed, Nancy’s reading practice is sensual and erotic. This was taken up by a reviewer, who observed sarcastically, that ‘to feel at the sound both of ‘clamorous’ and ‘mulberry’ as if one were touching a ripe apricot is to be under influences which have nothing to do with beauty of their meaning.’¹²⁸ The reviewer intimates that there is something perverse in Nancy’s novel way of reading, and that she is under the influence of something that he cannot bring himself to mention.

In Medd’s analysis of the trial transcripts for “The Cult of the Clitoris” case (1918), she notes that when Lord Alfred Douglas took the stand on behalf of Noel Pemberton-Billing, he suggested that ‘calling “things” what they *are not*, and an aversion to calling things what they are,’ renders ‘all symbolic modes of reading [...] as perverted.’¹²⁹ According to Medd, Douglas, then, seemed to suggest that any reading practice that does not say things directly is inherently queer. Nancy, in unhooking the signifier from the signified – the word ‘mulberry,’ in the critic’s example, becomes attached instead to the concept, apricot – is bent on calling things what they are not. Not only then does she articulate queerly but, fittingly, reads so too.

In one of the founding texts of post-structuralism, ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968), Roland Barthes famously dethroned the Author as the sovereign producer of textual meaning, and replaced him (and I use the pronoun advisedly) with the Reader. It was instead through the play of signifiers, he argued, that meaning was made. In an extract that speaks to the inherent violence of seeking to reach behind, or through, the text to its ‘real’ meaning, Barthes wrote:

¹²⁷ Lowell, ‘Preface,’ p.8

¹²⁸ ‘Development,’ *Times Literary Supplement* n.d., Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

¹²⁹ Medd, “‘The Cult of the Clitoris,’” p.41

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, ‘run’ (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced.¹³⁰

For Barthes, texts are textiles; they are always already veils, but ones that cannot be lifted, since nothing lies beneath. Barthes’ simile – texts are like stockings – evokes, yet at the same time rebuffs, the interpretative practice of critics like Williams, who sought to unveil the naked truth. Indeed, as Barthes observed: ‘there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic’¹³¹ In unseating the Author, the semiotician simultaneously relegated the Critic too.

Taking up Barthes’ work further, we can designate *Development* and *Two Selves* as writerly texts – they require the reader to creatively engage with them, forcing us to produce, rather than simply consume them. Readerly texts, on the other hand, draw upon recognisable and deeply entrenched literary codes, that do not require the reader to do any work; it is a passive mode of reading.¹³² I suggest too that Bryher’s refusal of ‘I,’ her rupture of the autobiographical pact, anticipated, as did numerous modernist writers, such as Stein, Richardson, and Woolf, Barthes’ slaying of the Author. Instead she envisioned a more democratic reading practice by suggesting that meaning was generated in the interplay between reader and text, rather than being housed in the text itself, having been lodged there by the author.

In the next section I continue to explore these themes, as I move on to Bryher’s deployment of the figure of the cross-dressed girl page, a multi-layered figure who similarly refuses the idea of a singular (gendered) truth.

‘I said I wanted codpiece or nothing’: Reading the Girl Page

As well as offering an alternative model of textual consumption, Bryher, I suggest, deployed the ludic figure of the cross-dressed girl page, who roams *Development* and *Two Selves*, as yet further resistance to the groping gaze of both critics like Williams and sexological reading practices. S/he is a theatrical, confounding figure who shrugs off such

¹³⁰ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author,’ in Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p.147

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathon Cape, 1975), p.4

attempts at penetration, such hankerings after the naked truth (of body or text). S/he is also a paradigmatically queer figure who troubles the fixity of the heterosexual matrix, and, moreover, who, via her multiple performances, offers us various contrary models of desire, thereby further facilitating Bryher's queer articulations. Indeed, while Nancy 'wanted knowledge, loved it, longed for it,' and eventually acquired it through 'books she discovered and read for herself,' (D 110) it was not the tomes of sexual science that proved of use to her. In an important scene, which takes place in the final chapter of 'Epic Childhood,' we find Nancy searching for companionship in her father's library:

Lonely, not for playfellows, but for some one to share her dreams, a wet April morning sent her to search the library, sent her to a worn book on the middle shelf: *The Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, by William Hazlitt. Was it the hint of history which made her take it down, some innate interest in the old cover which made her carry it upstairs? There was a sense of richness in the paper as she turned the leaves, as lines obscure in meaning, strong in music, ebbed in her head. Nancy had come to her own land at last. (D 76-77).¹³³

This is a celebration of reading, and of finding the right sort of text – a writerly text, we might say – one which Nancy struggles to understand, and whose difficulty she actively revels in. It also presents the act of reading as an embodied practice. Importantly, though, it is a moment too of recognition; Nancy discovers her own land at last.¹³⁴

Nancy's own land is inhabited by a coterie of cross-dressed girls since, as Bryher noted in her 1920 essay, 'The Girl-Page in Elizabethan Literature':

Every Elizabethan writer seemed to have been tempted by the possibilities of disguise. [...] There are repeated instances of a man borrowing a ruff and a farthingale, but perhaps the favourite of all devices is to send a girl forth in the apparel of a boy.¹³⁵

¹³³ William Hazlitt's *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* was first published in 1820.

¹³⁴ Many years later, in 'A Note on Beaumont and Fletcher' (1943) Bryher once again referred to the difficulty of reading Elizabethan plays: 'Elizabethan plays have never been widely read. Men like Hazlitt and Swinburne have loved them with a fierce, wild enthusiasm but they do not lend themselves to academic research, they are too fiery, too uneven in plot and conception and youth either does not discover them or is repelled for a want of a few indications on "how" to read them.' Bryher, 'A Note on Beaumont and Fletcher,' *Life and Letters To-Day* 36 (January 1943): p.5

¹³⁵ W. Bryher, 'The Girl-Page,' p.442

Bryher's fast-paced study, full of elan and erudition, was based on her reading of 118 Elizabethan plays and indicates the import that the girl page held for her.¹³⁶

Thus, Nancy is kin to such cross-dressed characters as Shakespeare's Rosalind/Ganymede from *As You Like It* (1599-1600), Viola/Cesario from *Twelfth Night* (1601) and Imogen /Fidele from *Cymbeline* (c.1611), as well as Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's Bellario/Euphrasia from *Philaster, or Love Lies a Bleeding* (1609-10). Bryher observed: 'Her intimacy with Bellario and Bellafront, with all that Imogen ever spoke, made friendship in this modern world difficult of achievement.' (D 164). Like Nancy these figures are dissemblers, who are forced to conceal themselves for a variety of reasons, and like Bryher's protagonist, though they hide themselves from other members of the cast, the reader/viewer is positioned as 'in the know' and has the means to see through their costumes. Tellingly, in her 1920 essay Bryher draws a direct connection between the restrictions of womanhood in her own lifetime and those of the Elizabethan era, asserting that 'it [too] was a period of parental oppression.'¹³⁷

Nancy's discovery is a very different scene of reading, then, to the often-cited one, to which Winning drew our attention earlier, in Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, in which Stephen is finally afforded self-discovery while listlessly fingering through her father's secret bookshelf. This scene follows a devastating confrontation with her mother, in which Stephen is told she must leave her ancestral home, Morton, since her mother has discovered that Stephen loved and courted a neighbour's wife, Angela Crossby. Following this, Stephen finds herself in her father's study, where she is drawn to a locked bookcase. Having 'slipped the key into the lock and turned it,' Stephen:

noticed that on a shelf near the bottom was a row of books standing behind the others; the next moment she had one of these in her hand, and was looking at the name of the author: Krafft-Ebing – she had never heard of that author before. All the same she opened the battered old book, then she looked more closely, for there on its margins were notes in her father's small, scholarly hand and she saw that her own name appeared in these notes –¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Indeed, in autobiographical notes in the Beinecke, Bryher recorded 'my first Elizabethan period during the 1917-18 years.' Manuscript fragments, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 72, Folder 2872, Beinecke.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.444

¹³⁸ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1999), p.207

Stephen reads into the gloaming, bending her head to the light of the window, until Puddle, her ex-governess-cum-companion, arrives to offer her solace (and give her own confession).

Though both Nancy and Stephen pick out and peruse old books by unfamiliar authors from their father's libraries, their responses and their discoveries are markedly different. Hall's scene is set up from the start as *the* moment of self-revelation: Stephen literally unlocks the truth about herself, she finds the 'answer to the riddle of her unwanted being' and it is a truth that is paternally sanctioned by both Krafft-Ebing as well as her own beloved father.¹³⁹ It is also a scene framed by isolation and disaster. Stumbling to the study, Stephen feels that:

All the loneliness that had gone before was as nothing to this new loneliness of spirit. An immense desolation swept down upon her, an immense need to cry out. All around her were grey and crumbling ruins, and under those ruins her love lay bleeding; shamefully wounded by Angela Crosby, shamefully soiled and defiled by her mother – a piteous, suffering defenceless thing, it lay bleeding under the ruins.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, although Stephen is represented as discovering the truth of herself, it is a truth which leaves her maimed and marked like Cain. Though Hall's reference to Stephen's dashed and crushed love seemingly summons the spectre of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* – whose subtitle, *Love Lies a Bleeding*, refers to Philaster's wounding of Arethusa following accusations of infidelity – there is no happy resolution, as is the case for Beaumont and Fletcher's couple. Nancy's reading scene, on the other hand, introduces her to a coterie of friends and companions, and, importantly to Bellario, Beaumont and Fletcher's girl page.

In place of the female invert, then, Bryher offered the playful figure of the cross-dressed girl page. Referring to Shakespeare's Viola/ Cesario and Rosalind/ Ganymede, Nancy notes that 'she was ever impatient of the end where they changed to a girl's attire, [relinquishing] 'the lovely garnish of a boy'' (D 29), a phrase borrowed from yet another play with a cross-dressed character, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-8). Bryher makes clear then that the attraction of such texts for Nancy does not lie in their narrative resolution, in the point of disclosure, when gendered (and, frequently, national) order returns, but instead in the various moments of 'gender trouble'. Moreover, as Bryher

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.206

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

was herself aware, and, indeed, as she noted in 'The Girl-Page,' this was not the end anyhow since 'in the seventeenth century the women's parts were always acted by boys' as women were banned from the stage.¹⁴¹ As a number of Renaissance scholars have argued, in the Elizabethan period this fact introduced both a queer erotics and a dangerous 'anti-structure' to the theatre, which deeply vexed many religious commentators (as well as buoying the polemics of anti-theatrical critics). Such commentators saw the boy player as a threat to theological and national order.¹⁴² Player's boys were rigorously trained for their parts; they were apprenticed to Masters, whom they served as well as learnt from, a relationship which recalls Plato's formulation of pedagogic eros, and which Bryher would directly engage with thirty years later in her second historical novel, *The Player's Boy* (1953).¹⁴³ Indeed, Shakespeare alluded to the queer erotics at work on the Elizabethan theatre when he had Rosalind choose Zeus' cupbearer and lover as her male disguise: 'I'll have no worse a name than Jove's own page,/ And therefore look you call me Ganymede.'¹⁴⁴ As we shall see shortly, this was also a myth that Bryher set to play in her own texts.

If, then, we reconsider Bryher's March 1919 letter to H.D. with these particular passages of *Development* in mind, the novelist's request for information on 'cross-dressing' gains a different colouring. Rather than evoking Ellis' category of inversion, it speaks just as well to the figure of the Elizabethan girl page. Indeed, in the same letter Bryher also tells H.D. that 'we talked of progress and his big book that he is writing, the position of women in the Elizabethan Age'.¹⁴⁵ Ellis certainly shared Bryher's interest in Elizabethan drama, having become editor of the Mermaid Series of unexpurgated Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in 1897.

Rather than playful Rosalind or plucky Viola, Bryher repeatedly returned to and reanimated Beaumont and Fletcher's girl page Bellario throughout her life. Bellario offers an alternative model to these celebrated Shakespearean characters. Firstly, she is cross-dressed from the beginning: we meet her as Bellario, in the role of Philaster's page, rather

¹⁴¹ W. Bryher, 'The Girl-Page,' p.444.

¹⁴² See Phyllis Rackin, 'Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage,' *PMLA* 102,1 (January 1987): p.35; and Tracey Sedinger, "'If sight and shape be true": The Epistemology of Crossdressing on the London Stage,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48, 1 (spring 1997): pp.63-79.

¹⁴³ Bryher represents her player's boy, James Sands, as the beloved in a form of *paidierastia*, which then sees the Master (variously Master Awsten, Frances Beaumont, and Master Sly) as the pedagogue figure. See Bryher, *The Player's Boy: A Novel* (New York: Pantheon, 1953).

¹⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), p.187, 1.3.121-2.

¹⁴⁵ Bryher to H.D. 20 March 1919, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Beinecke.

than as Euphrasia, devout daughter of Dion. Unlike Shakespeare's plays, then, the audience is *not* in on it from the beginning. Most striking, however, is the fact that at the play's conclusion, Bellario does not wed, the usual resolution for Elizabethan comedies, where gendered, classed and national order is restored once again. Instead, Bellario vows to stay celibate (like Nancy, who, if we recall, 'hated men.' (TS 264)). Following Bellario's 'coming out,' which s/he is forced into in order to prove Arethusa's fidelity to Philaster, Arethusa's father, the King, offers to 'Search out a match,' telling the page that 'I will pay the dowry,' but Bellario responds: 'Never, sir, will I/ Marry. It is a thing within my vow.'¹⁴⁶ Euphrasia/Bellarion stands outside the otherwise happy resolution, where 'natural' hierarchy is regained and nation and marriage line up: Philaster, now husband of Arethusa, is heir to Sicily, as well as the Kingdom of Naples. Indeed, if Beaumont and Fletcher were known at all in the early twentieth century, it was for their dissidence and lack of convention. In his 1820 collection, *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (the text which so animated Nancy in that earlier reading scene), Hazlitt observed of the pair, that:

They are not safe teachers of morality: they tamper with it, like an experiment tried *in corpore vili*; and seem to regard the decomposition of the common affections, and the dissolution of the strict bonds of society, as an agreeable study and a careless pastime.¹⁴⁷

No wonder, then, that Bryher was drawn to the improper, heterodox duo, with their inviting 'laxity of principle'.¹⁴⁸

In *Two Selves* Bryher dedicates an entire chapter, 'Cherry Pie' to Nancy's identification with, and desire for, Bellario. Here, Nancy addresses Beaumont and Fletcher's girl page directly in a heart-felt outburst:

"Bellario. When you ran away what did you do? How did you get your page's clothes to begin with and how did you get out of the house? I know you told your father you were going on a pilgrimage but there must have been servants or something . . . and why were you such a fool as to care about Philaster? [...] Come, Bellario. I am so tired of dreaming you. I want you to teach me sword play. I can fence, modern fashion. Come and teach me and tell me things ... do you know how lonely I am with no

¹⁴⁶ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Philaster, or Love Lies a Bleeding*, ed. Dora Jean Ashe (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), p.118, 5.5.192 & 194; 5.5.195-6

¹⁴⁷ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (New York: Lemma Publishing Corporation, 1972), p.87

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

one to talk to? I can make questions but I can't make answers . . ." (TS 219)

The scene is further marked out since it is framed by quotation marks: this is the first instance in which Nancy speaks out in a public voice. Moreover, this passage echoes themes present in her earlier, passionate address to a reader-lover, in which Nancy was no longer able to contain her impatience and sought 'the answer one waited' (TS 267). Here, once again, Nancy asks for dialogue, but this time not just with a reader, but a teacher who will provide her with answers. Moreover, if we recall, in that earlier passage Nancy reeled off a list of sites: 'Egypt, Syracuse, Carthage, Naples...' (TS 267). This is the landscape of *Philaster*: Bellario comes from Syracuse and Arethusa from Naples.

Forty years later, in *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher rewrote Nancy's scene of discovery:

The beginning of life is brief. It is only the moment when the spirit is neither male nor female but a unity and my April lasted barely its thirty days. I think my mind might subsequently have died had not destiny sent me scuffling along the shelves of my father's library towards an old, leather-bound book. It was Hazlitt's *Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* and in it, waiting for me, was Bellario.¹⁴⁹

In re-scripting her meeting with Bellario, however, Bryher reversed the roles: here, it is Bellario who awaits the younger Bryher not vice versa. And, although the older Bryher casts this as a life saving moment, she erases the pleasure and possibility in textual difficulty that we saw in Nancy's own scene of discovery.

Ten years later in *The Days of Mars* (1972), Bryher noted rather obscurely, that: 'Bellario may have been unconsciously a symbol to me of what I felt I had lost.'¹⁵⁰ Finally, and circling back to 1920 again, in 'The Girl-Page' Bryher described Bellario as:

It is the poetry and the spirit and the tragedy of adventure caught in a single figure. Yet-

"The trustiest, loving'st and the gentlest boy
That ever masters kept."

possesses a wisdom, a rarity of intuition wholly unboyish, nor is she hostage to mere restlessness, but rather the embodiment of that spirit, warm with longing and experiment some have titled youth.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.121

¹⁵⁰ Bryher, *The Days of Mars: A Memoir 1940-1946* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p.101

Accordingly, we have Bellario as, variously, the symbol of childhood, an androgynous unity, a gentle boy who is wholly unboyish, a marker of something lost; in sum, a figure as slippery and mutable as Proteus, one who refuses to be pinned down. S/he is, moreover, a figure who unsettles the correct lining up of gender, sex, and sexuality. Bryher spoke to this a couple of decades later, when she observed that during World War One, ‘not one Bellario but hundreds, drove ambulances or sat at telephone switchboards quite unmoved by any falling bombs.’¹⁵² Not only does this evoke the radical shift in gender norms which took place during the Great War, but, through her reference to female ambulance drivers, Bryher also invokes Hall’s notorious novel. In what is perhaps her happiest period as an adult, Hall’s protagonist Stephen Gordon works tirelessly at the French front, an ‘other’ space, in which she discovers both camaraderie and love, through her meeting with Mary Llewellyn.

In ‘Cherry Pie,’ when Nancy fantasises about venturing as Bellario she thinks: ‘What fun, tricking them all. Being one’s self.’ (TS 221). What this self is, however, is not clear, other than a figure that radically undermines the fixity of the heterosexual matrix. This is foregrounded in a letter to H.D., written some time in the early 1930s, in which Bryher describes a recent analytical session with Hanns Sachs. She observed:

I have come to the bones as it were avec Turtle [Sachs]. There was apparently never question of compromise – there is with most – I said I wanted codpiece or nothing always in the unconscious and we have worked back this layer right to three [years old].¹⁵³

Here, Bryher quite matter of factly acknowledges her desire for a codpiece (*not* a penis); she desires masculinity *not* manhood.

As well as a slang term for penis, the codpiece was, from the fifteenth through to the seventeenth centuries, also an item of men’s dress. Though Bryher claims that she and Sachs have come to the ‘bones’ of the matter, having slowly peeled back the onion-like layers of her unconscious, nothing is revealed but an item of clothing, and one whose function was, initially at least, concealment. In the fifteenth century, the shortening of

¹⁵¹ W. Bryher, ‘The Girl-Page,’ p.449. In ‘A Note on Beaumont and Fletcher,’ Bryher contended that the pair ‘created the best of all the girl pages in literature in Bellario’. Bryher, ‘A Note on Beaumont and Fletcher,’ p.8

¹⁵² Bryher, ‘A Note on Beaumont and Fletcher,’ pp.8-9.

¹⁵³ Bryher to H.D. [c. 1930s] cited in Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller, ‘Superior Guinea Pig: Bryher and Psychoanalysis,’ p.7. At <http://www.laisps.org/GuineaP.html>. Accessed on 26/01/2004.

men's doublets resulted in the inadvertent revelation of their genitalia – since hose did not cover this section of male anatomy – and so a triangular piece of cloth was introduced to male garb to rectify this: the codpiece (in middle English, 'cod' means bag or scrotum). By the sixteenth century, however, the codpiece began to be padded and shaped, even adorned, in order to emphasise, rather than conceal, the male genital area. Over time then, the codpiece effectively usurped the role of the penis, exaggerating it and thus revealing its status as a signifier.

In Freudian psychoanalytic terms Bryher's desire for a codpiece would have been framed in relation to the 'masculinity complex' and later linked with 'penis envy.' These conceptual terms, like Freud's suggestion in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that 'where the component drives of sexuality appear, they [women] prefer the passive form,' have been, as Griselda Pollock puts it, 'red rags to feminist cows'.¹⁵⁴ Yet, we can also see these apparently misogynistic notions as in fact accurately describing (white, middle-class) women's compromised position in Victorian society. Indeed, in the masculinity complex Freud recognised women's grounds for wanting access to the masculine position as a desire for activity. In Freudian terms the active is not innately masculine but instead situated on the oppositional scale active/passive, which then translates into the social positionings, masculine/feminine. As Pollock argues, the 'preference for the passive [...] is important to redress since Freud's discussion of the sexual component drives carefully reveals that there is only ever one originating form: active. Passive is not its opposition but its involution or even complement.'¹⁵⁵ This redress is crucial to Pollock's project, which seeks to highlight the radical nature of the theory of drives that Freud proposed in *Three Theories*. Indeed, according to the feminist art historian, drive theory not only marked a departure from sexological notions of different desires, as pathological or congenital, but crucially also undermined the very notion of a normal, natural sexuality. What Freud's *Three Essays* actually achieved was the subversive revelation, as Pollock writes, that:

there is no normal, no proper, no acceptable sexuality but only a complex and variable trajectory from the need for animal sustenance to the ability to love and experience pleasure with ourselves and later with another by means of the formations of the drives, their varied aims and unpredictable objects.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud cited in Griselda Pollock, 'The Visual Poetics of Shame: a Feminist Reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905),' in *Shame and Sexuality: Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture*, eds. Claire Pajaczkowska and Ivan Ward (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p.123; Ibid, p.124

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.124

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p.111

In other words, in his theory of drives, Freud recognised that desire is inherently queer.

In a reading which contests the idea of Freud as an arch misogynist, whose theories were rooted in a biological essentialism, Pollock continues by observing that, in fact, ‘The writing of this essay is primarily a wonder of deconstruction – disassembling the everyday and common-sense ideas about fixed sexuality’.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, in a total reversal of this earlier notion, Pollock states: ‘Psychoanalysis, far from reducing everything to a fixed origin, functions as a counter-theory. *All is accident.*’¹⁵⁸ Pollock thus discerns in psychoanalysis a struggle ‘for a political emancipation of human sexualities not dictated by the elevation of a sovereign construction of the biological.’¹⁵⁹ Following Pollock, then, we can see that in his theory of drives, Freud, in fact, offered legitimacy to same-sex desires (as well as to Bryher’s want for the ‘codpiece’) since it exploded the notion of a natural or normal sexuality. In Pollock’s interpretation, then, *Three Essays* would, in fact, have comfortably echoed back at Bryher her early contention that, ‘I am a girl by accident’. It is the radical assertions of Freud, then, that reverberate through *Development* and *Two Selves*, particularly in the figure of the girl page, bedecked with her “lovely garnish of a boy,” rather than a sexological model of perversity. Indeed, in the light of Pollock’s essay, the father of psychoanalysis becomes the very first queer theorist.

Before moving on to my final section, it is pertinent to note that as well as frequently figuring as an exile in Elizabethan dramatic writing, the girl page also often performed the duty of messenger. Strikingly, in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster* Bellario transports ‘hidden love’ between the prince and princess, with Philaster describing the page’s role to Arethusa as being: ‘To wait on you and bear our hidden love.’¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in Bryher’s texts, Nancy’s hidden self bears the traces of desire forbidden in the early twentieth century; she is cloaked in a gallimaufry of queer intertexts. In the following section, I consider how Bryher re-figured a range of tropes and signifiers with homoerotic heritages, such as the Greco-Roman myths of Zeus and Ganymede, Narcissus and Artemis and Endymion, in her performance of veiled disclosure.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.117

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.119

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.114

¹⁶⁰ Beaumont and Fletcher, *Philaster*, p.25, 1.2.142

Veiled Disclosures and Queer Articulations

In its liminal state, caught in the movement of simultaneously revealing and concealing, I suggest that we consider Bryher's texts as a steganograph. Derived from the Greek for 'hidden' (steganos) and 'writing' (graph), according to Kuhn, 'the goal of steganography is to hide messages inside other harmless messages in a way that does not allow any enemy to even detect that there is a second secret message present.'¹⁶¹ While an early instance of steganography saw the captured Greek tyrant Histiaeus tattoo a message onto the shaven head of a messenger to facilitate its covert transmission (once his hair had grown back) to his son-in-law Aristagoras, and thus connects it with an unveiling of the flesh, another ancient form of steganography sees covert messages inscribed in milk or lemon juice in between lines of text.¹⁶² Those 'in the know' would then heat or sprinkle soot on the text in order to discern the invisible intertextual writing. It is Bryher's introduction of queer intertexts which constitutes her most ingenious strategy of veiled disclosure. Bryher gestures to the queer motifs of Sappho and her fragmented poetic production as well as the Greek myth of Artemis and Endymion, and in a queer act of borrowing, she usurps homoerotic tropes as she alludes to Plato's *Symposium* and the myths of Narcissus and Echo.

Bryher's most obvious performance of veiled disclosure is her choice of name for her protagonist. Nancy is a variation upon the names Anne or Annie, and thus alludes to Bryher's own given name: Annie Winifred Ellerman. It also, however, bears specifically homosexual connotations. The terms 'Nancy,' 'Miss Nancy,' and 'Nancy boy' are slang for catamite or 'a boy kept by a pederast' and therefore invite knowing readers to consider Nancy's queer desire.¹⁶³ Indeed, Collecott refers to the name as 'contemptuously effeminate.'¹⁶⁴ Moreover, as we have seen, *Development* was written during a period when Bryher was herself undergoing a renaming. This transition cast off her famous patronymic, Ellerman, and signalled her move away from the cloying, and oppressive, role

¹⁶¹ M. Kuhn cited in P.M. Sivathanan, 'Steganography: An Urban Myth or a Virtual Reality' (Unpublished PhD thesis. Leeds, University of Leeds, 2002), p.1. In contrast, the *OED* defines it as 'the art of secret writing'.

¹⁶² The 5th century BCE Greek historian, Herodotus, writes: 'there came from Susa Histiaeus' messenger, the man with the marked head [...] For Histiaeus desired to signify to Aristagoras that he should revolt; and having no other safe way of so doing [...] he shaved and pricked marks on the head of his trustiest slave, and waited till the hair grew again'. Herodotus, *Histories III, Books V-VII*, trans. A.D. Godley (London: William Heinmann, 1963), p.39

¹⁶³ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: Colloquialisms and Catch Phrases, Fossilised Jokes and Puns, General Nicknames, Vulgarisms and such, Americanisms as have been naturalised* (London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.777

of beloved daughter, a position with which Nancy also struggles.¹⁶⁵ Our attention is also drawn to the importance of naming within Bryher's texts, for, in an episode that describes Nancy's first foray into the pleasures of writing, she notes that: 'the whole campaign was forgotten while [Nancy] pondered over the hero's name.' (D 38).

'Nancy' also speaks to the popular homoerotic myth of Zeus and Ganymede, which is embedded in Bryher's texts. In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle offers a novel interpretation of the much discussed scene in Henry James' *The Bostonians* (1885-6) in which Olive is described, soon after her meeting with Verena, as having 'taken Verena up, in the literal sense of the phrase, like a bird of the air.'¹⁶⁶ Contesting readings which have linked this scene with Milton, Castle contends that 'what the image much more directly and vividly recalls is the preeminent classical instance of male homosexual desire, Zeus's rape of Ganymede while in the shape of an eagle.'¹⁶⁷ Castle then proceeds to argue that, 'The passage could in fact be said to mark a kind of allegorical "crossing point" or junction at which the thematic of male and female homosexuality coincide.'¹⁶⁸ Not only, then, is the myth re-routed through James' famous 'lesbian' novel but, Castle suggests, it is a crossing over. In other words, it partakes of a queer movement, a queer cross-sex borrowing.

Film scholar Richard Dyer notes that the Zeus-Ganymede myth has an 'explicitly homoerotic theme, with a rich artistic pedigree,' a point which he expands upon in his discussion of the little-known Swedish film of 1916, *Vingarne (Wings)*, whose 'key personnel,' he tells us, 'were all gay'.¹⁶⁹ The film's fulcrum is Swedish sculptor Carl Milles' *Vingarna* (c. 1908), which 'shows a sinewy youth on his knees with his arms reaching up into the wings of an eagle,' a stance which recalls the Zeus-Ganymede legend.¹⁷⁰ Zeus is so taken by the Trojan prince's pulchritude that, disguising himself as an eagle, he swoops down and bears Ganymede off to Olympus to become his cupbearer and lover.

Dyer avers that Milles' statue 'is central to the film's strategy of homosexual evasion and declaration,' for those 'in the know' the reason for the sculpture's pervasive presence is limpid while for those oblivious to its classical homoerotic heritage it must be

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.137

¹⁶⁵ Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance,' p.129

¹⁶⁶ Henry James cited in Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.178

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies in Lesbian and Gay Film* 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.20 & 11

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.17

taken at face value.¹⁷¹ In *Development* and *Two Selves*, Bryher similarly alludes to the Zeus-Ganymede myth in her own strategy of queer evasion and declaration. Bryher twins Nancy with Ganymede, firstly, through her protagonist's name, for, as we have seen, Nancy is slang for 'Catamite,' which is the Latin transliteration of the Greek, 'Ganymede'. Bryher foregrounds this association in an episode that sees Nancy return to her 'homeland,' the South: 'Solitary, before the frescoes of the bull ring and the *Cupbearer*, Nancy recovered antiquity.' (D 129. My italics). In *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher again reiterates her true vocation: 'After I left Queenwood I prayed that my destiny might be service to artists and poets. I saw myself as a [Benozzo] Gozzoli page, a cupbearer at the feast of minds'.¹⁷² Moreover, in that crucial passage I read earlier, Nancy was 'waiting to be lifted,' a phrase which Bryher would repeat again in *The Player's Boy*, when the boy of the title, James Sands, recounts how liberating he finds his temporary position in service to playwright, Francis Beaumont: 'this [moment] is like the story that Mr. Beaumont told us the other evening. Do you remember, about the boy and the Eagle? *We are lifted up...*'¹⁷³

The presence of the Zeus-Ganymede trope becomes even more luminous, however, when we consider an unpublished fragment of prose, which is filed alongside the manuscript of Bryher's prose poem, 'Eros of the Sea' at the Beinecke. It depicts a kiss between 'Nancy' and someone called 'Helga' (H.). In *West*, Nancy's friend and travelling companion is Helga Brandt, who, if we suture together the three texts, is, by implication, the nameless female poet of *Two Selves*. Collecott has proposed that this fragment represents an alternative – and, she argues, explicitly lesbian – ending to *Two Selves*. The fragment reads:

To her amazement H. was crying, short bird-sobs quivering the body. It had never occurred to her H. could possibly care.

Without word, without protest, H. moved to her with eyes she dared not face. Wild eyes, wild wings; head bent back. Flutter of lips, flutter of more than lips, towards her mouth.

O ripple of bird-notes
on my throat.

As swiftly was gone. Dumb, bewildered struggling with new pain,
because of your lips I will live.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Dyer, *Now You See It*, p.16

¹⁷² Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.183

¹⁷³ Bryher, *The Player's Boy*, p.85. My italics.

¹⁷⁴ Bryher cited in Diana Collecott, 'H.D.'s "Gift of Greek" Bryher's "Eros of the Sea,"' in *H.D. Newsletter* 3:1 (1989), pp.11-12

In this electrifying rendering of desire, the poet ‘H.’ is figured as ornithoid. She is cast in the role of Zeus’ kidnapping eagle (‘Wild eyes, wild wings’), to Nancy’s Ganymede (‘with her head bent back’), which speaks to popular representations of the myth, such as Milles’ Statue, *Vingarna* (1908). What is so striking about this excerpt is that following the kiss Nancy speaks in the first person: ‘because of your lips I will live,’ she tells H. Bryher’s decision to extract this scene clearly reveals the press of censorship, which prevented such explicit imaging of same-sex desire. Yet, as I now consider, Bryher did draw upon the most celebrated Lesbian poet: Sappho.

‘If you want the gist of the matter go to Sappho, Catullus, Villon,’ Ezra Pound suggested to anyone interested in Imagism.¹⁷⁵ The *Imagistes* sought lyric perfection and saw themselves as being engaged solely with the ‘best tradition, as they found it in the best writers of all time’.¹⁷⁶ Sappho, who was lauded in ancient times too – Plato famously named her the tenth muse – was one of the few from whom Pound suggests the poets draw instruction and inspiration. Aside from the Imagists, Sappho’s poetry also drew the attention of other early twentieth century writers, but for different reasons. In the 1931 lecture that I cited earlier, Woolf conjures the spectre of Sappho, alongside Jane Austen, in her pedigree of woman writers. Sappho, and her fragments, afford Woolf the means to offer a riposte to those who say that there have never been any successful women writers. Woolf writes: ‘When they said, Women cannot write I downed them with the sacred name of Sappho – a very difficult writer whom few people have read.’¹⁷⁷ Here, Woolf lands a double blow, for Sappho is, in part, difficult because her poetry only remains to us in fragments following the censorship of the Church; the novelist thereby speaks to the social (and religious) mores which not only prevent women from writing, or being acknowledged as writers, but which splinter and fragment their work too. Moreover, few have read the poet, as Woolf notes, since only a few (and those predominantly men) have been tutored in Greek.

For other contemporaries, such as Natalie Barney and Renée Vivien, who, according to Karla Jay, ‘deified Sappho and took her words as a foundation for living and writing,’ it was the fact that Sappho’s sensuous love poetry was addressed to, and composed for, women that was the draw.¹⁷⁸ The dearth of representations of female same-

¹⁷⁵ Ezra Pound cited in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones (London: Penguin, 2001 [1913]), p.130.

¹⁷⁶ F.S. Flint cited in *Sappho Trough English Poetry*, eds. Peter Jay and Caroline Lewis (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1996), p.11

¹⁷⁷ Woolf, ‘Speech Before The London/ National Society For Women’s Service, January 21 1931,’ p.xl

¹⁷⁸ Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.12

sex desire in western art and literature has meant that both the figure of Sappho, as well as her fragmented literary production, function as important touchstones for lesbian writers.

Over the centuries writers and critics have recast and reinterpreted Sappho and the two hundred fragments which remain of the original nine volumes of her poetic oeuvre, and consequently, a sprawling and contradictory mythology has risen up around her. Although what remains of Sappho's poetry is mostly about and addressed to women, the poet's love of the ferryman Phaon and her subsequent leap from the Leucadian rock after he spurned her, are facts equally ingrained in the western literary tradition. Roman poet Ovid's conflation of the poet Sappho with the 'Other' Sappho, purportedly a courtesan from Lesbos and the 'real' lover of Phaon, was the beginning of a trend which saw the erasure or replacement of Sappho's address to women. For many years Sappho's 'lesbian' fragments were rescripted, erased or mistranslated to fit a heterosexual mould. Such critical practice began to be contested at the turn of the twentieth century, a period when many women, including Bryher, were beginning to learn Greek, and when explicitly 'lesbian' fragments, such as Balmer's No.33 (96LP), were discovered at the archaeological site of Oxyrhincus in Egypt.¹⁷⁹ Suggestively, for Nancy, learning Greek is an act of survival in wartime Britain: 'I know that Greek is valueless but I must have some beauty or I'll die,' she says, 'I often think of the Thames' (TS 270).

Like Sappho's fragmented poetic form, modern queer writing also bears the cicatrices inflicted by the oppressive social mores of the period.¹⁸⁰ Such is the case with *Development* and *Two Selves*. Indeed, reviews repeatedly made reference to the fragmented nature of *Development*: 'It is an essay in autobiography, a note-book rather than a novel, the *fragmentary* jottings of a child's emotions,' stated one,¹⁸¹ while the reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian* described it as 'a small *fragment* of a limited life'.¹⁸² Nancy's fragmented self, sundered by the inflexible social mores of the Edwardian period, recalls both Sappho herself – one of 'the mutilated Poets of Antiquity' – as well as her extant fragments.¹⁸³ Moreover, Sappho's presence is also discernible in the paragraph from *Two Selves*, which I cited earlier, saturated as it is with natural images, as well as in

¹⁷⁹ Sappho, *Poems & Fragments*, ed. Josephine Balmer (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), p.47

¹⁸⁰ Winning, however, has also noted the 'compelling correlation between representations of an identity fractured by modernity and a lesbian identity fragmented through cultural mediation and intervention.' Winning 'Writing by the Light of *The Well*,' p.390

¹⁸¹ *Times Literary Supplement*, [n.d.], Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke. My italics.

¹⁸² 'Developments,' *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3111, Beinecke. My italics.

¹⁸³ Joseph Addison cited in Jay and Lewis, *Sappho Through English Poetry*, p.19

Nancy's reference to herself as a 'vase painted over with many pictures' (TS 267). A number of the poet's fragments were conserved on potsherds and vases (such as Balmer's 79 and 100), many of which were palimpsests. Invitingly, writing to H.D. in December 1918, Bryher noted of the poems in *Sea Garden*: they 'are like an old vase or a piece of some statue to me. They suggest so much.'¹⁸⁴ Although Nancy's fragmented self vividly evidences the strictures of Edwardian society, as Bryher's letter suggests, the fragment was also a resonant form – it 'suggest[s] so much' – and one that further facilitated her queer articulations.

Bryher's texts are suffused with Sapphism; she alludes both to the mythic figure of Sappho and her lyric form as well as employing Sapphic motifs. In one fragment, Sappho refers to love as that 'bittersweet, undefeated creature,' a phrase which although it speaks to the experience of love in general, reverberates particularly with that most 'impossible' of desires.¹⁸⁵ Nancy's tale, like that of other queer subjects, such as Stephen Gordon, is itself bittersweet.¹⁸⁶ The bitterness is most discernible when, in her despair, Nancy contemplates suicide:

Better not try to find a friend. Better drown under the cliffs. One stab of water and no fear more. [...] Better be done with it, under the cliff, forget the anemones, the sea call, the adventures. One choke of water and no fight more. Better not try to find. . . (TS 289).

Nancy is here twinned with Ovid's Sappho, as Collecott argues, the episode reverberates with the Roman poet's 'representation of Sappho as the frustrated lover of Phaon who, inspired by Aphrodite, casts herself into the sea.'¹⁸⁷ Nancy, however, draws back from the maw, shrugs off this tragedy and, shortly after this episode, meets the woman poet: her sweet salve.

Greek lyric poetry, 'which was sung by a single voice and was [...] personal in subject matter,' however, was in stark contrast to epic form, epitomised by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which preceded it.¹⁸⁸ In Bryher's own texts there is a transition from what

¹⁸⁴ Bryher to H.D., 22 December 1918, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 3, Folder 80, Beinecke.

¹⁸⁵ Collecott tells us that 'Sappho's sobriquet for Eros was *glukupikros* (literally translated "sweetbitter")' however, it is usually translated 'bittersweet'. See Collecott, 'H.D.'s "Gift of Greek" Bryher's "Eros of the Sea,"' p.13

¹⁸⁶ In *Queers Read This*, a 1990 leaflet distributed by Anonymous Queers, 'queer' is described as a term which is 'forcibly bittersweet'. Anonymous Queers cited in Heather K. Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.2

¹⁸⁷ Diana Collecott, *H.D. And Sapphic Modernism 1910-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.207

¹⁸⁸ Sappho, *Poems & Fragments*, p.17

might be considered the masculine epic, to the Sapphic lyric over the course of Nancy's literary development. She begins engrossed in Homer's epics:

with this book [the *Iliad*] and a companion volume in which she learnt of Odysseus and his travellings, the whole of antiquity seemed to draw aside its veil of years with slow and unreserving movement, and taking its place, with sun and wind and grasses, among the natural emotions of childhood (D 35-36).

Nancy reaches her readerly apogee, however, with the lyric poetry of H.D. and Pound. Bryher twins H.D.'s writing and Greek poetry, particularly noting the lyric quality of her poems: 'Now in H.D.'s translation of the same thing, the English and the Greek words count up precisely the same, and you get the picture and the rhythm ... a wonderful archaic chant.' (TS 268).

In her preface to *Development*, Lowell highlights this transition too, when she comments: 'If Nancy's childhood was epic, the chapter "Salt Water" is lyric. Here the artist has full play, and we feel that Nancy is at last coming into her own.'¹⁸⁹ Nancy comes into her own, finding her voice, as Bryher shifts into (Sappho's) lyric form. Indeed, Lowell was not alone in attributing lyricism to Bryher's first text, a review in the *San Francisco Argonaut* directly linked *Development* with Sappho's poetry, when it noted: 'that the outstanding impression of the extraordinary spiritual biography, "Development," is that every word had a peculiar and unmistakable perfume.'¹⁹⁰ This phrase is drawn from Symonds' description of the Myteline poet in *The Studies of Greek Poets* (1880): 'Of all the poets of the world, and of all the illustrious artists of all literatures, Sappho is the one whose every word has a peculiar and unmistakable perfume, a seal of absolute perfection and inimitable grace.'¹⁹¹

Bryher's narrative form is melded, then, from both lyric and epic elements. The diegesis is a personal and emotional tale, 'sung' by a single voice addressed to an (absent) female reader-lover. As a little girl, however, Nancy is intent on writing about Carthage and Hannibal's crusades, and is swept up in the excitement of adventure: it is 'an epic of childhood.'¹⁹² Sutured together *Development* and *Two Selves* are epic in duration, lasting

¹⁸⁹ Lowell, "Preface," p.11

¹⁹⁰ 'R.G.,' 'Development, *San Francisco Argonaut*, 8 January 1921, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3113, Beinecke.

¹⁹¹ John Addington Symonds, *The Study of the Greek Poets, Volume I* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1902), p.293.

¹⁹² Kiki, 'An Amazing Book: Development,' *Sunday Pictorial* 4 July 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3110, Beinecke.

almost two decades as they trace Nancy's life from the age of four to twenty-four. Indeed, as a belligerent critique of Edwardian society wrapped tightly in the apparently innocuous tale of a young woman's emotional development, Bryher's strategy is akin to that most deceitful of epic tricks, deployed by the Greeks in the *Iliad*: the Trojan horse. It is a ploy one reviewer certainly seemed to have had in mind, when he observed of Bryher's protagonist: 'Inarticulate as she is, here is a personality of complicated powers. Thwarted and divided, she makes war.'¹⁹³ Significantly, the reviewer connects Nancy's divided, or fragmented, self with her capacity to rebel.

It is Nancy's lyricism, however, which is evident when she addresses the moon as 'Oh, the wild rose of the sky,' a phrase that recalls Sappho's evocation of an absent female lover named Atthis:

But now she surpasses all the women
Of Lydia, like the Moon.
Rose-fingered, after the sun has set,

Shining brighter than all the stars;¹⁹⁴

The title of Bryher's first memoir, *The Heart to Artemis*, invites us to consider the possibility of an Artemisian intertext in *Development* and *Two Selves*. Bryher's explanation for her choice of title is as elusive and allusive as one might expect, she observes that with an '*unchildlike passion*, I had to give myself, the heart to Artemis'.¹⁹⁵ In one of her many guises, the Greek goddess Artemis (also affiliated with the goddesses, Phoebe and Selene) was the leader of a band of chaste maidens, who dispensed brutal punishments to any man who threatened her virtue, as the unfortunate fates of both Orion and Actaeon attest. The tough and independent figure of Artemis, the eternal virgin, provided a radically different version of femininity and female sexuality, one completely divorced from the Victorian construction of woman as the passive object of male desire. Understandably, then, she was a potent and alluring figure for feminist and queer writers like Bryher.

As twin sister of Apollo, Greek god of the sun, however, Artemis is synonymous with Selene or the moon and, subsequently, as the lover of the beautiful slumbering youth,

¹⁹³ *New Republic*, 26 January 1921 cited in Winning, 'Introduction,' p.xx

¹⁹⁴ Sappho, *Poems & Fragments*, p.47

¹⁹⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.102

Endymion. In *Development*, Bryher introduces us to this mythological tale during a musing moment at Downwood when Nancy is lost in John Fletcher's verse:

How the pale Phoebe, hunting in a grove
 First saw the *boy* Endimion, from whose eyes
 She took eternal fire that never dies;
 How she conveyed him softly in a sleep,
 His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
 Head of old Latmus, where she stoops each night,
 Gilding the mountains with her brother's light,
 To kiss her sweetest. (D 110. My italics.)¹⁹⁶

As Fletcher's lines suggest, like the image of the fearless, chaste Artemis, the myth of Artemis-Phoebe similarly troubles the associated binaries active/passive and masculine/feminine, thus providing a more fluid economy of desire. Here, the poles are inverted, with the female position being linked with active desire and the male figure rendered passive, as the sexual object. As well as providing an alternative to the bourgeois construction of femininity, this myth also annuls the violence of the numerous Greco-Roman myths that are structured by a hunter/hunted paradigm, such as Apollo's fevered pursuit of Daphne. In Ovid's take on the tale the only options open to Daphne are rape or death, and choosing the latter she is metamorphosed into a laurel tree.¹⁹⁷

Returning to the myth of Artemis-Endymion later in the narrative, Nancy exclaims: 'to watch Endimion waken with the moon, was to breathe the air of adventure, to surprise adventure itself.' (D 164). To Nancy reading is life in the emotionally barren environs of Downwood: 'Made of a sudden so poor she turned increasingly to poetry, become a sanctuary against the onslaughts of the day.' (D 101). Nancy's absorption in literature furnishes Bryher with the means by which to introduce relevant intertexts which she then weaves into her queer mantle, facilitating her act of veiled disclosure and her queer articulations.

In her introduction to *Two Novels*, Winning cites an episode from *Development* that sees Nancy night shrimping in the Scilly Isles, as an experience through which 'Nancy seems to come to a point of understanding about herself'.¹⁹⁸ Night, and its ruling goddess,

¹⁹⁶ The lines are from John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609), which he called a 'pastoral tragicomedy, and are spoken by the shepherdess Cloe to the faithful shepherd, Thenot, in an attempt to woo him. John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, ed. F.W. Moorman (London: Dent and Sons, 1922), Act 1, Sc.3, p.30.

¹⁹⁷ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.15

¹⁹⁸ Winning, 'Introduction,' p.xxiv

Linda Dowling has asserted that the study of Greek language, literature and culture functioned as a “homosexual code” in the University of Oxford towards the end of the nineteenth century.²⁰⁰ In particular, Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* were evoked by authors who wished to gesture to male same-sex desire in their writing. Both of Plato’s texts elevate *paiderastia*, the love of an older man for his younger male pupil, above other forms of desire. In the *Symposium*, Pausanias deifies this ‘pedagogic eros’ by arguing that it is governed by Venus Uranus (Heavenly Aphrodite) while he consigns all other forms of human love to the rule of Venus Pandemos (‘Popular’ Aphrodite).²⁰¹ This ‘code’ offered an important means of expression for homosexuals, for instance, Hargreaves notes the relief and ‘sense of liberation’ Maurice feels, in ‘E.M. Forster’s posthumously published novel of same sex love,’ when Clive Durham asks Maurice, “‘You’ve read the *Symposium*?’” for ‘when Durham did so in the middle of the sunlit court a breath of liberty touched him.’²⁰² Famously, Wilde also alluded to Plato’s works in the second trial of 1895: “‘The Love that dare not speak its name’ in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare.’²⁰³ Far from being contained in Oxford circles, or even in Britain, the code was pan-European. Thomas Mann’s 1912 novella, *Death in Venice*, sees his protagonist, Gustave von Aschenbach, a venerable author, rationalise his desire for the young Pole, Tadzio, through the Platonic/Socratic ideals found in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Aschenbach sees himself as kinsman to the pederast and philosopher Socrates and therefore considers his love as an elevated ‘pedagogic eros’.²⁰⁴

In an act of queer borrowing, Bryher appropriates this ‘homosexual code’ for use in her own queer articulation. Alongside her desire to be a boy, Nancy is also characterised by a craving for knowledge and a friend: ‘Knowledge was a fire more vital than the sunset; heart of the desert, strength of the sea.’ (TS 197); ‘If she found a friend they might shut her up. Everyone, Eleanor, Doreen, Downwood. Because if she had a friend something would burst and she would shoot ahead, be the thing she wanted and disgrace them by her knowledge.’ (TS 288). The mixture of traits with which Bryher adorns Nancy’s hidden

²⁰⁰ Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.15

²⁰¹ See Plato, *Lysis; Symposium; Gorgia*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp.109-111

²⁰² E.M. Forster cited in Hargreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature*, p.15

²⁰³ Oscar Wilde cited in Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p.435

²⁰⁴ See Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp.46-55.

self marks her as the beloved in the Platonic construction of pedagogic love, while the nameless female poet is cast as her teacher. Nancy's inability to speak – 'Was this all that life meant? A veritable wrestling of expression from a soul not yet articulate' (D 140) – is conflated with her lack of knowledge: 'It was only her ignorance that kept her from expression; always to watch, never to feel.' (D 155), knowledge which, the texts imply she eventually receives from the female poet since she goes on to author her own narrative (in *Development* and *Two Selves*). Moreover, *paidierastia* is also alluded to through Bryher's inclusion of a fragment of an unnamed and unattributed poem in *Two Selves*:

"I saw the first pear
As it fell –
The honey-seeking, golden-banded,
The yellow swarm
Was not more fleet than I
(Spare us from loveliness)" (TS 256).

These lines comprise the first verse of an early poem by H.D., entitled 'Priapus'.²⁰⁵ Priapus was a well-known pederast in Greek mythology, Murgatroyd tells us that in the Alexandrian school he was considered 'as a son of Aphrodite and as a lustful god of fertility and lover of boys'.²⁰⁶ Striking a more personal note, the inclusion of this intertext invites knowing readers to place H.D. as the lover of the sole boy of the narrative, Nancy.

Although the *Symposium* functioned as a singularly homosexual motif in Benjamin Jowett's Oxford, and other academic arenas at the turn of the twentieth century, it was also a significant text for female writers too; indeed, it is one of the only texts in which female same-sex desire is evoked in ancient Greek literature and mythology. Aristophanes observes: 'All the women who are sections of the women have no great fancy for men: they are inclined rather to women, and of this stock are *she-minions*.'²⁰⁷ Aristophanes' dialogue, in which Plato offers a serio-comic explanation of the origins of human desire, acknowledges the variations of human love, allowing for male and female same-sex desire as well as heterosexual love. Aristophanes recounts a tale in which Zeus sunders the original tri-sexed – male-male, female-female and, the androgynes, female-male – occupants of earth, having become fearful of their strength and irritated by their arrogance, and, in doing so, creates men and women. Consequently, the myth suggests, everyone is

²⁰⁵ As I mentioned earlier, 'Priapus' appears under the title 'Orchard' in H.D.'s first collection, *Sea Garden*. See H.D., *Collected Poems*, pp.28-9

²⁰⁶ Paul Murgatroyd, *Tibullus I: A Commentary on the First Book of the Elegies of Albius Tibullus*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1980.), p.131

searching for their other half, yearning to return to the plenitude of their original combined form. Aristophanes' dialogue even found its way into Ellis' *Sexual Inversion*. The British sexologist observed that:

In the seriocomic theory of sex set forth by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, males and females are placed on a footing of complete equality, and, however fantastic, the theory suffices to indicate that to the Greek mind, so familiar with homosexuality, its manifestations seemed just as likely to occur in women as in men.²⁰⁸

Bryher harnesses the Aristophanic tropes of yearning/schism/injury and pairing/plenitude/healing to underscore the relevance of Nancy's meeting with the female poet. This queer articulation, or joining, thereby articulates queerly too. The motif of coupling is introduced early on in *Development*, when Nancy plays as a little girl: 'Best of all she loved the hours when, ranging the contents of her Noah's Ark carefully, *two by two*, upon the floor, her mother spoke' (D 25, my italics). Aristophanes' tale is more obviously present, however, in Bryher's construction of Nancy as a wounded and fragmented self. The following passage from *Two Selves* recalls Zeus' punishment of the contented spherical beings:

Something had cleft her from herself. She was two personalities now, sitting on the sand. Something, like an axe, had hit her and taught her to keep hidden in herself. (TS 285-286)

he sliced each human being in two, just as they slice sorb-apples to make a dry preserve, or eggs with hairs²⁰⁹

Throughout the narrative Nancy pines for a friendship which 'would be immediate, inevitable. There would be no recognition of each other. Simply a placing together of two lives' (TS 185), which echoes Aristophanes' assertion that 'to be joined and fused with [one's] beloved that the two might be made one' is what people are 'yearning for all the time'.²¹⁰ Bryher's title, *Two Selves*, similarly alludes to Aristophanes' dialogue, and, as Collecott notes, it 'has a double meaning: the hero will only heal the 'split' within herself by meeting with an other self.'²¹¹ Indeed, Bryher's complete narrative trajectory represents

²⁰⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, p.141

²⁰⁸ Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, p.195

²⁰⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, p.139

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.145

²¹¹ Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves*', p.131

queer love as a balsam: in *West* and ‘South’ Nancy is no longer the fractured identity so obvious in *Development* and *Two Selves*, the meeting with the female poet and her subsequent companionship, the texts infer, is the cause of this salvation. Such a conclusion resonates with Aristophanic depiction of the plenitude attained upon finding one’s ‘other half’: ‘Thus anciently is mutual love ingrained in mankind, reassembling our early estate and endeavouring to combine two in one and heal the human sore.’²¹²

The Greek myth of Narcissus is yet another tale which bears homoerotic undertones and which is a recognisable motif in western homosexual writing. Narcissus was a vain, self-possessed, and like Ganymede, a beautiful youth whose arrogance eventually earned him punishment from the gods. Aptly, they bewitched him into falling in love with his own reflection and, unable to tear himself away from the pool that held his beloved, he starved to death where he lay. Female same-sex desire, however, has also been represented in western literature as self-love or narcissism, as the following segment from John Donne’s ‘Sapho to Philaenis’ demonstrates:

My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two,
But so, as thine from one another doe;
And, oh, no more; the likeness being such,
Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
Hand to strange hand, lippe to lippe none denies;
Why should they brest to brest, or thighs to thighs?
Likeness begets such strange selfe flatterie,
That touching myself, all seems done to thee.²¹³

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, however, Narcissus is not simply coupled with his reflection, instead the desultory tale of Narcissus is also paired with the story of the nymph Echo. Following Echo’s disobedience to Juno she is robbed of her voice: ‘That tongue of thine [...] shall have its power curtailed and enjoy the briefest use of speech’: from this moment Echo can only repeat what others say.²¹⁴ Echo too is bewitched by Narcissus, only to be spurned like the rest and thus ends her days dwelling in the most solitary places, before eventually disintegrating, leaving only her voice:

²¹² Plato, *Symposium* p.141

²¹³ John Donne, *The Works of John Donne* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p.90. Drawing upon Ovid’s *Heroides*, in which the Roman poet re-imagined letters between famed lovers of antiquity, Donne’s ‘Sapho to Philaenis’ rewrites Ovid’s heterosexualised version and, moreover, imagines a less than bleak ending for the lovers.

²¹⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.63

Shamed and rejected in the woods she hides
 And weeping vigils waste her frame away;
 Her body shrivels, all its moisture dries;
 Only her voice and bones are left; at last
 Only her voice, her bones are turned to stone.²¹⁵

The invisible and vocally constrained figure of Echo reverberates with Nancy, as a voiceless young woman, whose despair resounds within Bryher's narrative: patently, she is as alone as Echo. Their kinship is obvious when Nancy laments: 'it was hard to be a discoverer and have no one to echo her enthusiasm.' (D 136). Nancy recognises, too, that her writing lacks originality, that she is an epigone: 'that her rhythms were but echoes, that her thoughts had no strength.' (D 140); and 'Better silence than to sit weaving into words pretty echoes of her favourite poets or her immature dreams, untested of reality'. (D 142-143). Bryher herself literally echoes other writers, as she stitches lines into the body of her texts. Nancy's lament, however, is not a weeping vigil; instead, her echoes metamorphose into a chant or invocation, which works to summon a lover-reader, the nameless poet.

The final section of *Two Selves* reads:

She was too old to be disappointed if an elderly woman in glasses
 bustled out. Poets, of course, were not what they wrote about. It was the
 mind that mattered.

A tall figure opened the door. Young. A spear flower if a spear
 could bloom. She looked up into eyes that had the sea in them, the fire
 and colour and the splendour of it. A voice all wind and gull notes said:
 "I was waiting for you to come." (TS 289)

Thus, by the end of *Two Selves*, Nancy has metamorphosed into Echo's partner, Narcissus, for the female poet she meets is a reflection of her hidden self: a dual-sexed figure (she is described as a 'spear flower if a spear could bloom' (TS 289)), who is also, like Nancy, versed in French, for 'Familiar yellow covers, *French Books*, were piled at the open window' (TS 289); and is a writer. Finally, like Nancy, the poet too has been waiting.

The myth of Narcissus is also, however, evoked in a private text, which again uses images of both Bryher and H.D.: a photomontage produced by Kenneth Macpherson, Bryher's second husband and H.D.'s lover (Figure 1). Collecott suggests that this image was produced sometime in the late 1920s, at the same time as a series of photomontages featuring H.D., which appear together in the 'H.D. Scrapbook.'²¹⁶ This was the period the

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ For the H.D. scholar's reading of Macpherson's photomontages see Diana Collecott, 'Images at the Crossroads: "The H.D. Scrapbook,"' in *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. Michael King (Orono, ME:

trio worked together as the POOL group, and, indeed, the photomontage is marked by both

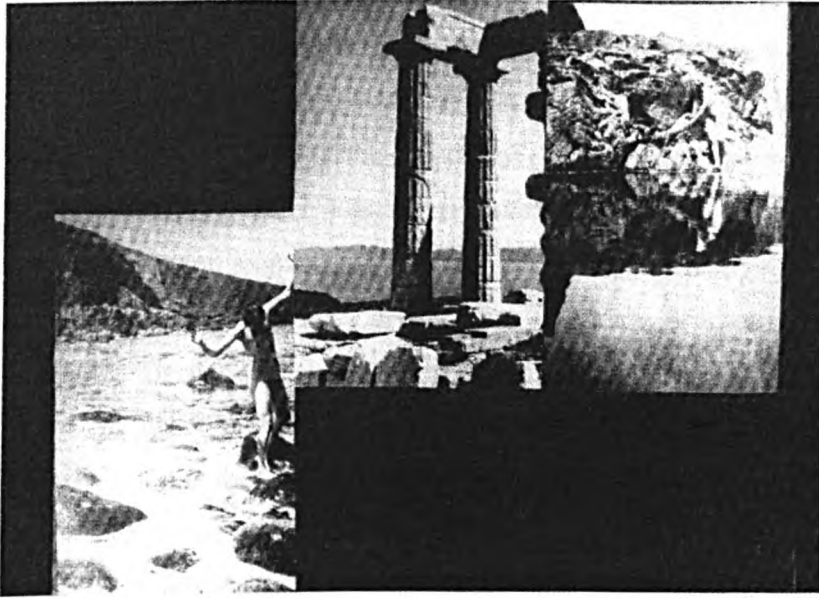


Figure 1. 'Two Selves'

the collaborative and queer dynamic of the group, a point I explore further in my next chapter, which reads POOL's *Borderline* (1930). Collecott suggests that the photographs of the two women used here were taken during a holiday together in the Scillies at some point in the early 1920s, a period in

which Bryher was at work on her autobiographical novels. Both images are long shots, which show the women cavorting alone in shallow, brackish water (presumably, then, they took turns in using the camera). Both women are naked: H.D., her arms patulous, precariously balances on a rock set in the rolling surf while Bryher steps cautiously around a rocky outcrop, head bowed, intent on her own progress. Set diagonally across from each other, the two images pivot on a third photograph, which shows a ruined Greek temple.²¹⁷ As Collecott has noted, the two women 'appear to reflect each other as in a mirror,' with Macpherson, then, playfully alluding to the thematic of narcissism. Indeed, this reference to the homoerotic Greek myth is foregrounded by the presence of a second axis of reflection in the montage, in which Bryher's *own* reflection is discernible in the calm pool of seawater below her.²¹⁸ Both H.D. and Bryher are looking down at themselves, are regarding their own bodies and their own movement through the world; they are decidedly *not*, then, nudes for the consumption of the critical (or sexological) gaze. They are active, independent women, self-possessed rather than self-obsessed, and thus resist the pejorative association between female sexuality and narcissism or egotism, which we saw Williams evoke earlier.

National Poetry Foundation, 1986): pp.319-367. 'Two Selves' is Collecott's 'nickname' for the H.D./Bryher image.

²¹⁷ Collecott suggests that it is a temple on Cape Sounion. Ibid, p.179

Narcissus' tragic death is also gestured to in a letter sent to Bryher, not long after *Development's* publication, from the English author, Hugh de Selincourt. Despite greatly admiring the novel, Selincourt observed that: 'To read *Development* was an experience as painful as watching a lovely drowning in a pond: the instinct to rush in and pull her out was insanelly strong.'²¹⁹ In the absence of the sweet and salving resolution that comes at the end of *Two Selves*, when Nancy meets with the nameless female poet, Selincourt reacts to the livid pain and anguish, which Bryher's novel so effectively depicts, as the adolescent Nancy wobbles precariously on the brink of suicide, or insanity. As Selincourt's response illustrates, Bryher's texts attest powerfully to the agony and loneliness of difference.

In this chapter I have argued that Bryher's texts constitute an effort to articulate queerly, not just for herself, however, for I have suggested that her texts attempted to remedy the social isolation felt by other others, as she sought to address a queer readership. As we have seen, the act of reading offered Nancy both solace and a means of escape, which thus enabled her to survive her own isolation. Yet, most crucially, it also provided her with a sense of community, for, through the Elizabethan dramatists, Nancy discovered 'her own land' (D 77).

In speaking out, Bryher, I argued, imagined and sought to forge a queer reading community, a disparate and ephemeral web of queer articulations. Due to the threat of homophobic retribution, however, this address must necessarily be made covertly. Bryher was forced to perform what Nancy refers to as a 'disassociation trick' (TS 286), an ingenious act of veiled disclosure, which saw her reveal to a cognoscenti what must remain concealed from the audience at large. Bryher achieved this, I averred, by swathing Nancy's hidden self in mantle stitched of queer intertexts. Drawn from a disparate range of sources, including the sexological, classical and literary, Bryher also borrowed and resignified a range of homoerotic tropes in her queer articulation.

Yet, what sort of reader would have been able to register such an esoteric and queer articulation? It seems to me that Bryher's decision to publish her second novel through her own press, Contact, in the queer and modernist hub of expatriate, left-bank Paris, offers some clue. In my introduction, if we recall, I discussed Winning's contention that the rue de l'Odéon, where both Beach and Monnier's bookshops were located, constituted the

²¹⁸ In her 1922 poetry collection, *Arrow Music*, 'The Pool' also retells the myth of Narcissus. See Bryher, *Arrow Music*, p.8

²¹⁹ Hugh de Selincourt to Bryher, 28 July 1920, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 81, Folder 3109, Beinecke.

centre of 'Bryher's "map" of Paris," because it was 'a space of sapphic modernity'.²²⁰ Indeed, it was in the early 1920s, the years, then, between the publication of *Development* (1920) and *Two Selves* (1923), that Bryher made her entrance into Parisian literary circles. Bryher's construction of Nancy as a French speaker constitutes a cheeky wink, I suggest, at her expatriate Parisian colleagues, a group of women and men who would provide her with that long-desired sense of community. As Winning observes, Beach's bookshop was a space in which Bryher would 'find sameness of intellectual endeavour *and* sexuality, rather than difference.'²²¹ In Paris, then, Bryher found not just 'someone with a mind' (TS 263), but a whole mindful queer community of readers.

In my next chapter I transport my concept of veiled disclosure into the arena of cinematic modernism in order to explore Bryher's significant role in POOL's 1930 silent film *Borderline*.

²²⁰ Joanne Winning, 'The Sapphist in the City: Lesbian Modernist Paris and Sapphic Modernity' in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, eds. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.24

²²¹ *Ibid.*

3

*Veiled Disclosures and 'Speaking Back':
Borderline and the Presences of Censorship*

Mr Macpherson buries his intentions in a conglomerate of weird shots and queer situations, worked out around a dissolute set of unsympathetic characters.

— 'Borderline Bungle,' Bioscope, 16 October 1930.

[W]hat the screen showed was just a meaningless jumble of close-ups, cut-ins and so forth, with a couple of very masculine women, a cat who got a fish out of a jar and all that sort of thing, meaning rather less than nothing.

— Borderline Review, Daily Film Renter, 14 October 1930.

When it premiered in London in early October 1930, *Borderline* (1930) was certainly not noticed for its popular appeal.¹ The scathing summaries of POOL's silent film, which I produce as epigraphs, accurately capture the general flavour of the contemporary critical response: bemused irritation.² Indeed, the reviewer from the *Bioscope* noted further: 'The story I found extremely difficult to follow; the dominant impression it left on me was that of a number of not very interesting people who alternated between hysteria and baffled

¹ *Borderline*, dir. Kenneth Macpherson. Switzerland/UK, 1930. This reading is based on the BFI's version of *Borderline*, which runs to 63 minutes. A portion of this chapter has been published as Fiona Philip, 'Veiled Disclosures and Speaking Back: *Borderline* and the Presence of Censorship,' in *Bound and Unbound: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Genders and Sexualities*, eds. Zowie Davy, Julia Downes, Lena Eckert, Natalia Gerodetti, Dario Llinares and Ana Cristina Santos (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008): pp. 146-163.

² Alongside this (private) screening by the London Film Society, between 1930 and 1931, *Borderline* also showed at other film society venues in Birmingham, Edinburgh and Leicester. See Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Oversize Box 178, Beinecke. Bryher also took the film to Berlin, where it showed only once, an event recounted in her 'Berlin: April 1931,' *Close Up* XIII, 2 (June 1931): p. 132. *Borderline* also screened in Catalonia in January 1931, and a showing in New York was booked for October 1931, but the film was impounded by American Customs. In her account of the film's reception, Anne Friedberg fails to note the other UK screenings. See Anne Friedberg, 'Approaching *Borderline*' in *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. Michael King (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986): p. 384. It took the BFI's screening at the Tate Modern in May 2006, then, to bring *Borderline* to a (more) mainstream audience.

lust, with the racial prejudice of white against black as a background.’³ And this was in spite of the fact that POOL issued a ‘libretto’ of the film’s plot to guide viewers.⁴ Though the background of ‘white against black’ also generated comment, this mostly amounted to the observation that the film’s lead was played by celebrated singer and stage actor, Paul Robeson, which, as one reviewer averred, ‘lent a certain importance to ‘*Borderline*.’⁵ Critics were unsettled, then, not by POOL’s ‘progressive,’ though not unproblematic, treatment of racial politics, but by its experimental aesthetic, its ‘weird shots,’ ‘close ups, cut ins and so forth,’ which, much to their frustration, refused to disclose a specific meaning.

Exasperated by this hostility, Kenneth Macpherson took the opportunity to defend the film in his next editorial in *Close Up*. He wrote:

They (the British) reject *Borderline*, not because it is complex – for its power is its complexity, its unexplainedness – like something seen through a window or key-hole; but because it is a film of subconscious reasoning. And if, among the English the subconscious is ruefully admitted, for some definitely social reason, it is not to be condoned.⁶

Ignoring the substance of the critical response, Macpherson, sounding rather like a psychoanalyst telling his patient that ‘no’ actually means ‘yes,’ read this critical dislike *not* as being generated by the film’s obscurity, which, he stated, was in fact intentional, but argued that it was due instead to the collective English psyche’s need to censor the subconscious. For a ‘definitely social reason,’ Macpherson informs us, in England the ‘subconscious,’ which, moreover, provides the structure of the film, cannot be condoned and hence, we must conclude, neither can the film. *Borderline*’s director qualified this statement further, however, observing that: ‘To a mind unaware of nuance, to a one-track mind, [*Borderline*] would naturally appear chaotic. I do not deny for a moment that it is

³ ‘Borderline Bungle,’ *Bioscope*, 16 October 1930, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Oversize Box 178, Beinecke. Even those with a filmic background, and who were disposed to experiment in cinema, were baffled. Ralph Bond, who contributed to *Close Up*, admitted sheepishly to Macpherson that: “Frankly, I have not written a word anywhere on ‘Borderline’. Deliberately. Because (what a confession) I did not understand it completely. And if I don’t understand a thing I don’t like talking about it as if I did. But because I did not grasp ‘Borderline’ I see no reason why I should say that it was meaningless and obscure. I may have been obscure to me, but it wasn’t to you and a great many other people. But after all we can’t always all grasp in its entirety the other fellow’s interpretation of an idea.’ Ralph Bond to Kenneth Macpherson, 8 November 1930, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Box 169, Folder 5664, Beinecke.

⁴ The libretto is reproduced in Anne Friedberg, ‘Writing About Cinema: *Close Up*, 1927-1933’ (Unpublished PhD thesis. New York, New York University, 1983), p.150

⁵ Our Film Correspondent, ‘Paul Robeson in British Film,’ *Morning Post* 14 October 1930, cited in Tirza True Latimer, “‘Queer Situations’: Behind the Scenes of *Borderline*,” *English Language Notes* 45, 2 (2007): p.38

chaotic. It was intended to be.’⁷ This is no less confusing. Macpherson seems to hint that for a select few – those *without* one-track minds – *Borderline* might not appear so disordered, indeed it might offer a sort of clarity or meaning, but then proceeds to cover this over almost immediately with the claim that the film was nonetheless intended to be chaotic.

This refusal, or resistance, to pin down meaning coupled with the suggestion that understanding might anyhow be present for a select few is a paradox which sits not only at the centre of POOL’s film but also at the core of my chapter. It is a paradox too which gestures to the workings of the veiled disclosure, as we saw in my last chapter, which refers to a means by which POOL/Bryher could simultaneously reveal to the open-minded – or to those who can concede that the ‘subconscious’ exists – what must be concealed from viewers at large, and which, I argue here, similarly facilitated *Borderline*’s queer sexual politics of representation. Before taking this up in more detail, however, I want to first consider the further paradox of my own, and other late twentieth/early twenty-first century, responses to the film.

Like the 1930s critics, I found my first experience of watching *Borderline* confounding, though, in contrast to them, this aroused, rather than dulled, my interest. Yet, it was not its difficulty that caused me to repeatedly return to the film. Instead, what drew me time and again were those ‘very masculine women,’ who, in the eyes of the riled reviewer meant ‘less than nothing.’ It was precisely their loaded significance, however, what they *did* seem so clearly to signify to me, as a twenty-first century viewer, that captured my attention. That is, what struck me was how utterly *queer* the film appeared. I am not speaking of its abstract, unexplained quality nor of the strange and unsettling feeling it inspires whenever I watch it, as was identified by the *Bioscope* reviewer too, both of which are deserving of the term. Instead I am referring more particularly to the performances of the three nameless café employees, who seemed to me, on that first viewing, to be explicitly marked as homosexual and lesbian.

To offer a little context, much of *Borderline* takes place in a café-bar, which is presided over by a coterie of (nameless) queer characters, comprising both ‘masculine women’ – Bryher’s cigar-smoking manageress and Charlotte Arthur’s effervescent

⁶ Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ *Close Up* VII, 5 (November 1930), p.293

⁷ *Ibid*, p.296

barmaid – as well as Robert Herring’s Charleston-dancing, jazz-playing pianist. In a film perhaps best described as a visual poem, one which works through symbolism and gesture, close ups are used to pick out the pianist’s dandified accoutrements. Shots linger on his ring, bracelet and cigarette holder. Moreover, he keeps a photograph of Pete (Paul Robeson) beside his music as he plays. The pianist’s cross-gendered style is underscored by the masculinity of the café manageress, acted by Bryher. As the inverse of Herring’s effeminate character the manageress wears no jewellery or makeup, has cropped hair and smokes a cigar (Figures 2 & 3).



Figure 2: The manageress (Bryher)

I am not alone in reading the trio of café employees as such. Jean Walton and Tirza True Latimer both refer to them as ‘overtly queer-coded characters,’⁸ while much attention has focused on Herring – ‘a queer who played a queer,’ as Susan McCabe puts it⁹ – who has been read as participating in the (otherwise) subdued homoerotics which structure and flavour the film, and which circle around the white male characters’ interactions with, and



Figure 3: The manageress close up

desire for, Robeson’s character, Pete.

Though Richard Dyer, for instance, notes that *Borderline* is ‘hardly an explicitly gay film,’ he then proceeds to unproblematically identify ‘the dyke style of the innkeeper.’¹⁰ Indeed, scholars have almost exclusively interpreted the character played by Bryher as a masculine lesbian.

Walton describes her as the ‘butch-looking, cigar-smoking Bryher,’¹¹ while Susan

Stanford Friedman refers to the ‘butch figure played by Bryher,’¹² and, most recently,

⁸ Jean Walton, ‘White Neurotics, Black Primitives, and the Queer Matrix of *Borderline*,’ in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p.255; Latimer, ‘Queer Situations,’ p.39

⁹ Susan McCabe, ‘Borderline Modernism: Paul Robeson and the Femme Fatale,’ *Callaloo* 25, 2 (2002): p.643

¹⁰ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1987), p.132

¹¹ Walton, ‘White Neurotics, Black Primitives,’ p.244

Judith Brown has dubbed her the ‘butch bar manager’.¹³ Latimer offers a slightly different interpretation, labelling her ‘the transvestite innkeeper,’¹⁴ while McCabe tags her as the ‘lesbian sign’.¹⁵

It was the apparent ‘overtness’ of these representations, rather than the film’s abstraction, that baffled me most. Firstly, in a film which, according to Macpherson, was intentionally chaotic, such clarity seems incongruous – it fails to fit with POOL’s desired, and, according to critical opinion, successfully achieved – abstruseness. My bemusement grew, however, as I began to consider the film in relation to the contemporary moment, and more precisely as being produced in the tremorous years following the 1928 banning of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) under the charge of obscenity. As with the Wilde trials (and the public emergence of the modern homosexual) before it, scholars have seen this event as a decisive moment in the formation of the modern lesbian. Joanne Winning, for example, encourages us to view the trial as a ““fault-line” across which lesbian identity became formulated both in the cultural imagination and in the lives of lesbians of the period.’¹⁶ For some contemporary queer subjects, however, it was also a period of acute anxiety, as the juridical gaze threatened to penetrate the private sphere. According to Silvia Dobson, a close friend of Bryher and H.D.’s from the 1920s and ‘30s, this was the case for the two POOL women. Replying to Friedman’s inquiry about whether or not Bryher and H.D. had shown concern over the implications of the trial, Dobson stated: ‘Oh yes, very much so. We didn’t call ourselves homosexual in those days. We had to be very, very careful.’¹⁷

Further, POOL’s correspondence illustrates that despite its intention to screen *Borderline* at film club venues rather than under general release (and thereby circumvent the British Board of Film Censors) members nonetheless felt the press of censorship.¹⁸

¹² Susan Stanford Friedman, *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher and their Circle* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2002), p.304, fnt.54.

¹³ Judith Brown, ‘*Borderline*, Sensation, and the Machinery of Expression,’ in *Modernism/Modernity* 14, 4 (2007), p.691

¹⁴ Latimer, ““Queer Situations,”” p.35

¹⁵ McCabe, ‘*Borderline* Modernism,’ p.647

¹⁶ Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.108

¹⁷ Silvia Dobson, ‘Interview, 1980’ cited in Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope’s Web: Gender, Modernity and H.D.’s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.382, fn.3.

¹⁸ My thanks to Sofia Bull for bringing this fact to my attention. Confusingly, though, all three extant prints of the film begin with a certificate from the British Board of Film Censors. I cannot offer an explanation. During *Close Up*’s run the backbone of film censorship in the UK was the British Board of Film Censors, which was an independent organisation that had been established in 1912 (there was no state censorship at this time). According to Macpherson, however, it was ‘no less evil’ for being ‘appointed by the trade and paid by the trade.’ Indeed, he considered it ‘a greater farce than a State Censorship’. Moreover, it was ‘fortified considerably through the acceptance of the Board’s decision by a large body of the licensing

Writing to Bryher to offer her congratulations for *Borderline*, whose ‘sheer beauty ... unforgettable rhythmic beauty, & its eloquence, its many eloquences’ to which she was apparently still reacting, Dorothy Richardson wondered: ‘What, in the name of the Censors, what, beyond the pianists’ jewellery & photograph-pocketing which the [undecipherable ‘goose’?] wouldn’t have noticed, what is there to upset the Censor?’¹⁹

This chapter seeks, in part, to provide an answer to Richardson’s query. In doing so, I trouble present-day interpretations of *Borderline*’s café employees as overtly queer (a coupling which might already seem oxymoronic to some). In a reading which takes Bryher’s manageress, who has received only scant critical attention, as its focus, I query the semiotic fixity of this so-called lesbian sign, and argue instead that the manageress’ ‘female masculinity’ would, during the 1920s and ‘30s, have signified multiply.²⁰ In contrast to these interpretations, I suggest that it is more fruitful to read the manageress as gesturing to Radclyffe Hall, who by 1930 was an iconic figure. Bryher’s performance, however, was not only an effort to represent a proscribed subjectivity, but constituted a politics of representation, a queer intervention. Indeed, the assertion that POOL constructed the manageress through a range of signifiers which connoted ‘Radclyffe-icity,’ is integral to my understanding of *Borderline* as the group’s attempt to ‘speak back’ to homophobic censors. As we shall see, British film censorship was one of POOL’s major bugbears, with the group dedicating its February 1929 issue to the topic.²¹ Thanks to both the polysemic nature of female masculinity and *Borderline*’s own aesthetic of abstraction, POOL, I argue, simultaneously concealed from the censorious majority what they intended to reveal to the open-minded, or, to those readers attuned to difference. Importantly, this anti-homophobic and anti-censorial rebuttal is intertwined with POOL’s anti-racist statement.

authorities throughout the country.’ Macpherson was referring to the fact that licensing bodies used a loophole in the 1909 Cinematograph Act, which granted local authorities licensing powers for safety concerns, but which also allowed them to withhold film licenses as a means of censorship. Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ *Close Up* IV, 2 (February 1929), p.8. For the length of *Close Up*’s run the Board was presided over by the MP and journalist, T. P. O’Connor, who figures as Macpherson’s bogeyman in the ‘censorship number’ of *Close Up* (February 1929). One way of circumventing the Board, as POOL well knew, was to set up private film clubs, such as The British Film Society.

¹⁹ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, undated letter [circa mid-October, 1930], Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Oversize Box 178, Folder 5747, Beinecke. Underlining in original.

²⁰ The term is borrowed from Judith Halberstam, who has argued that not only is there such a thing as female masculinity – that women can ‘possess’ masculinity, and, moreover, own it in a positive way (this is in contrast to, for instance, French feminist conceptions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’) – but that it has multiple versions and manifestations. See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp.1-43

²¹ POOL often dedicated issues to the exploration of specific topics, so, for instance, the August 1929 issue focused on ‘negro film.’

I proceed by outlining the events surrounding the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* and, in contrast to Latimer, who has suggested that ‘the topic of homosexuality [...] received [no] notice in the pages of *Close Up*,’ illustrate that in fact it haunted the ‘censorship issue’ of the journal, as commentators repeatedly conjure the spectre of Hall.²² I then return to *Borderline*, and the details of its production, to offer my own interpretation of POOL’s film.

A Book That Must Be Suppressed

In his acerbic review of the British cut – or massacre – of G.W. Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* (1929), Robert Herring observed that ‘in the English version the Lesbian part [of Countess Gershwitz], so marvellously played by Alice Roberts, is cut out’. He added sarcastically, ‘We mustn’t know about them.’²³ Published in May 1930 in the film journal, *Close Up*, Herring’s article bears witness to the homophobic and censorious *Zeitgeist* of interwar Britain. Herring’s account attests further to the violence – both real and symbolic – of cultural censorship. Films are literally cut up while illicit subjectivities are cut out. Pabst’s films were not alone in attracting the censorial gaze in this period: the majority of Soviet productions were banned, while those foreign films deemed acceptable to screen (and able to afford the extortionate customs duties) were, like *Pandora’s Box*, often ‘mutilat[ed] to the point of destruction’.²⁴ In such a repressive political and social environment artistic freedom was devastatingly compromised. The literary record of the interwar period is equally cicatrised by censorship.

The list of proscribed works includes prominent canonical texts like James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), both of which were suppressed for their sexually explicit content. Perhaps the most infamous incident in British literary history, however, was the banning in 1928 of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. It was infamous because Hall’s novel was patently not obscene and because it signalled the stranglehold which the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, and his colleagues had on freedom of artistic speech in England. The infamy was further compounded because female same-sex desire not only became uncomfortably visible, but was endowed, as Laura Doan has argued in

²² Latimer, “‘Queer Situations,’” p.34

²³ ‘R.H.’ [Robert Herring], ‘For Adolescents Only,’ *Close Up* VI, 5 (May 1930): p.423

²⁴ Dorothy Richardson, ‘The Censorship Petition,’ *Close Up* VI, 1 (January 1930), p.8.

Fashioning Sapphism, with a public face: that of Radclyffe Hall. As we saw in my introduction, Doan contends that the trial is ‘the crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian subculture,’ an event which resulted in ‘a narrow set of cultural signifiers [being grafted] onto an ostensibly legible homosexual body’.²⁵

The Well of Loneliness was published in July 1928 by Jonathan Cape, the same month that *Close Up* was celebrating its first anniversary. Hall’s fifth novel recounted the tragic and misunderstood life of the British aristocrat Stephen Gordon from early childhood to her late-thirties. As a little girl Stephen has a crush on the scullery maid Collins, masquerades as Nelson and, like Bryher’s protagonist Nancy, despises the trappings of Victorian femininity: ‘I hate this white dress and I’m going to burn it – it makes me feel idiotic!’ (*The Well of Loneliness* 33).²⁶ As she grows up Stephen’s difference becomes even more palpable. Not only is she consummate in traditionally masculine pursuits – she is a brilliant horsewoman (riding astride) and a gifted fencer – but ‘[p]eople stared at the masculine-looking girl’ (WL 164). This difference is compounded when Stephen falls in love with and pursues a neighbour’s wife, the American Angela Crosby; the disclosure of their affair leads to her expulsion from the family seat. As I discussed in chapter 2, Stephen’s masculinity and same-sex desire are later ‘explained’ when she literally discovers herself in the margins of her late father’s copy of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*: ‘then she looked more closely, for there on the margins were notes in her father’s small, scholarly hand and she saw her own name appeared in these notes’ (WL 207). Following a move to Paris and a stint as an ambulance driver in World War I, Stephen, who in the meantime has become a successful novelist, falls in love with a younger woman, Mary Llewellyn. Though things run smoothly for a while, the relationship, and the novel, both end when Stephen tricks Mary into leaving her for her oldest friend, Martin Hallam, in the belief that this conventional coupling – and the social acceptance she anticipates it bringing – will make Mary happy. Closing with Stephen’s self-exile, and her anguished cry to God, ‘Give us also the right to our existence!’ (WL 447), *The Well of Loneliness* was an overt apologia, but, in the name of what exactly, has become a critical sticking point.

²⁵ Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.xii

²⁶ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1999), p.33. Subsequent references to *The Well of Loneliness* will appear as ‘WL’ in the body of my text.

Dubbed ‘The Bible of Lesbianism,’²⁷ *The Well of Loneliness* retains a prominent position in the literature of lesbianism, and is still seen as *the* classic lesbian novel, despite the fact that, as Heather K. Love observes, it ‘is also the novel most hated by lesbians themselves.’²⁸ Not only tragic and depressing, some see it as espousing an intrinsically homophobic and misogynistic viewpoint, indeed, as such, it proved a considerable embarrassment to lesbian feminists. Yet, as Tracy Hargreaves observes: ‘Hall mined sexological case studies when she was writing *The Well of Loneliness*,’ and Stephen has also been read through a sexological lens, primarily as an invert (Hall poached her epigraph from Ellis), with a twist of Edward Carpenter too.²⁹ With recent critical developments in lesbian and gay, gender and queer theories, Stephen has become no less contentious, and continues to be read through competing models of desire and identity. In Laura Doan and Jay Prosser’s edited collection, *Palatable Poison* (2001), Prosser, for instance, offers a novel reading of Hall’s invert protagonist as the progenitor of a transsexual subjectivity, arguing that ‘the most famous representation of lesbianism’ in fact ‘provides the most infamous *mis*representation of lesbianism.’³⁰ In contrast, Judith Halberstam interprets Stephen’s gender inversion through the conceptual lens of female masculinity.³¹ This chapter is not concerned to supplement this wide range of interpretations but to highlight that, however we might choose to label Stephen, Hall’s protagonist is clearly a queer figure, who radically undermines the coherence of the heterosexual matrix, and whose call for sexual tolerance, we might say, is made on behalf of difference.³²

The struggle over naming Stephen proved just as problematic for contemporary reviewers. A plethora of names, derived from a variety of nomenclatures, were employed:

²⁷ This phrase appears on the cover of the Virago edition of *The Well of Loneliness*, which I quote from in this chapter.

²⁸ Heather K. Love, “‘Spoiled Identity’: Stephen Gordon’s Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History,” in *GLQ* 7, 4 (2001): p.487

²⁹ Tracy Hargreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p.48. Discussing Hall’s novel in a letter to Bryher, Ellis complained: ‘The little note I wrote was not for inclusion in the volume.’ Havelock Ellis to Bryher, 16 September 1928, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 10, Folder 419, Beinecke.

³⁰ Jay Prosser, “‘Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition’: The Transsexual Emerging from *The Well*,’ in *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, eds. Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.129

³¹ Judith Halberstam, “‘A Writer of Misfits’: ‘John’ Radclyffe Hall and the Discourse of Inversion,’ in *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, eds. Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): pp.145-161

³² In most other respects, however, Hall proved an arch conservative. See Laura Doan, “‘Woman’s Place Is the Home’: Conservative Sapphic Modernity,” in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, eds. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): pp.99-107

Leonard Woolf plumped for ‘a Sapphic or Lesbian’³³ while Cyril Connolly oscillated between ‘invert,’ ‘homosexuality’ and ‘disciple’ of Sappho.³⁴ Elsewhere reviewers chose ‘the female invert, the man-woman’³⁵; ‘the abnormal woman – the masculine woman’³⁶; ‘the unfortunate intermediate sex’³⁷; ‘sexual pervert’³⁸; and ‘the homosexual woman,’³⁹ terms that often collapsed sexuality and gender into each other, as Ellis’ category of sexual inversion did. Rather than being unspeakable, or unthinkable, female same-sex desire appears to have been, momentarily at least, the love that had many names.⁴⁰

Initially, *The Well of Loneliness* received favourable reviews, the prevailing opinion being that Hall treated the subject admirably and inoffensively. On August 19, however, James Douglas, the editor of the *Sunday Express*, launched his own one-man crusade against the novel’s ‘perverted decadence’.⁴¹ He called for it to be withdrawn from print in his notorious article, ‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed’. Though widely disdained and ridiculed, especially by the liberal literati, Douglas’ polemical outburst initiated a concatenation of events that brought about *The Well of Loneliness*’ eventual banning in November 1928.⁴² Like the Wilde trials, a scandal with which Douglas drew a parallel, it was an event that prompted greater scrutiny and censure of illicit subjectivities. Herring’s mocking aside – ‘We mustn’t know about them’ – speaks clearly to this and was arguably written with *The Well of Loneliness* in mind. His review’s linkage of lesbianism and censorship would undoubtedly have recalled the almost contemporaneous scandal to *Close Up* readers.

³³ Leonard Woolf, *Nation & Athenaeum*, 4 August 1928, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.52

³⁴ Cyril Connolly, *People*, 26 August 1928, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, pp.68-9

³⁵ Anonymous critic, review in *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 August 1918, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.51

³⁶ I. A. R. Wylie, *Sunday Times*, 5 August 1928 reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.55

³⁷ Richard King, *Tatler*, 15 August 1928, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.64

³⁸ W.R. Gordon, *Daily News and Westminster Gazette* August 23, 1928, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.65

³⁹ Anonymous reviewer, *Lancet*, 1 September 1928, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.71

⁴⁰ As we saw in my previous chapter, Jodie Medd tells us that ‘female homosexuality has been considered by many historians as having been essentially ‘unthinkable’ to the British cultural imagination emerging from Victoria’s reign.’ Medd, ‘The Cult of the Clitoris’: Anatomy of a National Scandal’ in *Modernism/Modernity* 9, 1 (2002), p.26

⁴¹ James Douglas, ‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed’, *Sunday Express*, 19 August 1928, reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.38

Close Up and the Spectre of Radclyffe Hall

The Well of Loneliness also haunted the February 1929 ‘censorship number’ of *Close Up*, which, along with its 1930 silent experimental film *Borderline*, constitutes the cinema group POOL’s most outspoken critique of British cultural censorship. As we have seen, POOL was a collaborative enterprise with roots in the literary avant-garde, whose core comprised Bryher, H.D., and Macpherson. From its base in Territet, Switzerland, POOL produced *Close Up*, as well as publishing a number of film-related titles and making four films, including the feature-length *Borderline*.⁴³

The trio was excited by the aesthetic possibilities offered by the novel form, and Macpherson began his first editorial by speculating that ‘fifty more [years] will probably turn [film] into THE art’.⁴⁴ This focus was coupled with a conviction that film had serious political and social implications. POOL embraced the idea of silent cinema as an *Esperanto* – a ‘single language across Europe,’ as Bryher later labelled it – that could unite war-ravaged Europe.⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, then, from its inception POOL proclaimed its allegiance to European cinemas, particularly German, Soviet and French ones. As we shall see in my next chapter, however, POOL’s catholicism did not extend to embracing Hollywood, whose ethos it regarded as antithetical to its own. The group, and *Close Up* contributors in general, frequently characterised its productions as dull, repetitive and unoriginal, and saw the US’s increasing cinematic imperialism as a malignant force which ‘doped’ audiences, hindered experimental practice and saturated the British film market with substandard productions. Through frequent trips abroad, particularly to Berlin, Bryher and Macpherson met and befriended a number of cinematic luminaries including Pabst and the Soviet director, Sergei Eisenstein, both of whom influenced their own film-making efforts. This international interest also fed into POOL’s anti-censorship stance, with *Close Up* being used as a means of combating cinematic censorship. The journal ran a Censorship Petition, and constantly critiqued the British Board of Film Censors

⁴² For more comprehensive accounts of the events leading up to the trial see Vera Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?* (London: Femina, 1968); Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (London: Hamilton, 1985) and Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (London: Virago, 1999).

⁴³ POOL produced *Wingbeat* (1927), *Foothills* (1929), *Monkey’s Moon* (1929) and the feature-length *Borderline* (1930), as well as publishing a number of film-related titles including Bryher’s *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929) and Kenneth Macpherson’s two novels *Poolreflections* (1927) – from which the group took its name – and *Gaunt Island* (1927).

⁴⁴ Kenneth Macpherson ‘As Is,’ *Close Up* I, I (July 1927), p.5

⁴⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer’s Memoirs* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press), p.290. This was a hope ubiquitous among contemporary cinema critics, including Russian director Dziga Vertov who said of

(Macpherson, for instance, ‘wrote back’ directly to points made by its head, T. P. O’Connor, in his editorial in the 1929 censorship issue).⁴⁶ Moreover, for those unable to view foreign films, *Close Up* proved an important, indeed it was the only, source of information.

Dubbed ‘a composite beast with three faces’ by H.D., the group was not just a creative affair but also a personal and sexual one: after divorcing McAlmon in 1927, Bryher married Macpherson, who had been H.D.’s lover since 1926.⁴⁷ This queer dynamic fed into the production of both *Close Up* and *Borderline*. Though not a core member of the POOL group, Herring was a regular contributor to the journal as well as being *Close Up*’s ‘London correspondent’. He was also a personal friend, travelling widely with Bryher and her husband, an intimacy which deepened when he became Macpherson’s lover in the early 1930s.

Herring’s contribution to *Close Up*’s censorship issue, ‘Puritannia Rules the Slaves’ (1929), was one among many defences of free speech that followed the banning of *The Well of Loneliness*.⁴⁸ His article focused on what Herring termed ‘the English state of mind,’ the reactionary sensibility which stymied difference, inhibited freedom of expression and ‘Ke[pt] Things As They Were’.⁴⁹ Sitting at the heart of Herring’s diatribe was the spectre of Hall’s novel. ‘Someone wrote a book,’ he commented, ‘in which the sex wasn’t quite the same. The Attorney General observed forthwith that nothing more “corrosive or corrupt” had ever been written’.⁵⁰ Though Herring did not explicitly name *The Well of Loneliness* he did invoke Hall when he quoted the Cambridge don and critic, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, who,

felt impelled to write to *The Guardian*, “it is an obstinate and familiar habit of the English to get rid of facts that they don’t like by pretending that they don’t exist . . . But questions such as are touched on (he does not say ‘treated’, we can’t do that yet) in Miss Radclyffe Hall’s book are not

his own *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929): ‘This experimental work aims at creating a truly international absolute language’.

⁴⁶ Here, Macpherson is in dialogue with the president’s ‘lengthly article on censorship in the *Times Literary Supplement* of February 21, 1922’. Macpherson, ‘As Is’ (February 1929), p.7

⁴⁷ H.D. cited in Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Modernism of the ‘Scattered Remnant’: Race and Politics in the Development of H.D.’s Modernist Vision,’ in *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. Michael King (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), p.98

⁴⁸ Prominent literary figures such as Virginia and Leonard Woolf, and E.M. Forster, interpreted the banning as an attack on artistic liberty and rallied around Hall, despite their aesthetic differences. Though the highbrow Woolf privately considered Hall’s novel ‘a meritorious dull book,’ she was nonetheless ready to publicly defend it, as one of Cape’s forty defence witnesses. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf vol. 3 1925-1930* (London: Penguin, 1980) p.193. The entry is dated Friday August 31, 1928.

⁴⁹ Robert Herring, ‘Puritannia Rules the Slaves,’ *Close Up* IV, 2 (February 1929): p.25

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.26

disposed of by such treatment. To boycott them means that they are driven underground, with the usual results of blackmail, cruelty and folly.⁵¹

Herring discretely supported Hall, referring to her novel as ‘a worthy book’ and one ‘beyond [...] pornographic punch’.⁵² He also highlighted the hypocrisy of a government which allowed free circulation of Denis Diderot’s lascivious ‘lesbian’ novel, *The Nun* (Francis Birrell’s new translation was published by Routledge in 1928) but proscribed Hall’s comparatively chaste book.

While Herring’s article makes explicit reference to the Chief Magistrate, Sir Chartres Biron, and the Home Secretary, Joynston-Hicks, his language recalls that of Douglas’ in ‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed,’ and was, I suggest, in dialogue with it. The *Sunday Express* editor was certainly on the mind of fellow *Close Up* contributor Norma Mahl, who began her only entry in the journal with: ‘Hark, Mr Douglas – here’s a tub for thumping!’⁵³ Douglas’ article is shot through with images of plague and decay: inverts are ‘the leprosy of the lepers’ and the ‘pestilence [...] devastating the younger generation’.⁵⁴ He personally attacked Hall too, calling her a ‘decadent apostle’ of the ‘most hideous and most loathsome of vices’ who took ‘delight in [her] flamboyant notoriety’.⁵⁵ Taking a tack that resonates with contemporary homophobic diatribes, Douglas’ anxieties congealed around the figure of the Child. The journalist repeatedly evoked the threatened juvenile, averring that ‘this pestilence’ is ‘wrecking young lives. It is defiling young souls,’ and: ‘We must protect our children against the specious fallacies and sophistries.’ Infamously, Douglas asserted that he would rather ‘give a healthy boy or girl a phial of prussic acid than [Hall’s] novel.’⁵⁶

Picking up on this, Herring observed in ‘Puritannia Rules the Slaves’ that, ‘We have been told so long that it is better to do something or other than hurt the least of these’.⁵⁷ His deployment of a Biblical idiom mocked Douglas’ patent anxiety for Christian

⁵¹ Ibid, p.27

⁵² Ibid, pp.26-7

⁵³ Norma Mahl, ‘Second-Rate Sex, September 1929: A Report on ABORT,’ *Close Up* V, 6 (December 1929): p.471. I have been unable to discover any details about Norma Mahl. Considering that this is her sole contribution to *Close Up*, I think it likely that it was a pseudonym (playing on ‘normal,’ perhaps) for one of the POOL group. This would certainly fit with the extensive self-censorship that took place in regard to members’ concealment of their work on *Borderline*.

⁵⁴ Douglas, ‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed,’ p.37

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.37

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.37-8

⁵⁷ Herring, ‘Puritannia Rules the Slaves,’ p.30. In a lecture given four months earlier to the London Diocesan Council of Youth on his role as Britain’s artistic censor, Joynson-Hicks had used the same phrase (which is attributed to Jesus in both the gospels of Matthew and Mark). He stated: ‘There must be some limit to the

society: 'If Christianity does not destroy this doctrine,' he observed, 'then this doctrine will destroy it'.⁵⁸ Herring argued that rather than preserving the innocence of the Child, censorship in fact infantilised the entire population. He wrote:

Most of us, if we want to live in England, have to wear coats and mufflers and fur gloves. Fur gloves don't make for a light touch, nor is clear thinking induced by a cold in the head. We are all muffled up, and kept warm by Puritannia.⁵⁹

The ageing 'Mother Puritannia' – 'that elderly lady, about whom the only thing elastic is the side of her boots' – was Herring's mocking parody of censors, of establishment figures like Douglas, Joynston-Hicks and Biron.⁶⁰ She was Herring's own spin on the aged Mrs Grundy, the Victorian figure of censorship, who had hobbled with a vengeance into the interwar era too: *Close Up*'s 'Hollywood correspondent,' Clifford Howard, for instance, described American film censorship as 'the philistine Mrs Grundy.'⁶¹

What Herring *does not* say in 'Puritannia Rules the Slaves,' however, is also noteworthy. Whereas he brashly employs the term 'Lesbian' in his review of *Pandora's Box*, in his 1929 article the term and its synonyms are absent. It is striking too that Herring fails to name *The Well of Loneliness* and, moreover, that his defence of the novel was in part ventriloquised through Lowes Dickinson's. It seems likely that, as was the case with the *Tatler* critic Richard King, Herring was being cautious. In his review King had remarked: 'Should I praise [*The Well of Loneliness*] then I can literally hear the huge army of the narrow-minded hinting that I am in sympathy with its publication.'⁶² King's observation speaks to the fact that critics and defenders of the novel were also vulnerable to the unwelcome attention of the censorial gaze. Herring's care in discussing and defending Hall's novel may very well have been fuelled by the fact of his own queer desires, and thus by the ever present threat of 'blackmailability.' Indeed, as we shall see shortly, Herring was certainly desperate to screen his performance in *Borderline* from family members.

freedom of what a man may write or speak in this great country of ours. That freedom in my view, must be determined by the question as to whether what is written or spoken *makes one of the least of these little ones offend.*' Joynston-Hicks, *The Times*, 16 October 1928 cited in Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, p.191. My italics.

⁵⁸ Douglas, 'A Book That Must Be Suppressed,' p.38

⁵⁹ Herring, 'Puritannia Rules the Slaves,' pp.31-2

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.32

⁶¹ Clifford Howard, 'Hollywood and the Philistines,' *Close Up* II, 3 (March 1928), p.31. The aged Mrs Grundy was drawn from Thomas Morton's *Speed the Plough* (1798) in which she is the (absent) figure of conventional propriety.

What Herring's article also indicates, however, is just how infamous both Hall and her novel had become by 1929. Following the trial, according to Vera Brittain, the term 'lesbian' and its synonyms were momentarily superseded by Hall's name and image, as the author became 'exclusive[ly] identifi[ed] with the lesbian world'.⁶³ Brittain's contention is bolstered by an opaque observation made by Macpherson in *Close Up*'s censorship issue. Much of his editorial is taken up with a roll call of the subject matter banned by the British Board of Film Censors, which was itself 'so indecent that if it came from any but a recognised public society for protecting peoples' morals, this issue would be burnt by the common hangman, without a doubt'.⁶⁴ Macpherson thought it necessary, however, to 'add that *the title of a notoriously doubtful book* is not allowed, even if the film is treated in such a way as to be inoffensive'.⁶⁵ In 1929, Hall's novel was so infamous that it appears Macpherson was able to gesture to the subject of female same-sex desire through an oblique reference to its notoriety.

The need some queers felt to distance themselves from the trial, which, as we saw earlier, was apparently the case with Bryher and H.D., also had implications for the Bloomsbury campaign that was undertaken on behalf of Hall's book. Virginia Woolf observed to Vita Sackville West, her lover at the time, that upon hearing of the banning 'soon we were telephoning and interviewing and collecting signatures – not yours,' she tells West, 'for *your* proclivities are too well known.'⁶⁶ Though Woolf jested in her correspondence about being 'the mouthpiece of Sapphism,'⁶⁷ her husband and sister warned her, as she reported to Quentin Bell, that 'I musn't go into the box, because I could cast a shadow over Bloomsbury.'⁶⁸

Ignoring their concern, and despite her ambivalence about the literary quality of Hall's novel, Woolf proceeded to the courtroom, along with Cape's other 39 defence witnesses, in order to take a stand for artistic liberty. Yet, having heard the first statement,

⁶² King, *Tatler*, p.63.

⁶³ Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall*, p.83

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8

⁶⁵ Macpherson, 'As Is,' (February 1929), p.13, my italics. In the May 1929 issue of *Close Up*, the psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs – Bryher's close friend and analyst – similarly began an article about film censorship by making an oblique reference to Hall: 'A few months ago I read about a trial against a book describing a form of human love not acknowledged hitherto either by acts of parliament or by popular story writers: the love relations between two women.' Like Herring, Sachs offered a support of sorts to the unnamed author and her text, when he wrote 'I sincerely hope, [the banning] has done something to enlarge its circulation.' Hanns Sachs, 'Modern Witch Trials,' *Close Up* IV, 5 (May 1929): p.18

⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 20 August 1928 in Virginia Woolf, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3, 1923-1928*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p.520.

⁶⁷ Woolf, 4 September 1928 in Woolf, *A Change of Perspective*, p.530

⁶⁸ Woolf to Quentin Bell, 1 November 1928 in Woolf, *A Change of Perspective*, p.555

the Chief Magistrate, Chartres Biron observed that, 'The mere fact that the book is well written can be no answer to these proceedings; otherwise the preposterous position would arise that, because it was well written, every obscene book would be free from proceedings,' and promptly dismissed the publisher's remaining witnesses.⁶⁹ There was no scope, then, to 'speak back' to censors in the British judicial arena. Moreover, Hall was herself quite literally silenced during the trial. Towards the end of Biron's judgement, the author was prompted to stand and defend herself, her friends, and her novel. According to the transcript, Hall declared:

MISS RADCLYFFE-HALL: [sic] I protest. I am the writer.
 The MAGISTRATE: I must ask people not to interrupt the Court.
 MISS RADCLYFFE-HALL: [sic] I am the authoress of this book.
 THE MAGISTRATE: If you cannot behave yourself in Court I shall have to have you removed.
 MISS RADCLYFFE-HALL: [sic] It is a shame.⁷⁰

In supremely condescending fashion, then, Biron silenced Hall by threatening her with the same punishment that he was in the process of dealing out to her novel: banishment. She was not only shut *up* (the consequence, if we recall, that Nancy herself so feared) but faced the prospect of being shut *out* too.⁷¹ Bryher's role as *Borderline*'s manageress is a queer performance, I shall argue, which speaks back on Hall's behalf, not, it should be noted, for Hall as a private individual, but for what she had come to represent: the female invert, or mannish woman.⁷²

Exploring the 'inflections that Hall's trial places on the articulation of lesbian desire in modernist texts,'⁷³ Winning argues that for a number of practitioners of lesbian (literary) modernism 'the questions of censorship and lesbian representation,' arising from the trial, prompted creative responses, pushing their formal and technical experiments further. She writes:

⁶⁹ Chartres Biron, cited in Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, p.111

⁷⁰ Sir Chartres Biron, 'Judgment,' reproduced in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.45. Although she had prepared a statement, Hall was not given the opportunity to defend her novel since it was the publisher, rather than the author, who was held liable in cases of obscenity.

⁷¹ In a high profile case, such an incident was sure to make it into the press, and indeed, the next day, *The Daily Mirror* bore the subheading: 'Authoress in Scene.' Anonymous, *The Daily Mirror*, 17 November 1928, reproduced in Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall*, p.103

⁷² The POOL group never met Hall but, as we shall see, the aristocratic author was clearly of great interest to its members, and crops up repeatedly in Bryher and H.D.'s correspondence.

⁷³ Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, p.104

After such spectacular public condemnation, authors had to pick a course somewhere between a literal formulation which would sink beneath a wave of social outrage and a subversive “silence” which employed an aesthetics of dissimulation and displacement. What interests me here is how this choice is taken up by lesbian modernists. What possibilities does the experimental, fragmented texture of the modernist text open up? What becomes recordable in its complex, densely linguistic forms that cannot otherwise be articulated in either life or traditional literary forms such as realism?⁷⁴

In her own answer to this, Winning explores Richardson’s purposeful deployment of silence, or, indeed the ‘multifarious silences,’ in her *Pilgrimage* series.

Elsewhere, the literary scholar has argued that writers such as Gertrude Stein, H.D., Bryher and Virginia Woolf, ‘avoid[ed] censure by employing fragmented, dissimulating techniques of modernism (a project upon which they were already engaged) as a kind of “escape route” for lesbian representation.’⁷⁵ Such techniques, Winning suggests, act as ‘a kind of “cover” to avoid censure.’ I suggest similarly that it was POOL’s deployment of the experimental techniques of cinematic modernism that enabled its subversive riposte to censors in *Borderline*. As we saw earlier, it was POOL’s application of those ‘weird shots,’ ‘close ups, cut ins and so forth’ (what H.D. termed ‘clatter montage’) that most baffled and irritated its original viewers. Indeed, one London critic anticipated that ‘The average spectator will yawn and wonder what the deuce it is all about.’⁷⁶ There was the added factor, though, of the medium’s novelty. Spectators, after all, were still in the process of learning to read film’s newly emergent, and still evolving, language. It is worth noting that it was in the pages of *Close Up* that Eisenstein’s theoretical essays made their debut in the English language.⁷⁷ The journal was therefore the primary conduit for the Russian’s pioneering work on the techniques of montage into the English-speaking world.

Moreover, it was not just that the language of film provided the means for both expressing, and yet simultaneously covering over, POOL’s seditious queer content, but that this new medium also offered the very means of *producing* new desires. Indeed, there is a correlation between the emergence of cinema in the late nineteenth century and the ‘birth’ of the modern homosexual in the same period, with the 1920s and ‘30s thus being the

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.113

⁷⁵ Joanne Winning, ‘Writing by the light of *The Well*: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Modernists,’ in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable Poison*, p.375

⁷⁶ ‘J.S.’, ‘Borderline: An Experiment in Silent Films’ in *Manchester Guardian*, October 14 1930, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Box 168, Folder 5633, Beinecke.

⁷⁷ According to James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus, *Close Up* published nine essays (in translation) by the Russian director, including ‘The New Language of Cinematography’ (1929) and ‘The Principles of Film Form’ (1929). See James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, ‘Preface’ in *Close*

cradle of both. This is arguably hinted at in Bryher's enthusiastic response to Pabst's 1930 sound film *Westfront 1918*. She wrote:

What opportunities of deepening consciousness there are in this new use of sound, this mingling of speech that may be listened to without obligation to understand or to reply, that *may be experimented with or played with, according to desire.*⁷⁸

I want now to turn back to *Borderline* to explore how Bryher's performance as the manageress, and POOL's film as a whole, comprise a powerful retort to those figures responsible for ostracising illicit subjectivities from the realm of the symbolic, the censors. This reading, then, does not so much consider what stake the trial had in representing queer desire but, rather, thinks about censorship as an exclusionary practice, which is used to sustain the social status quo, and about the practice's relation to the policing of national boundaries.

Borderline: 'like something seen through a window or key-hole'

Shot in stark black and white, evocative of German Expressionist cinema, *Borderline* is marked by a compulsive use of close ups, unusual and affected camera angles and by sequences of frenetic montage.⁷⁹ Shots of a woman's dancing feet are rapidly spliced with white hands scaling a piano and beer sloshing in a glass. A shot of a black man's head against a bank of cumulous cloud is cut with the tumult of a cataract to giddy effect. Such montages contrast with shots which voyeuristically linger on bodies, or pause meaningfully on objects, creating at times a tense and claustrophobic atmosphere. These descriptions, however, do not quite capture the strange, disturbing, queer quality of *Borderline*, which makes watching it an unnerving and discomforting experience. The film's abstract modernist aesthetic was wrought from a mixture of Eisenstein's cinematic theories of montage and Freud's psychoanalytic theories of the mind. Eisenstein's new

Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism, eds. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998): p.viii

⁷⁸ Bryher, 'Westfront 1918,' *Close Up*, VII, 2 (August 1930): p.107, my italics. Bryher's enthusiasm is also remarkable, since POOL was, in general, disdainful of 'talkies' and viewed them as scuppering the aesthetic and social possibilities of silent film. Indeed, in *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher observed: 'It was the golden age of what I call "the art that died" because sound ruined its development.' Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.290

⁷⁹ This reading is based on the BFI's version of *Borderline*, which runs to 63 minutes.

filmic language relied on editing and cutting, creating sequences in which objects and images were juxtaposed to produce a third meaning. In *Borderline*, bodies and gesture also play a crucial role in signification, with POOL commandeering the cast's different physical appearances, their sexual and gender difference, and 'race'. Characters are continually paired and contrasted, through gesture and action, in order to highlight allegiances and hostilities within the film. Intertitles are used sparingly (there are just twenty-three screens) and only for dialogue and letters (such as 'Adah is his Girl, isn't she – not yours?'), as *Borderline* subordinates the verbal to the visual.

Summarising the film is a complicated task. Not only elliptical and disjunctive, *Borderline* was, to my mind, intended to resist narrative coherence. In attempting to describe *Borderline*'s diegesis, critics have tended to defer to the libretto I mentioned earlier. Anne Friedberg has argued that, without the libretto, key features of the narrative would be occluded, thus rendering the film (even more) incomprehensible to viewers.⁸⁰ The libretto runs roughly as follows. Set for the most part in a café-bar in a 'borderline' town in the Alps (in springtime), the film dramatises the crumbling relations between a black couple, Adah (Eslanda Robeson) and Pete (Paul Robeson), and a white couple, the neurotic Astrid (H.D. as Helga Doorn) and the dipsomaniac Thorne (Gavin Arthur).⁸¹ The film begins as Adah and Thorne's interracial affair ends, with her preparing to leave the rooms she has been sharing with the white couple. Unbeknownst to Adah, her estranged husband/partner (it is not clear), Pete, is working in a café-bar in the same town; soon the couple are reunited. In contrast, Astrid and Thorne's already jaded relationship spirals further into decay. The white couple struggle over a knife and Astrid is accidentally killed. Her death precipitates the eruption of an already simmering racial hatred from the white townsfolk. Incited by a malicious old woman (Blanche Lewin) Pete is held responsible. Adah leaves town, blaming herself, while Pete remains, only to be expelled by the mayor. Having been acquitted of any responsibility in Astrid's death, Thorne begins to recover, helped by his reconciliation with Pete.

Like McCabe, who observes that the libretto 'belies the film's experimental method,' I also believe recourse to POOL's text is problematic, though for different reasons.⁸² The libretto is effectively a censored account of the film. A summary is necessarily a simplification but what is immediately noticeable to viewers of *Borderline* is

⁸⁰ See Friedberg, 'Approaching *Borderline*,' pp.369-390.

⁸¹ Charlotte and Gavin Arthur were an American couple who lived near to the POOL group in Switzerland. See Bryher and H.D.'s 1929 correspondence in Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 13, Folder 548, Beinecke and H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Folders 85-9, Beinecke.

that the libretto pares the film down considerably, bowdlerising it and effectively erasing the roles of a third group of characters. This ‘censored’ coterie comprises the white employees of the café-bar whom I discussed earlier, Bryher’s cigar-smoking manageress, and her cohorts, the energetic barmaid played by Charlotte Arthur and Herring’s pianist. The trio features significantly in the film, most of which unrolls in the café-bar. In the libretto, however, the pianist is cut out completely while the café manageress and the barmaid feature only once:

Gossip in the café. Malice. Friction. Thorne blames Astrid for his loss of Adah. A little old lady, symbolic of small-town “rectitude,” warns the café manageress that “the negroes” will be trouble. “Why blame the negroes,” asks the barmaid, “when people like Thorne are at the root of the trouble?”⁸³

It is no accident, I think, that the queer triumvirate is excised from the libretto and, indeed, POOL’s self-censorship does not cease there, with the group’s own accounts of *Borderline*’s production history exhibiting similar excisions. In her anonymously published promotional account of the film, ‘The Borderline Pamphlet’ (1930), H.D. lauds Macpherson, proclaiming him a multi-faceted virtuoso who wrote, directed, filmed and edited *Borderline* (almost) single-handedly.⁸⁴ More recently, however, the idea of Macpherson as *Borderline*’s father-creator has been questioned by scholars who have discovered an alternative account of the film’s production in unpublished manuscripts held in the Beinecke. In H.D.’s ‘Autobiographical Notes’ she claims that she and Bryher edited the film: ‘When finished [shooting] K. develops a bad throat and Bryher and I worked over the strips, doing the montage as K. indicates.’⁸⁵ And this, considering that POOL members deemed editing ‘[t]he only real creative work’.⁸⁶ Moreover, observing that in ‘The Borderline Pamphlet,’ H.D. ‘remains silent about the sexual borderline status of the hotel employees,’ Walton has suggested that this ‘could be taken as a closeting on H.D.’s part,

⁸² McCabe, ‘Borderline Modernism,’ p.644

⁸³ ‘Libretto,’ reproduced in Friedberg, ‘Writing About Cinema,’ p.150

⁸⁴ See H.D., ‘The Borderline Pamphlet,’ reproduced in *Close Up 1927-1933*, eds. Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus, pp.221-236. Over thirty years later, Bryher reiterated this view in her memoir, *The Heart to Artemis*, noting: ‘Kenneth wrote the scenario, directed, photographed and cut the picture.’ See Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.264

⁸⁵ H.D., ‘Autobiographical Notes’ cited in Friedberg, ‘Approaching Borderline,’ p.380. This account is supported by a letter from Sachs, in which he tells Bryher: ‘I think it is quite out of the question that you should go away while you are still needed for the film work. I should feel ‘inhibited’ myself, working with you while you wouldn’t be able to concentrate on our work feeling that you have ‘deserted the cause’. Hanns Sachs to Bryher, 8 April 1930, cited in Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller, *Lesbian Lives: Psychoanalytical Narratives Old and New* (Hillsdale, NJ and London: The Analytic Press, 1997), p.10

⁸⁶ Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ *Close Up* 1, 6 (December 1927): p.16.

characteristic of her general reluctance to publish her overtly homoerotic autobiographical novels of the period.’⁸⁷

Indeed, H.D. further obscured her role in the film by adopting the pseudonym Helga Doorn. In contrast, her performances in POOL’s earlier films, *Wingbeat* and *Foothills*, were credited with her authorial *nom de plume*. It is no coincidence either, I think, that Bryher and Herring’s names failed to appear in *Borderline*’s credits.⁸⁸ Moreover, in a frantic letter written just before *Borderline*’s premiere in London, Herring observed to H.D.:

the point is, suddenly, that my mother must NOT know or see the film – I told Bryher & K[enneth]; & never imagined they wouldn’t have passed it on to you, so when I realised how barely I had escaped the damage, I was gasping!⁸⁹

Interestingly, Herring’s anxiety seems to have centred upon his mother discovering that he had acted in any film at all, which perhaps suggests that her ‘one-track mind’ would have hindered any further understanding. This was not the case, however, for one incisive reviewer, who observed that *Borderline* featured: ‘an enlightened film critic in the guise of a nance pianist.’⁹⁰ Nonetheless, this pervasive self-censorship speaks, I suggest, to the subversive content of POOL’s film, to its queer sexual politics, from which POOL members sought to distance themselves.

The members of the bar staff are the most sympathetic white figures in the film, frequently defending Pete and Adah from the racist townfolk, as the excerpt above from the libretto illustrates. This is significant in a film which is an overt condemnation of white western racist society. McCabe has suggested that we read *Borderline* as a riposte to D.W. Griffith’s vitriolically racist *Birth of a Nation* (1915), while Annette Debo contends that it ‘speaks against lynching’.⁹¹ Both scholars propose that through the character of Pete the film offers a positive alternative to the pervasive stereotype of the predatory black male intent on defiling a pure, white femininity. Indeed, in contrast to this, in *Borderline* it is

⁸⁷ Walton, ‘White Neurotics, Black Primitives,’ p.256

⁸⁸ Stills reproduced in *Close Up* featuring Herring and Bryher also remain untitled.

⁸⁹ Robert Herring to H.D., [c. late 1930] Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Oversize Box 178, Beinecke.

⁹⁰ Unattributed, *To-Day’s Cinema*, 14 October 1930, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Box 168, Folder 5635, Beinecke.

⁹¹ McCabe, ‘Borderline Modernism,’ p.649. Interestingly, one of *Borderline*’s critics made a similar, though less flattering comparison. S/he averred that, ‘The camera has been misused to the extent that one felt one was watching the antics of a D.W. Griffiths on the borderline.’ Unattributed, *Kinemato Graphic W.*, 16 October 1930, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Oversize Folder 178, Beinecke; Debo, ‘Interracial

Robeson who becomes the focus of a network of desiring looks, most obviously through the gaze of the camera (read, most often, as being aligned with Macpherson's own desiring look), which lingers upon, and caresses, his body. Nonetheless, POOL's assumptions, and fantasies, about blackness need to be addressed. This is most in evidence in an entry in Eslanda Robeson's diary, in which she records that she and Paul 'often completely ruined our make-up with tears of laughter' over POOL's 'naïve ideas of Negroes.'⁹² *Borderline* is marked by such notions, with the black couple repeatedly being aligned with nature and the natural; they are frequently shot out of doors, hence the montage featuring shots of Robeson's head intercut with a waterfall, unlike the white characters, most of whom do not leave the café bar. Thus, the black couple is constructed through racial stereotypes of primitivism and noble savagery, in contrast to the white pair who are cast as degenerate, with their multiple neuroses being rooted in their over-civilisation.⁹³ As Friedman notes, like 'many liberal whites whose disgust for discrimination and sympathy for blacks ran very deep,' POOL's 'friendship and fascination' was nonetheless 'tainted by covert forms of racism.'⁹⁴ Yet, importantly, in response to such charges, McCabe asserts that *Borderline* 'should not be viewed simply as an expression of skewed worship; it simultaneously subverts the desire for wholeness or an essential identity.'⁹⁵ This is a crucial point to keep in mind when reading the film, like I do here, as simultaneously a commentary on, as well as a powerful riposte to, censorship and its close kin, social exclusion.

Rather than acknowledging this anti-racist effort, however, POOL's only explicit claim for *Borderline*, as we saw in Macpherson's editorial earlier, was made in relation to psychoanalysis. During his defence of *Borderline*, Macpherson pronounced the film heir to Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul* (1927), and stated: 'instead of the method of externalised observation, dealing with objects, I was going to take the film into the minds of the people in it'.⁹⁶ According to Macpherson, then, the film's focus was the invisible psychical processes then being elucidated by Freud and his followers. H.D. gestured to Freud's work too in 'The *Borderline* Pamphlet' when she wrote: '*Borderline* is a dream and perhaps

Modernism in Avant-garde Film,' pp.374-5

⁹² Eslanda Robeson cited in Jean Walton, "'Nightmare of the Uncoordinated White-Folk': Race, Psychoanalysis, and *Borderline* in *Discourse* 19, 2 (1997): p.105

⁹³ See Walton, "'Nightmare of the Uncoordinated White-Folk,'" and 'White Neurotics, Black Primitives' for her extended discussion of POOL's 'raced' interpretation of psychoanalysis, and her contextualisation of the film in relation to the Harlem Renaissance.

⁹⁴ Friedman, 'Modernism of the 'Scattered Remnant,' p.101. Here, Friedman discusses *Borderline* in terms of both Herring and Macpherson's 'negrophilia,' as well as their affairs with black men, which she sees as undergirding the interracial homoerotics of the film.

⁹⁵ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.641

⁹⁶ Macpherson, 'As Is'(November 1930): pp. 293-4

when we say that we have said everything.’⁹⁷ Indeed, for some, including POOL members, just about ‘everything’ could now be said – or read – following Freud’s work on dreams.

Censorship was, of course, not just a cultural affair in the interwar period but a psychoanalytic one too – censorship and repression are integral facets of Freud’s theorising. Both terms describe psychological mechanisms that work to confine unacceptable wishes, thoughts, images and memories to the unconscious. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud developed the idea of censorship as an explanation for dream distortion, which in turn he used to illustrate the general workings of the psychological structures of the ego, id and superego. Strikingly, in attempting to explain this he employed the metaphor of ‘the political writer who has disagreeable truths to tell to those in authority.’ Freud writes: ‘If he presents them undisguised, the authorities will suppress his words. [...] A writer must beware of the censorship, and on its account he must soften and distort the expression of his opinion.’⁹⁸ Developing this further, he observed that: ‘The stricter the censorship, the more far-reaching will be the disguise and the more ingenious too may be the means employed for putting the reader on the scent of the true meaning.’⁹⁹

Like Freud’s ‘political writer,’ and, indeed, the unconscious, POOL was obliged to distort the seditious queer content of its film to deflect the censor’s gaze, performing, what I refer to as, a veiled disclosure in order to put the (open-minded) viewer ‘on the scent’. Both H.D. and Macpherson’s allusion to the psychoanalytic precepts of *Borderline* also, I think, gesture to a means by which to read the film differently. Viewers are invited to double as analysts and urged to attend to both the latent and manifest content of the text, or, as H.D. put it in another context, to ‘The something behind the something’.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, this brings to mind Macpherson’s earlier statement that *Borderline* ‘is like something seen through a window or key-hole,’ and his claim that, it is ‘a film of *subconscious* reasoning’; in other words, it is a text structured by the (il)logic of the unconscious, and must therefore be interpreted accordingly.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ H.D., ‘The Borderline Pamphlet’, p.232. Bryher drew a similar parallel between the technology of cinema and Freud’s theorising thirty years later in *The Heart to Artemis* when she described film as a ‘framework for [...] dreams’. Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.247

⁹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. & ed. James Strachey. The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 4 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.223

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.224

¹⁰⁰ H.D., ‘The Cinema and the Classics: The Mask and the Movietone,’ *Close Up* 1, 5 (November 1927): p.25. Freudian censorship levels the ground. In contrast to those figures policing cultural production in interwar Britain, who were predominantly white, heterosexual, upper class men, Freudian censorship is a universal psychological mechanism.

¹⁰¹ Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ (November 1930), p.293, my italics.

H.D. seems also to evoke the paradoxical mechanism of the veiled disclosure in ‘The Borderline Pamphlet,’ when she writes: ‘Macpherson sculpts literally with light. He gouges, *he reveals, he conceals*. All this not by accident, not automatically but with precision and deliberate foresight.’¹⁰² This speaks to Macpherson’s own paradoxical claim for the film that, ‘To a mind unaware of nuance, to a one-track mind, [*Borderline*] would naturally appear chaotic. I do not deny for a moment that it is chaotic. It was intended to be.’¹⁰³ Both H.D. and Macpherson, as I stressed earlier, emphasise that *Borderline* is intentionally recondite, but not comprehensively so: to some – those *without* ‘a one-track mind’ – it ‘reveals’. Macpherson certainly saw himself as possessing such a mind, and schooled in the necessary (analytically-inspired) reading practice. In a letter to Bryher, documenting his movements in Berlin, he grumbled:

Saw Marquis d’Eon last night. Poor old Lilian Haid is a complete sop to the censor in that she annihilates any possible suggestion of homosexuality or cross-dressing. It’s all so darned respectable. It doesn’t even make a suggestion to the most observant mind (my own).¹⁰⁴

The sort of suggestive opacity that Macpherson hankered after is realised visually in *Borderline* during a pivotal sequence that reaches a crescendo with Astrid’s death. As



Figure 4: The title page

the white couple tussle over a knife in their bedroom, a table is knocked over and a book tumbles to the floor. Its cover falls open fleetingly, partially revealing its (upside-down) title page: a fragment of a word is discernible, which seems to be ‘Voirie’ (Figure 4). We are returned to the book several shots later, lying on the ground with its pages flapping. The tail end of the word is revealed transiently: ‘tés,’ but the word

as a whole evades us. This visual conundrum provides us with ‘voir,’ the French ‘to see,’ but though we ‘see’ a word we cannot read it: we are promised sight but given obscurity.

¹⁰² H.D., ‘The Borderline Pamphlet,’ p.227. My italics.

¹⁰³ Macpherson, ‘As Is’ (November 1930), p.296

¹⁰⁴ Macpherson to Bryher, undated [c.1928], Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 35, Folder 1281, Beinecke. Macpherson is referring to Karl Grune’s 1928 film *Marquis D’Eon: der Spion der Pompadour*, which starred Liane Haid.

This sequence functions as a metonym for *Borderline*, inscribing in the minutiae the overarching theme of suggestiveness and inviting abstrusity: the veiled disclosure.

Indeed, although the name, POOL, summons notions of reflection and a pooling of resources, the actual motif was a rippled pool, which suggests instead distortion, an obfuscated reflection (Figure 5). Friedberg has suggested that '[t]o Macpherson, POOL was a reflective, mimetic surface that, when rippled, became an abstract non-representational distorting surface,' a description arguably befitting the unconscious too.¹⁰⁵ In the next section I move on to consider the cause of the ripple in *Borderline*: the manageress.



Figure 5: The POOL logo

'Radclyffe-icity'

McCabe observes that *Borderline* is 'a space mapped and freighted with 'gesticulatory gesture.'"¹⁰⁶ In the absence of words, the body became an important site for inscribing meaning in POOL's silent film. Hands emphasise and are emphasised in *Borderline*: balled fists infer anger; limp ones convey wretchedness or inebriation. Such gestures are a marked feature of Figure 6, which depicts a shot taken from behind and below Thorne (Gavin Arthur) as he attempts to access Pete's room but is prevented by the manageress.



Figure 6: Standing up to Thorne (Gavin Arthur)

Thorne has his back to us, and the clenched fist of his right hand is foregrounded as it hangs at his side, conveying his barely controlled rage. The manageress faces him, standing in the background of the shot with her fists held across her chest, underscoring her defensive stance. It is through the repetition of shared gestures that

¹⁰⁵ Friedberg, 'Writing about Cinema,' p.108

¹⁰⁶ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.641

Bryher's character is also paired both with the other members of bar staff, as well as, crucially, Pete, as I will go on to illustrate shortly. Gesture, like metaphor, is drawn from a root word meaning 'to carry' (coming via the Latin *gestura*, it originates in the French, *gerere*, to carry). It is about suggestion or hinting rather than the definitive statement. Gesture, and the body, sit at the core of POOL's effort to speak back to censors.

In a scene which works to highlight the pairing of the manageress and the pianist, they share and repeat a gesture. Having descended from eavesdropping on Pete and Adah, the manageress halts near the piano and looks at the pianist. A sequence of close ups captures him scratching the back of his head, which foregrounds his ring and bracelet thus highlighting, once again, his dandified style and queer status. As the camera returns to the manageress, she mimics him, scratching her head. As well as being contrasted with Herring's effeminate pianist, the manageress is also paired with the barmaid, who is conventionally feminine with waved hair, beads, flowing skirts and high heels. Their coupling is emphasised in a drawn out shot of the two women standing side by side, which lasts for about twelve seconds. The camera returns repeatedly to them in this scene, zooming in on their heads and shoulders. The barmaid has her arm draped over the manageress' shoulder, only shifting her position to ruffle her partner's hair affectionately (thus picking up the same shared gesture). The manageress wears a jacket over her skirt and jumper while the barmaid is dressed in a housecoat and slippers (Figures 7 and 8).



Figures 7 & 8: The manageress and the barmaid (Charlotte Arthur)

Despite the riled reviewer's description of the two women as 'very masculine,' I think that POOL's coupling of the women in fact works to foreground the masculinity of the manageress and highlight her difference from Charlotte Arthur's more normative femininity. The barmaid's flowing skirt, jewellery and high-heeled shoes contrast with the

manageress' plain skirt, long round-neck jumper and her flat, heavy shoes with laces. While both women have short hair, the barmaid's is waved in a more feminine fashion while the manageress' resembles a shingle cut. Finally, the manageress smokes a cigar, a more robustly phallic version of the barmaid's cigarette.

As I discussed in my introduction, it was the general – late twentieth century – critical consensus that Bryher's character was the masculine member of a butch-femme lesbian couple. This critical designation is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, drawn from mid-century lesbian bar culture, 'butch' is an anachronistic (American) slang term which entered the British lexicon after the production of *Borderline*.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the term conflates Bryher's masculine sartorial style with female same-sex desire, collapsing the signifier into the signified, a move illustrated most obviously by McCabe's assertion that the manageress – the 'lesbian sign' – 'wears a man's suit'.¹⁰⁸ She does not. As I discussed above, for the entire length of the film Bryher's character is dressed in a simple skirt-jumper combination (she never wears trousers). Such readings obscure the polyvalent nature of sartorial (female) masculinity in the interwar period and make assumptions about how women who dressed in plain, tailored fashions would have been interpreted by contemporaries.

Of the earliest *Borderline* critics, Andrea Weiss was the only one to relate the manageress' masculine sartorial style to contemporaneous theories of sexuality and gender when she read her as an embodiment of Edward Carpenter's 'intermediate sex,' asserting: 'Bryher, with her short hair and cigar, more consistently occupies an androgynous zone.'¹⁰⁹ More recently, Latimer has also referred to the 'intermediate' sexuality of the bar staff, though she is more explicit in connecting POOL members with Carpenter's progressive writings. She observes:

All three founders of the POOL group (and many of their collaborators) enjoyed what the sexual theorist Edward Carpenter described as a "Certain

¹⁰⁷ According to Eric Partridge, 'butch' first appeared around 1945, while the *OED* posits 1954. 'Dyke' or 'dike,' following Partridge, was adopted in America circa 1935, while the *OED* suggests 1942. Both terms are originally American. Of course, the accuracy of dates for subcultural slang in official records is always going to be questionable, especially during periods of heightened homophobia. For example, Partridge tells us that the term lesbian did not make it into the 1937 edition of the *OED*, though it was in use. Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: Colloquialisms and Catch Phrases, Fossilised Jokes and Puns, General Nicknames, Vulgarisms and such, Americanisms as have been naturalised* (London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.164 & 308. Doan suggests a much later date for 'butch,' asserting that, 'The term 'butch' was not in use in Britain until the 1960s.' Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.196, fn.8.

¹⁰⁸ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.646

¹⁰⁹ Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p.18

freemasonry of the secrets of the two sexes.” Just as Carpenter’s theories undoubtedly enabled them to view “intermediate” sexuality as a diplomatic credential, theories linking “variant” sexuality with artistic genius and aesthetic sensitivity may have bolstered the POOL’s cultural credibility (at least in their own eyes.)¹¹⁰

Though I think it is certainly more constructive to read Bryher’s character through a sexological lens, rather than as part of a butch-femme lesbian dyad, by 1930, if not before, POOL members, as we saw above, were engaged by Freudian theory, having passed over Ellis’ compendious writings, which mapped sexuality onto the soma. As was the case with Bryher’s critique of the various foundational assumptions of sexual science in *Development* and *Two Selves*, which I discussed in my last chapter, this did not mean a break with Ellis himself, who in fact contributed numerous articles to *Close Up*. Rather than evoking the esoteric texts of sexual science, POOL, I argue, was drawing on a more pervasive and well-known set of signifiers, provided by the image of Radclyffe Hall. In *Fashioning Sapphism*, Doan has argued that it was specifically the mass dissemination of the photographed image of Hall during the trial that developed the indistinct image of the lesbian, derived from decadent and sexological literatures, into sharper focus, becoming, *pace* Hall, the mannish woman. It is to this ‘queer’ moment that I now turn.

Although British women’s fashion of the twenties was inflected with masculinity, sleek with wealth, Hall’s look was particular. Even before the trial, according to one newspaper, Hall was considered ‘the most easily recognized artistic celebrity in London’.¹¹¹ Photographs (Figures 9 and 10) taken in 1927, show Hall looking like a glamorous dandy.¹¹² In both images her shingle – ‘what most people consider the best shingle in London’ – has a distinctive kiss curl.¹¹³ In the first photograph she is swathed in a cape, looking over her right shoulder, and in the second she wears a high collar and jacket as she stares out to the right; in both, her features are accentuated by a touch of make-up. The images that saturated the print media, however, as Figures 11 and 12 illustrate, depicted Hall dressed in a more masculine, tailored style. Photographs also frequently showed Hall holding a cigarette or smoking, with the cigarette clenched between her teeth. The image Douglas chose to illustrate his poisonous article,

¹¹⁰ Latimer, “‘Queer Situation,’” p.36

¹¹¹ *Manchester Dispatch* cited in Terry Castle, *Noël Coward and Radclyffe Hall: Kindred Spirits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.19

¹¹² Castle has suggested that Hall’s style was indebted to the sartorial flamboyance of Noël Coward (another instance, then, of queer cross-sex borrowing), as well as arguing that Hall and Coward both appear as ghostly cameos in each others’ work. See Castle, *Noël Coward & Radclyffe Hall*.

¹¹³ *Birmingham Post*, April 1927 cited in Baker, *Our Three Selves*, p.194



Figures 9-13 (clockwise from top left): Radclyffe Hall.

‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed,’ was of a particularly dour and mannish looking Hall (Figure 13).¹¹⁴ She stands gazing out to the left with one hand in the pocket of her skirt, while the other is positioned over her chest, holding a cigarette and monocle. She wears a silk smoking jacket over a high-collared shirt and bow tie. This image was cut from a 1927 photograph by Fox Studios, which originally showed the author at home, standing beside the reclining figure of her lover, Lady Una Troubridge.

Drawing upon the correspondence of Bryher and H.D., Doan asserts that for some contemporaries Hall’s name literally became ‘a byword for lesbian’ following the scandal.¹¹⁵ While both Hall’s style and name did most certainly become attached to a dissident sexual type, the term ‘lesbian’ does not capture effectively the inherent incoherence and slipperiness of these new signifiers. In a letter dated mid-December 1929, which Doan cites from, Bryher wrote to H.D.: ‘Lady Macpherson shattered [us] by saying . . . Mrs. Arthur is a . . . is a . . . well, you know, Radclyffe.’¹¹⁶ In Bryher’s anecdote, Hall’s name stands in for a type or category of person that her mother-in-law finds unspeakable. This equation of the unutterable, same-sex desire, and the name of a scandalised author resonates with Maurice’s struggle to describe himself to a doctor, in E.M. Forster’s eponymous novel. His protagonist pronounces: ‘I’m an unspeakable, of the Oscar Wilde sort’.¹¹⁷ Whereas Maurice’s allusion to Wilde leaves us in no doubt as to what ‘sort’ he is, Lady Macpherson’s meaning is far from clear. What exactly does ‘Radclyffe’ signify? Same-sex desire? A masculine sartorial style? Or both? We cannot be sure.

In Bryher’s account Lady Macpherson uses ‘Radclyffe’ to describe Mrs Arthur, whom Doan does not identify. To my knowledge the only Mrs Arthur with whom H.D. and Bryher were acquainted was Charlotte Arthur, the actress who played *Borderline*’s barmaid and the manageress’ partner. Knowing this, however, makes interpreting the letter fragment no less problematic. For Lady Macpherson might just as well be referring to Charlotte Arthur’s (nameless) character in *Borderline*, the feminine barmaid. In this scrap of correspondence, then, rather than functioning as a slogan for lesbian, ‘Radclyffe’ is instead frustratingly lubricious.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ This is in fact a slightly edited version of the image Douglas used, in which Hall’s skirt can be made out.

¹¹⁵ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.194

¹¹⁶ Letter from Bryher to H.D., December 18? 1929, cited in Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.28

¹¹⁷ E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.145. Though Forster wrote *Maurice* in 1913-14 it was only published posthumously in 1971.

¹¹⁸ The slippery nature of ‘Radclyffe-icity’ is evidenced further in POOL’s private correspondence of the mid-thirties. In a letter to H.D. dated early November 1934, Bryher recounts an anecdote about the psychoanalyst Barbara Low meeting Hall at a party. According to Bryher, Low did not endear herself to the author for, having mistaken her for a man ‘in a grey felt hat and tweed jacket,’ she addressed her with: ‘how do you do, Mr Hall, what a lovely day for a party’. Bryher was prompted by this story to observe: ‘I am

Laying the letter aside, I return to the manageress, whose style is more reminiscent of the disparaged author. Like Hall she boasts a shingle, smokes, and wears a masculinised costume, a combination of signifiers which arguably connoted ‘Radclyffe-icity,’ to employ a Barthesian terminology (see Figures 14 and 15).¹¹⁹ It is crucial to note, however, that the manageress does not cite Hall but *gestures* to her. The particulars of Hall’s sartorial style, her penchant for collars and ties, her ever-present monocle, are notably absent. Indeed, the



Figure 14: Hall Smoking



Figure 15: Manageress with cigar

manageress (nameless and always positioned in the public space of the café, her job constitutes her identity) could hardly be further removed from Hall (a wealthy aristocrat) in the hierarchy of the English class system. This difference is important for if, as Doan has argued, Hall’s style was in the process of coming to signify lesbianism, too close an association would risk drawing the censor’s gaze. The manageress, then, is a distorted and condensed version of the iconic Hall; her masculine accoutrements function synecdochically for the author’s image. Crucially, however, the polysemic nature of female masculinity cloaked POOL’s illicit disclosure further.

apparently considered by the group [of analysts] as their Radcliffe [...] I rather like the new conception of me and I was asked seriously about my trousers.’ For Bryher, ‘Radclyffe’ seems to signify both a masculine sartorial style and her own queer desire. Eleven days later, this time in a letter from H.D to Bryher, Hall’s name accrues yet another meaning: ‘[Silvia Dobson] acted the heavy Radcliff, then went all mou [soft], as I told you.’ H.D. employs ‘Radcliff’ to illustrate a certain (sexual?) behaviour – of being assertive and aggressive – which she attributes to her friend/lover Dobson. In the hands of H.D. and Bryher, ‘Radclyffe’ is a protean term, to which the orthographic shift from ‘Radclyffe’ to ‘Radcliffe’ to ‘Radcliff’ attests. See Bryher to H.D., 5 November 1934 and H.D. to Bryher, 16 November 1934, both reproduced in Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, pp.447 & 479.

The 1920s, as Doan has argued, was the era of the ‘*garçonne*’ and the ‘boyette,’ when a masculinised style was in vogue. Women wore shingles and Eton crops, and dressed in tailored styles. As Doan has observed, for viewers in the 1920s and early 1930s the mannish woman had a plethora of meanings attached to her:

the women *we* now read as lesbian or ‘butch’ [may have been read] in any number of ways: as the quintessence of the ultramodern, [...], *or* as slightly antiquated holdovers from the New Woman [...], *or* as women who were sexually attracted to others of their sex [...], *or* as eccentric.¹²⁰

Doan’s slew of ‘*ors*’ foregrounds the protean nature of female sartorial masculinity, even in those years directly following the trial of *The Well of Loneliness*, a fact which allowed the manageress ‘to pass’ in *Borderline*.¹²¹ The manageress’ performance then functions as a veiled disclosure, with ‘Radclyffe-icity’ smuggled in with the mannish woman, revealing to more open-minded readers what must remain concealed from the censors.

Bryher’s performance in *Borderline*, however, does not simply gesture to Hall, it rescinds the figure of the ostracised invert, offering a recuperative vision of the mannish woman. Her character is (one of) the most sympathetic white figures in the film, in stark contrast to the racism of Astrid and the townsfolk. The manageress and the barmaid, moreover, are the only couple to ‘survive’ the film, while the heterosexual pairs are violently riven. As *Borderline* draws to an end Pete waits on the empty train platform, having been deserted by Adah, and Thorne walks alone on the mountainside, following Astrid’s demise. In contrast, the barmaid goes about her usual business, filling glasses and polishing the bar, while the last shot is reserved for the manageress, who with pen in mouth, checks her figures before shutting her folder (Figure 17). This scriberly stance recalls both Hall, the author, (Figure 16) and her writer protagonist, Stephen Gordon.¹²²

¹¹⁹ See Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text* for his development of ‘Italianicity’. Barthes writes: ‘*Italianicity* is not Italy, it is the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian.’ Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1990), p.48

¹²⁰ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p181

¹²¹ The manageress’ cigar might also be interpreted as a tribute to Freud, an inveterate cigar smoker, or as a nod to Bryher’s close friend Norman Douglas, who encouraged her to smoke Toscanas. See Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, pp.234-5

¹²² As we have perhaps come to expect, however, the favourable aspect of the manageress is obscured in the *Borderline* literature. In a description which is cast through Thorne’s eyes, H.D. depicts her, along with Astrid and the barmaid, as one of ‘the three café furies’, and, specifically, as ‘an allegory of [...] sordid calculation’. H.D., ‘The *Borderline* Pamphlet’, p.234



Figure 16: Radclyffe Hall Writing



Figure 17: Doing the Books

The trial of Hall's book was a moment when the private, sexual self was dragged into public view. Woolf's brief digression in *A Room of One's Own* illuminates this:

Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words that I read were these – 'Chloe liked Olivia . . .' Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women like women.¹²³

Woolf dramatises the dissolution of the boundary between public and private which the trial entailed, the fear that 'the privacy of our own society' was at risk from invasion by the law, figured here as Biron, and consequently admits that self-censorship is now a necessary mode. 'Chloe liked Olivia . . .' Woolf implies, is all a writer could now hazard. In *Borderline* we only ever see the public faces of the manageress and the barmaid as they work in the café. The camera is never permitted to stray into their personal realm, as it does repeatedly with characters like Pete, Astrid and Thorne. The censorial gaze is stopped at the bedroom door and the women are left to like women in private.

Moreover, I read the film's introduction and construction of the manageress as speaking back specifically to a series of *Sunday Express* and *Daily Express* articles. In our first views of the manageress she is framed on one side by the café's large telephone, and on top by a plant frond, as she sucks on her cigar (Figure 18). In this initial sequence only her head and shoulders are shown. The next series of shots capture the manageress from



Figure 18: Introducing the manageress

above as she works behind the bar and again represents her in fragmented form. Finally, full body shots reveal she is dressed in a skirt and heavy shoes. This sequence, which initially confines attention to the face and upper body of the manageress before revealing her whole, inverts the savage cropping of Hall's photographic image which took place in the two newspapers.

As we have seen, Douglas chose a morose image of a masculinised Hall, cropped from a posed photograph. According to Doan, the same image was used again: 'a few days after the publication of the Douglas editorial, the *Daily Express* reprinted the same detail, but this time cropped so tightly into the narrow column it is difficult to ascertain whether the novelist is wearing a skirt or trousers.'¹²⁴ This tightly cropped image featured once more in a December issue of the *Daily Express*, under the headline 'Scathing Comments on Miss Radclyffe Hall's Novel: 'Subtle and Corrupt.'¹²⁵ POOL's own editorial cutting symbolically returns plenitude to the figure of the masculine woman, a wholeness lost not only in the *Express*'s cropping of Hall's image but in the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* too.

Through Bryher's performance, POOL returned an agency and subjectivity to the maligned mannish woman. This transformation, more specifically, this *inversion* provides a powerful metaphor for both *Borderline* and this chapter. Alongside its sexological definition, 'inversion' is also a rhetorical term, which according to the *OED*, means 'the turning of an opponent's argument against himself'. *Borderline* offers such a *volte-face*. It inverts the position of the (female) invert, transmuting her from a 'decadent apostle' to a sympathetic character. This movement, the inversion, is undoubtedly queer. If we recall Sedgwick, the term 'comes from the indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.'¹²⁶ It is a term that

¹²³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own/ Three Guineas*, ed. Morag Shiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.106. Woolf's essay was based on two lectures given at the Cambridge colleges, Newnham and Girton, towards the end of 1928.

¹²⁴ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, p.189

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

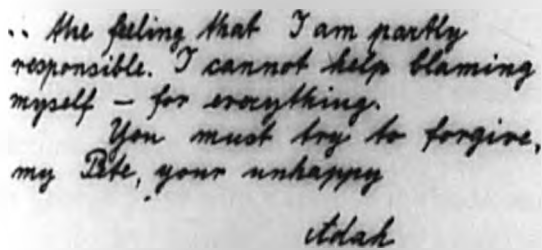
¹²⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.xii

bristles with a recalcitrant, confrontational energy, which characterises *Borderline*'s riposte to censors. For the film, as I will now explore, not only inverts the censor's powerful position in society, as wielder of the gaze, but symbolically turns the violence which inheres to it back on its practitioners.

Speaking Back to the Censors

Critics of *Borderline* have offered a number of interpretations of the film's disjunctive and giddy construction. Both Debo and Hazel V. Carby aver that *Borderline*'s form gestures to its concern with racism, to the violence inflicted on the black male body through lynching.¹²⁷ McCabe suggests that its form speaks more generally to the formation of subjectivities. She writes: the 'self-conscious cutting highlights the film's obsession with racial and sexual body marking; by disrupting the seamless narrative, the act of montage reveals itself as capable of taking apart installed cultural fantasies and refashioning them.'¹²⁸ While acknowledging these enlightening readings, I want to suggest a supplementary interpretation, which both works through and informs those already offered. *Borderline*'s form gestures repeatedly to another concern of POOL's, and one vividly evident in the trial of *The Well of Loneliness*: artistic censorship.

If one knew nothing about *Borderline* it would be easy to conclude that it too was a



∴ the feeling that I am partly responsible. I cannot help blaming myself - for everything. You must try to forgive, my De, your unhappy itdad

Figure 19: Adah's Letter

mutilated survivor of a run in with the censor's scissors or scalpel, whose cutting was responsible for the film's distinctive jagged and dizzying sequences. Herring noted, for instance, that in the British cut of *Pandora's Box*, 'All rhythm, of course, vanished.'¹²⁹ Like Pabst's massacred film, *Borderline* is full of diegetic gaps and incoherences: conversations are

¹²⁷ See Debo, 'Interracial Modernism in Avant-garde Film' and Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹²⁸ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.640

¹²⁹ Herring, 'For Adolescents Only,' p.423

entered *in media res*, questions are frequently left unanswered, and the two letters included as intertitles are fragmentary, both begin with ellipses (Figure 19). One London critic observed: ‘I must confess that the continuity left even hard-boiled me occasionally guessing.’¹³⁰ The lacunae are particularly apparent when the film’s actual unfolding is contrasted with the melodramatic narrative of the libretto, which, as I noted earlier, lends the film a coherence that alone it does not possess. *Borderline*’s fissures, however, simultaneously gesture to that which could not be fully disclosed. As we saw above, in *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf employs ellipses – ‘Chloe liked Olivia...’ – to playfully evoke that which could not be said plainly. She brings this into relief when, soon after her truncated sentence, she observes: ‘Sometimes women do like women’.¹³¹ Similarly, Martha Vicinus has observed that: ‘In literary works same-sex passion, when not concealed by a heterosexual plot, was subject to a designedly obvious form of elision, the ellipsis’.¹³² Following the trial, such editorial markers took on greater resonance, performing at the level of the text the censorial excision that the trial of *The Well of Loneliness* executed publicly. Moreover, in a discussion of twentieth century cinema, Ellis Hanson identifies the excised section of a film, the outtake, the ‘part of the film that, for whatever reason, ends up on the floor in the editing room, a scene that is shot but never quite makes it onto the screen,’ as particularly resonant for queer scholars.¹³³ He writes:

The outtake is the supplement, the remainder that defines every narrative as a deployment of silences and absences. An outtake has, like the queer subject, a certain reality, a certain place and defining power in the larger narrative of cultural representation but only as that which should not be looked at.¹³⁴

Additionally, the instruments of censorship, knives and scissors, recur in *Borderline*, whose ‘central character,’ as McCabe observes, is ‘cutting’.¹³⁵ In an early scene Thorne plays with a knife in the bedroom, running it down his face and letting it

¹³⁰ Unattributed, *Today’s Cinema* 14 October 1930 cited in Friedberg, ‘Writing About Cinema,’ p.161

¹³¹ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, p.106

¹³² Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.234

¹³³ Ellis Hanson, ‘Introduction’ in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p.18

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ McCabe, ‘Borderline Modernism,’ p.641. Moreover, since such a large number of copies were confiscated, *The Well of Loneliness* had to be destroyed both by means of a guillotine in the ‘Printers Department’ as well as by incineration, which was the more usual fate of banned books. See undated memo from Scotland Yard to the Home Office cited in Alan Travis, *Bound & Gagged: A Secret History of Obscenity in Britain* (London: Profile, 2000), p.89

hang suggestively between his legs. This knife becomes the means of Astrid's death when the white couple struggles over it in the pivotal scene I described earlier. Although we are not party to Astrid's fatal wound, she inflicts a number of cuts on Thorne's face and hand. Yet another knife is clutched between the teeth of the barmaid as she simulates a Russian dance in the bar. The tools of censorship, however, also double as the instruments of filmmaking, an irony of which POOL was not unaware. A scene in the bar captures the barmaid cutting some dark fabric with scissors as she twirls around to the (silent) music of the pianist. She ceases dancing as, with aplomb, she places a hat onto her head. The two characters and their movements are rapidly intercut, imbuing the barmaid's attempt at amateur millinery with the pianist's accomplished playing, and gesturing to the cutting and editing implicit in the construction of film.

Though *Borderline*'s form alludes to its concern with censorship, POOL's most important riposte to censors is entwined with and inflected by its critique of white racist society. Debo argues forcefully that POOL 'addresses the machinery of white racism' by 'condemning racist individuals and governing institutions'.¹³⁶ *Borderline* reveals the hypocrisy at the heart of western racist society as Pete is ejected from the community, and falsely blamed for Astrid's death. Thorne, meanwhile, walks free. As McCabe asserts: 'The borders of sex and race overlap,' and Pete's banishment speaks to the figure of the ostracised female invert too, who was symbolically exiled through the suppression of *The Well of Loneliness*.¹³⁷ Moreover, *Borderline*'s ending echoes that of Hall's novel: in both texts the sympathetic protagonists are left outcast and alone in order to illuminate and critique society's damaging racism/homophobia, its need to exclude racial and sexual others. In addition to what might be termed the iconic veiled disclosure, which I traced earlier, *Borderline* then performs a textual veiled disclosure too. The film gestures to a gesture. Hall's *cri de coeur* of two years earlier is evoked as *Borderline* effectively ends with Pete's cry to God: 'Give us also the right to our existence!'

The mannish woman is further adumbrated on Robeson's character through his construction as 'foreign': in the libretto Pete is described as 'the last remaining foreign and discordant element'.¹³⁸ Pete's racial otherness doubles as a national otherness. Indeed, xenophobia was a discernible element of Douglas' rant in 'A Book That Must Be Suppressed'. Douglas presented inversion as a foreign blight, a disease which was on the brink of invading and overthrowing the beloved homeland. The journalist wrote:

¹³⁶ Debo, 'Interracial Modernism in Avant-garde Film,' p.372-3

¹³⁷ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.648

I know that the battle [against inverts] has been lost in France and Germany, but it has not yet been lost in England, and I do not believe that it will be lost. The English people are slow to rise in their wrath and strike down the armies of evil, but when they are aroused they show no mercy and they give no quarter to those who exploit their tolerance and their indulgence.¹³⁹

This nationalistic tone is present in *Borderline* too, when the racist old lady (Blanche Lewin) declaims (via intertext): ‘If I had my way, not one negro would be allowed in this country’. The violent expunging of difference from the national body is a prominent feature of the fascist fantasy and *Borderline* illustrates POOL’s understanding of, and need to revolt against, this destructive policing of national boundaries, as was the case too with Bryher’s journal *Life and Letters To-Day* (which was edited by Herring). Indeed, as we shall see in my next chapter, the National Socialist desire for a pure, homogenous German national body penetrated the sphere of culture early on, with ‘non-Aryan’ artists and actors being banned from working, as well as via Joseph Goebbels’ censorship of non-representational, experimental art and the consequent destruction of Weimar artistic circles.

This intermeshing of queerness and racial difference is brought into greater relief through a reading of Pete and the manageress. From the film’s outset, Pete, as an employee of the café is linked to the queer bar staff. This is underscored at frequent intervals in the film: the barmaid defends Pete against the local racists, responding to the old woman’s rant with, ‘Why blame the negroes...?’ The pianist keeps a photograph of Pete propped on his piano and along with the manageress intervenes on Pete’s behalf when Thorne barges in on the black couple. It is the manageress, however, who is repeatedly connected with Pete.

The crucial scene occurs midway through the film. In his room Pete kneels to light and then tend the flame of his stove, gestures and actions which recall the manageress only minutes before as she makes coffee in the café below. Sharing the table with Bryher’s character are the old lady and a bespectacled, moustachioed man. The old lady rants at the manageress, wagging her finger vigorously and declaims, as we have seen, ‘If I had my way, not one negro would be allowed in this country’. The intercutting between Bryher’s character, the effervescing coffee and the apoplectic old lady, constructs the manageress, alongside Pete, as at the root of her ire. Following shortly after this scene intra-diegetic

¹³⁸ ‘Libretto,’ reproduced in Friedberg, ‘Writing about Cinema,’ p.150

¹³⁹ Douglas, ‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed,’ p.37

shots depict the old lady brandishing a broom or thumping her fist into her palm while superimposed on a dark background, encircled by flames, which lick up towards her. These shots ground her more solidly as the racial censor.¹⁴⁰

Later on, Pete shares a joke with the bar staff. Robeson's character accepts a rose head from the barmaid, which he places behind his left ear, simultaneously clasping the headless stem in his right hand and holding a silver platter behind his head with the other one, simulating a flamenco dancer (Figure 20). Pete's feminine pose, which inflects him with the cross-gendered style that so clearly marks the pianist and, most obviously, the manageress, underscores his pairing with Bryher's character.¹⁴¹



Figure 20: 'Paul Robeson enjoying his self-ordained canonization'

The most transparent incident of linkage, however, occurs during an exchange that takes place when Pete discovers he must leave town. This sequence contains one of the more sustained uses of intertext in the film. Having read the letter of expulsion he asks the manageress, 'What do you think?' She shrugs and displays her dismay by ripping up the

¹⁴⁰ Blanche Lewin, who was a neighbour in Switzerland, would accompany Bryher on one of her frequent trips to Berlin, a visit, during which Bryher was forced to conceal her left political leanings from her elderly companion. Bryher observed to H.D. that: 'Miss Lewin is pathetically happy but it appears she cuts people for one sin only, that of being "left"; I am waiting for the debacle. I have hidden my Film problems [her book, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929)] under underclothes and hope. [...] I fear she would die of shock did she know what I really thought.'¹⁴⁰ Yet this conventional old lady was quite happy to appear in POOL's subversive film – the group's collective tongue was clearly lodged firmly in its cheek when they cast her as Mother Puritannia. It is highly suggestive too, I think, that while Bryher felt the need to hide her book on Soviet film in her underwear in order to deflect Lewin's gaze and protect herself from potential censure, *Borderline*, in which Lewin featured centrally, required no such concealment – it was already at work in the film itself.

¹⁴¹ This shot was reproduced as a still in the August 1930 issue of *Close Up*, accompanied by the following caption, 'Paul Robeson enjoying his self-ordained canonization.' See *Close Up* VII, 2 (August 1930), n.p.

letter and placing it on the bar in front of her, then replies, 'Sorry, Pete! What makes it worse is they think they're doing the right thing. We're like that!' Their interchange ends with Pete directly echoing her: 'Yes, We're like that.' The manageress' slippage in her use of pronouns emphasises her affiliation with Pete: 'they' conveys her conscious separation from the racist townsfolk, though 'we' problematically suggests her complicity in his dismissal. The letter of banishment is handed over by a white-gloved hand, thereby further implicating the old lady, as the single character in the film who wears gloves, in Pete's expulsion.

POOL's film vividly evidences, I think, the brutality that shadows the practice of censorship. As Herring argues in 'Puritannia Rules the Slaves,' censorship is used to shore up the status quo, what the journalist refers to as 'Keeping Things as They Were' and 'Preserving the Sanctity of Home and Civic Life,' and was thus concerned to suppress, or repress, difference.¹⁴² As a critical commentary, which actively links, both in form and content, cultural censorship and anti-racist and anti-homophobic practices of social exclusion, *Borderline* colours censorship with fascist undertones. In her own reading of *Borderline*, McCabe too detects such strains in POOL's film, observing that: 'By the time of *Borderline*, the Nazis already had a presence, and this repressive presence haunts the film's racializing of sexuality.'¹⁴³

Moreover, in a 1968 letter to academic Thomas Cripps, whose *Slow Fade to Black* (1977) offers one of the earliest discussions of *Borderline*, Bryher responds to his request for information about the film by observing:

I fear I cannot help you very much. I can only refer you to *Close Up* and give you my own impressions of the making of *Borderline* as when we were threatened by a German invasion in May, 1940, I burnt all the documents I had connected with the film for the safety of persons concerned. We had already received our instructions as to what to do if the German violated Swiss neutrality, everyone was to resist passively or actively from the ages of six to eighty. Still, to avoid anyone getting into difficulties through documents, I burned all letters, papers and so on that I had.¹⁴⁴

Bryher's repetition of the fact that she felt it necessary to incinerate all documents about *Borderline* – ironically, then, providing them with the same fate as Hall's banned novel –

¹⁴² Herring, 'Puritannia Rules the Slaves,' p.24

¹⁴³ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.643

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Cripps to Bryher, November 6, 1968, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Box 169, Folder 5667, Beinecke.

is highly suggestive, and speaks, I think, to her own awareness of *Borderline*'s subversive nature.

POOL's incisive commentary on the workings of a racist (and homophobic society) is underscored by its representation of Pete's judges, who also double as caricatures of censors. Though the power they wield is presented as harmful and as having profound consequence for Pete, the judges themselves are given no credibility in the film. They are figured only obliquely: the mayor appears via a signature in the letter of expulsion while the police are depicted as the disembodied silhouette of an arm projected on the opaque glass of the police station. As such they are robbed of the gaze, the central 'tool' of censorship, a practice, which is founded upon sight. In the absence of the town authorities the little old lady and the drunken rabble that mindlessly follows her comprise *Borderline*'s racists.

Lewin's character is dressed in Victorian style, with white gloves, a cameo brooch and a swath of lace around her neck (Figure 21). Her age and dress gesture to the most well known figuration of censorship in this period, Mrs Grundy. Yet, *Borderline*'s most vitriolic racist, it seems to me, is drawn directly from the pages of Herring's 'Puritannia Rules the Waves,' the article in which he covertly defends Hall's novel. Lewin evokes his parody of British censors, Mother Puritannia: 'that elderly lady, about whom the only thing elastic is the side of her boots'.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, in later scenes the old lady's outfit is



Figure 21: The Old Lady (Blanche Lewin)



Figure 22: Mother Puritannia

supplemented suggestively by the addition of a fur muffler (Figure 22), which recalls Herring's description of a nation suffocated by censorship:

¹⁴⁵ Herring, 'Puritannia Rules the Slaves,' p.32

Most of us, if we want to live in England, have to wear coats and mufflers and fur gloves. Fur gloves don't make for a light touch, nor is clear thinking induced by a cold in the head. We are all muffled up, and kept warm by Puritannia.¹⁴⁶

In *Borderline* the stifling tendency of Mother Puritannia is infused with hyperbole and transported to another level in those sequences in which the old lady is superimposed on a dark fiery background. The flames allude, moreover, to the most well known means of destroying banned books, including *The Well of Loneliness*: incineration. Indeed, during the furore surrounding the banning of Hall's novel one newspaper published a caricature depicting the home secretary, Joynson-Hicks, dressed as a nursemaid and surrounded by prams, as he sets books alight. POOL's own lampoon, however, is more cutting, as the new language of film provided a means of (symbolically) revisiting the violence back on censors.

Censorship is founded upon the gaze and upon scrutiny, a point that H.D. underscores in her 1927 *Close Up* piece, 'The Cinema and the Classics I,' when she characterises the censor as 'the Cyclops' and 'this Polyphemous'.¹⁴⁷ Her choice of the mythological Greek giant, with its single huge eye, emphasises the crucial role which looking plays in censorship. Within *Borderline*, Mother Puritannia is divested of her censorial gaze, as her sight is repeatedly blocked. When first introduced, Lewin's character is cast as an onlooker, standing in the doorway of the café surveying the unfolding events. She is shot, however, through the beaded curtain which covers the entrance, thus rendering her oblique to viewers and consequently occluding her own sight



Figure 23: Obscuring the Gaze



Figure 24: Barring Mother Puritannia

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.31-2

¹⁴⁷ H.D., 'The Cinema and the Classics I: Beauty' in *Close Up* 1, 1 (July 1927): pp.26 & 34

too (Figure 23). Moreover, this shot is repeated in the film, which foregrounds her disrupted gaze. In another scene, Astrid stares out of the window shortly before her death. The camera cuts to the old lady on the street below. The lingering shot captures Lewin's character standing behind an iron fence, holding a basket of rhubarb (Figure 24). The old lady becomes the spectacle, caught by another's gaze and deprived of the means to 'look back,' symbolised in the shot by the fence.

The disruption of the authoritarian gaze, however, is most evident during the altercation that occurs between Pete and the old lady's compatriot, a bespectacled man, who Macpherson describes in a letter to Robeson, as 'incredibly loathsome'.¹⁴⁸ As Pete and Adah pass through the café on their way out, the nameless client verbally assails her, presumably uttering a racist slur. In her defence Pete punches this man, who is sent sailing across a table onto the floor. This client is one of only two figures in the film to wear glasses, an obvious signifier of the gaze, which aligns him with censorship. To foreground this further, immediately preceding his verbal assault on Adah, shots of the 'loathsome' man are intercut with the image of the old lady gesticulating in the flames, suggesting her influence on the incident. As Pete approaches the man he rips his glasses from his face before being sent sprawling, sightless, to the ground. Pete's violent response captures in minutiae what POOL was attempting in its subversive experimental film.

McCabe has suggested that *Borderline* 'questions and displaces the authority of the gaze' through its deployment of 'avant-garde' montage.¹⁴⁹ Building upon this premise, she argues that 'the same camera which objectifies Robeson also opens up a space from him to 'look back' (to use Silverman's term) at the white gaze.'¹⁵⁰ Against the backdrop of the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* and in the context of POOL's riposte, McCabe's reading is a salient one. The film, however, does not favour Pete, as McCabe suggests, providing him alone with a means to 'look back' at the dominant gaze. Rather, POOL's clatter montage, as H.D. termed the extraordinarily rapid cutting which is a unique feature of the film, had the effect of creating a network of looks.¹⁵¹ The pianist stares at a photograph of Pete, as well as the man himself, the manageress and the barmaid exchange glances, and Adah even 'looks back,' her eye caught reflected in a compact mirror.

I want to conclude by considering how POOL's retort functions at the level of the cinematic apparatus too, and by suggesting that the complex of looks I have described

¹⁴⁸ Debo, 'Interracial Modernism in Avant-Garde Film,' p.371

¹⁴⁹ McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism,' p.641

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ See H.D., 'The Borderline Pamphlet'.

arguably foreshadows Laura Mulvey's famous feminist call to arms in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). In her groundbreaking essay, Mulvey identifies three different gazes in the cinema, those of the camera, the spectator and the diegetic looks between characters. She argues: 'The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third'.¹⁵² Since 'the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form,' as Mulvey argues, Hollywood narrative cinema has been inscribed with society's 'sexual imbalance,' rendering women as 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and men as the 'bearer of the look'.¹⁵³ Moreover, since such films are mostly structured around a male protagonist, the man becomes 'the bearer of the look of the spectator' too.¹⁵⁴ In attempting to disrupt this powerful and pervasive gender imbalance embedded in narrative cinema Mulvey forcefully argues for the creation of a 'new language of desire'.¹⁵⁵ She writes:

The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions [...] is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment.¹⁵⁶

Borderline's use of montage executes these blows, with no one character functioning as 'bearer of the look,' which is instead freed into a heterogeneous (queer) network. As such the look is returned to those who had previously been the object of its



Figure 25: The manageress looks back

scrutiny, in the context of my argument, the masculine woman or invert (Figure 25). This volte-face, then, replaces the furtive gaze of censors ('Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed?') with that of the manageress, who, according to Bryher's own description of her character in *The Heart to Artemis*, had her 'eye clamped to the keyhole.'¹⁵⁷

This chapter has argued that POOL's silent film *Borderline* 'speaks back' to British censors, on behalf of the abjected female invert, who was symbolically ostracised by the

¹⁵² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985 [1975]), p.816

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.803, 809 & 810

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.810

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.805

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.816

¹⁵⁷ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.308

banning of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness*. The crux of POOL's queer sexual politics, and my chapter, is the figure of the manageress played by Bryher. Through the manageress' gesturing to the iconic figure of Hall, the new 'face' of female sexual inversion, POOL subtly and ingeniously inscribed an illicit subjectivity into its film while simultaneously deflecting the censor's gaze. Bryher's character also led the antistrophe that countered Mother Puritannia's racist chorus, producing an alternative ethos within the bounds of the film. Moreover, Bryher's queer performance offered a sympathetic portrait of the maligned masculine woman, with POOL's film inverting the position of the (female) invert, transmuting her from pariah to pacifier, and from martyr to manager(ess).

Borderline, however, also demonstrates POOL's awareness of the interrelation between the practices of artistic censorship and the similar desire for a 'cleansed' and 'purified' national body in fascist discourse. This is a central thematic in my next chapter, which considers the various queer articulations, or joinings, Bryher both represents in, and attempts to forge through, her 1935-6 novella *Manchester*, as a means to countering such exclusionary practices.

4

***'The end of all the stories must be the same':
Kitsch and Manchester's Queer Art(iculations)***

Sally's live original wasn't sure, at first, if she should allow it [the 'Sally Bowles' section of Christopher Isherwood's Goodbye to Berlin] to be published [...] And I myself had begun to have doubts. Wasn't the character in bad taste – too frivolous for such a grim political background? Those doubts seem absurd to me, nowadays. For, surely, every advancing thunder cloud looks better with a butterfly fluttering in front of it, to accentuate its menace?

— Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin of Sally Bowles* (1975)

I had come to films too late myself to take any interest in their stars but with one exception I have never seen anyone more beautiful than Garbo was in this film [G.W. Pabst's Die freudlose Gasse].

— Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis* (1963)

Musing over his concern with the recently completed 'Sally Bowles' section of *Goodbye to Berlin* in 1936, the Christopher Isherwood of 1975 bats back the idea of excising his eponymous female cad from his Berlin almost forty years later as 'absurd.'¹ For readers and viewers now such a notion is almost inconceivable, so (in)famous and multiple has Bowles become: Isherwood's Berlin stories spawned various artistic offshoots, including John Van Druten's stage play, *I am a Camera* (1951), Henry Cornelius' subsequent film of the same name, which was released in 1955, and the Broadway musical *Cabaret* (1966), which was adapted for the screen by Bob Fosse in 1972, and which famously starred Liza Minnelli as Bowles. Bryher's almost contemporaneous novella, *Manchester* (1935-6), shares a number of Isherwood's concerns.² Written between late 1933 to late 1934, against

¹ Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin of Sally Bowles* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), p.2

² Bryher, *Manchester* in *Life and Letters To-Day* 13 (December 1935): pp. 89-112; 14 (Spring 1936): pp. 94-114; 14 (Summer 1936): pp. 74-98.

the backdrop of the ‘advancing thunder cloud’ of Nazism, with an actress, based on an ‘original’ at its epicentre, it too appears, at least at the first glance, frivolous and out of place in such a historically earnest moment. Unlike *Goodbye to Berlin*, however, whose success at reproduction and rebirth has fostered its survival in the English-speaking cultural memory, *Manchester* is practically unknown. Three scholars glancingly refer to it in recent works but no full-length critical engagement exists.³ Moreover, the novella has never been republished (except in an issue of one, as a personal gift to the author), and, as we shall see, Bryher struggled to get it into print.⁴

This chapter redresses this critical neglect, and in doing so revives the ‘original’ Elisabeth Bergner (1897-1986) alongside Bryher’s ‘copy,’ *Manchester*’s actress ‘Cordelia,’ who forms the novella’s (absent) core. The much-celebrated Austrian Jewish actress has fallen from cultural consciousness, though she was as lauded as Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich in her heyday. As the comparison suggests, she was renowned for her androgyny, for her ability to flip from a boyish aesthetic, or trouser role, in one film to that of the femme-enfant in the next. In his famous history of German cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), Siegfried Kracauer observes of Bergner’s role in *The Violinist of Florence* (1926), that: ‘The androgynous character she created found a response in Germany which may have been intensified by the existing inner paralysis. Psychological frustration and sexual ambiguity reinforce each other.’⁵ While this may have been the case for the German nation, for Bryher, Bergner’s gamine roles and boyish aesthetic were enlivening. Writing to H.D. from the US in 1934, she observed: ‘I myself prefer Elizabeth [to Katherine Hepburn] because Elizabeth is more boy, more here, more mischievous, more a piece.’⁶ Bryher’s allusion to a star ‘more beautiful than Garbo,’ in my second epigraph, is, in all likelihood, then, referring to her paramour, Bergner.⁷ Indeed, Bergner,

³ See Diana Collecott, ‘Bryher’s *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance,’ in *Romance Revisited*, eds. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p.137; Susan Stanford Friedman, *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher and their Circle* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2002), p.513; Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women’s Historical Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.99

⁴ The American illustrator, George Plank, a good friend of both H.D. and Bryher, bound a copy of the text in sheets of the *Manchester Guardian*. In the front free endpaper Plank inscribed: ‘This edition of one copy, has been prepared for the author by one admirer.’ See Bryher’s *Manchester* [1936?] held at the Beinecke (general catalogue). Plank’s efforts speak clearly to the importance of this particular text for its author; moreover, his decision to bind it in the pages of a daily newspaper speak, I suggest, to its engagement with the matter of mass cultural forms.

⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.161

⁶ Bryher to H.D., 2 February 1934, YCAL MSS 24, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 103, Beinecke. Bryher spelt Bergner’s first name with a ‘z’ instead of an ‘s;’ I have chosen not to modify this.

⁷ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer’s Memoirs* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2006), p.294.

whom Bryher pursued on and off from 1931 through 1935, is a conspicuous absence in the writer's memoir, especially when the text is considered beside her correspondence of the period, which, as well as including a clutch of letters from the actress, is rife with discussion of her.

Susan Stanford Friedman has referred to *Manchester* as a 'screened fictionalisation' of the trip Bryher took to the northern capital in late November 1933 to support the actress in her debut on the English stage in Margaret Kennedy's *Escape Me Never* (1933).⁸ Friedman highlights how Bryher disguised herself 'with the use of a male persona named Ernest,' which she deployed in order to 'narrate her passion for Elizabeth Bergner'.⁹ *Manchester* is perhaps, then, best labelled a *roman à clef*, and, indeed, for those who have access to the Bryher Papers, and its glut of letters, it is clear who is a version of who.¹⁰ Cast in this light, we might choose to align the novella with Bryher's early autobiographical projects, *Development* (1920) and *Two Selves* (1923), yet, other than the transformation of her own life for creative use, *Manchester* in fact bears little resemblance to these formal experiments. Indeed, in terms of both form and content, the novella seems, at least at first glance, to be more closely associated with the popular genre of romance, with Ernest North, cast in the role of a love-struck anti-hero, setting forth to finally capture the heart of his actress amore, Cordelia.¹¹ Moreover, during the hunt for a willing publisher for *Manchester*, Bryher observed to Osbert Sitwell:

It is emphatically not a book for a small edition [...] I was an idiot really I think to send it to [the publisher Horace] Greenslet because he told me he is going to make [Constance Butler's novel] *Illyria, Lady* a best seller through the States and of course he wouldn't want M[anchester] to compete. Same style but I must say I think M[anchester] the better.¹²

Elisabeth Bergner was born Elisabeth Ettl in 1897 in Drubronyn, in the Polish part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Ukraine).

⁸ Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, pp.548

⁹ Ibid, p.513; Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity and H.D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.421

¹⁰ Cordelia represents Elisabeth Bergner and Ernest North is a version of Bryher. The novelist's school friend, the Anglo-Irish writer Dorothea Petrie Townshend Carew becomes Theodora Wilton, while English novelist and playwright, Margaret Kennedy, is transformed into Penelope Bush. See Bryher's correspondence to H.D., in particular letters 20-22 November 1933, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Folder 101, Beinecke.

¹¹ Although, as we have seen, Collecott reads *Two Selves* as 'lesbian romance,' Bryher's fractured, poetic prose offers a marked departure from the usual style of popular romantic novels.

¹² Bryher to H.D., 3 December, 1934[?], H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Folder 106, Beinecke. Constance Butler's *Illyria, Lady* (1934) is set on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean at the annual congress of the PMS (Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword) Club. Constance Butler, *Illyria, Lady* (London: Hogarth Press, 1934).

Bryher's novella, then, was intended for a popular audience – for 'the masses' – rather than for the avant-garde circles, where texts like *Borderline* (1930) and, as I suggested in my second chapter, her earlier prose works found both a home and a receptive audience.

This chapter does not, then, follow my previous ones in considering the workings of veiled disclosure, reliant as the concept is upon drawing a distinction between a 'knowing' fraction of the reading public and a censorious majority. Instead, I frame *Manchester* in relation to the second term of my thesis title: queer articulation. Here, I use 'articulate' in its sense of 'uniting' or 'joining'. According to the *OED*, the term also means 'A conceptual relationship, interaction, or point of juncture'. As I go on to discuss in more detail shortly, rather than being a private text for Bergner's eyes only, in *Manchester* Bryher united a critical commentary on the exclusionary nature of Hollywood cinema, particularly in relation to its desire for a 'happy' heterosexual ending, with a critique of the English population's apathy over the persecution of German Jews, and other others, by the Nazi Government. In twinning these commentaries, Bryher not only highlights the central role mass culture played in the struggle with fascism, but also gestures towards the need for what we might term a coalition-based politics, a response to the darkening situation which was emphatically *not* grounded in terms of national identity.

As well as expanding the queer cultural archive of the era, then, this chapter repositions Bryher as a prescient critic and thinker, especially in relation to her writing on kitsch, a concept that was only just starting to receive critical consideration. The production and consumption of mass medias such as cinema, photography, radio, and newspapers and magazines were beginning to be scrutinized by various members of the Frankfurt school, such as Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, as well as in the UK by Frank and Queenie Leavis, and, as I consider here, closer to home, in the pages of POOL's, own film journal. I read *Manchester* alongside two of Bryher's *Close Up* articles, 'Dope or Stimulus' (1928) and 'The Hollywood Code' (1931), in order to consider her contribution to this heated debate. Her articles show an acute awareness of cinema's unique role in sculpting public fantasies, though, like Benjamin, I suggest she simultaneously saw it as a potentially revolutionary medium. They also provided her with the ground from which to level blows at cinematic censorship practices which only allowed particular stories to be told, specifically those which were (apparently) successfully resolved by marriage. Such practices, then, muffled any overt attempt at cinematic queer articulation, at telling stories of difference. These observations fed into *Manchester*, which, I argue, comprises a subtle commentary on the deleterious effects of

such cultural homogeneity.¹³ Moreover, like her critical writings of the period, I believe that through her novella *Bryher* also sought to encourage viewers/readers to take a critical stance in relation to their consumption of popular cultural forms.

As scholars such as Andreas Huyssen and Griselda Pollock have highlighted, the closely related dichotomies copy/original, inauthentic/authentic, popular(-kitsch)/avant-garde art, have, from the nineteenth century on, borne gendered, raced, and sexualised associations, which, as well as being at work in the sphere of culture, have also fed into sustaining hegemonic social orders. These categories contribute to the validation of certain artistic and literary forms (and subjectivities) over others and therefore to the construction of a particular notion of 'Culture.' Correspondingly, this has had ramifications within academe: in the construction of disciplines, in the formation of canons, and in the writing of histories of culture, which is arguably one of the reasons why *Bryher's* text, which on the surface appears 'unoriginal,' has been over looked. During the first third of the twentieth century, however, these binaries, particularly that of authentic/inauthentic, played a role in the formation of national bodies and boundaries and in the construction of the notion of a racially pure, homogenous national people. Such ideas anchored the fantasies of National Socialism and other fascisms, and contributed to the violent expunging of all those who were deemed 'inauthentic' in relation to the national body, including Jews, queers, Romany peoples and people with impairments.¹⁴

Before moving on, mention needs to be made of the term 'fascism'. As Roger Griffin highlights there is no agreement on what constitutes 'the fascist minimum,' a problem which is bound up with the unresolved issue of whether or not fascism actually possessed anything resembling a coherent ideology.¹⁵ Instead, Griffin refers to the 'common mythic core' of fascism, which he suggests comprises 'the (perceived) crisis of the nation as betokening the birth-pangs of a new order,' a new breed Griffin refers to as 'homo fascistus'.¹⁶ He writes: 'Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core,

¹³ As Sarah Street has observed, from its inception the British film market was saturated with Hollywood productions, which led to a quota system being introduced to encourage home-grown cinema. A significant vein of anti-Americanism ran through social commentaries on this subject. See Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.8

¹⁴ Tamar Garb notes that it was in the modern period that 'Jewishness came to be conceived not as a matter of belief but as a racial identity, one which could be observed, measured, understood, and pathologized.' Tamar Garb, 'Introduction: Modernity, Identity, Textuality,' in *Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, eds. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p.22

¹⁵ Roger Griffin, 'General Introduction,' in *Fascism*, ed. Roger Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.1

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp.2, 3 & 4

in its various permutations, is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.¹⁷ As such, Griffin identifies National Socialism as the most significant fascism in relation to the terrifying extremes it reached in order to secure its vision of a new order.

Nazi nationalism prescribed fixed and diametrically opposed gender roles, with women being positioned first and foremost as mothers. Commenting on this gendered division, Joseph Goebbels noted that:

The mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world. This is not at all as rude and unmodern as it sounds. The female bird pretties herself for her mate and hatches the eggs for him. In exchange, the mate takes care of gathering the food, and stands guard and wards off the enemy.¹⁸

Erin G. Carlston refers to this 'ideology of motherhood that buttresses patriarchy and militarism' as 'matriotism'.¹⁹ In contrast to this happy Aryan reproductive couple, in Nazi propaganda both Jews and queers were represented as sterile and as being distinct from the bourgeois couple, and thus separated from any association with marriage and childbearing.²⁰ These reproductive fantasies fed into the realm of culture, for which, as Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (from 1933-1945), Goebbels had responsibility, and into the sort of romanticised realism that has frequently, as we shall see shortly, been labelled kitsch. This is significant, since, as Carlston observes: 'Fascism constituted itself on the terrain of the cultural,'²¹ a fact Walter Benjamin had highlighted in 1936, when he averred that fascism 'is the aestheticizing of politics.'²²

I also, then, frame *Manchester* in terms of the events unfolding in Nazi Germany, which, as we saw in my introduction, Bryher experienced first hand, as well as through the regime's effects on her wide-circle of (mostly Jewish) friends and acquaintances in Berlin, including Bergner and her analyst, Hanns Sachs. Indeed, she involved herself personally in dealing with this forced diaspora, as she helped organise papers for, and fund the flight

¹⁷ Ibid, p.4

¹⁸ Joseph Goebbels cited in Marie-Luise Gätgens, *Women Writers and Fascism: Reconstructing History* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1995), p.7

¹⁹ Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.7

²⁰ See George L. Mosse, *Nationalism & Sexuality: Respectability & Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), p.134

²¹ Ibid p.24

²² Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility' in *Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et al (Cambridge, Mass. & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.122.

of, 105 refugees, as well as using Kenwin as a Swiss ‘holding station’.²³ Nazi cultural policy decimated the alternative artistic and creative circles that had bloomed during the Weimar republic, and which Bryher had so engrossed herself in, as well as in the same move destroying its queer enclaves and scattering its psychoanalysts.

In her precient call to arms, ‘What Shall You Do in the War?’ (1933), published in the final issue of *Close Up*, Bryher foregrounded mass media, and in particular, the cinema, as a central component in the fight against fascism. She wrote: ‘Let us decide what we will have. If peace, let us fight for it. *And fight for it especially with cinema.*’²⁴ Moreover, she saw the struggle as necessarily taking a transnational form. She observed: ‘If we want peace, we must fight for the liberty to think in terms of peace, for *all* the peoples of Europe. It is useless for us to talk about disarmament [...] when every leader of intellectual thought in Germany is exiled or silenced.’²⁵ She thus encouraged the English-speaking *Close Up* readership to ‘spread the knowledge of other nations among the many English in outlying villages who still believe a foreigner to be not quite as human as themselves.’²⁶ Bryher ended her final contribution to the journal with some force: ‘It is for you and me to decide whether we will help raise respect for intellectual liberty in the same way, or whether we all plunge, in every kind and colour of uniform, towards a not to be imagined barbarism.’²⁷ It is a rally call which corroborates Jayne Marek’s observation that ‘Bryher’s writings repeatedly averred that the individual carried responsibility for the actions of his or her nation, and that the collective action of small groups of informed people applied to the reform not just of film-showing habits but also of a nation’s attitude toward its own problems and toward international co-operation.’²⁸ This, as we shall see, was the central thrust of *Manchester* too.

Before taking these notions up further in relation to my reading of *Manchester*, in the following section I provide an overview of Bergner’s (early) career and her relationship with Bryher. This is necessary not only since Bergner is now little known, and thus needs introduction, but also because Bergner’s star status might very well have meant that readers would have made a connection between the novella’s actress, Cordelia, and the

²³ Bryher also circulated the pamphlet, *J’Accuse!* which was published in May 1933 by the World Alliance for Combating Anti-Semitism, and which provided detailed documentation of the torture Germany’s Jews were already experiencing at the hands of the Nazis. For further details see Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, p.276

²⁴ Bryher, ‘What Shall You Do in the War?’ *Close Up* X, 2 (June 1933), P.191. My Italics.

²⁵ Ibid, p.190. My Italics.

²⁶ Ibid, P.191

²⁷ Ibid, p.192

²⁸ Jayne Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: ‘Little Magazines’ and Literary History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), pp.126-7

well-regarded émigré performer. This may even have constituted a ploy on Bryher's behalf, through which she intended to jolt awake the apathetic British population and to focus their attention on the looming threat of Nazism.

Elisabeth Bergner: A Brief History

Bergner was 'discovered' by the Austrian theatre director Max Reinhardt in 1914, who started her on what would become a much celebrated stage career, during which she performed in a range of classic roles from Ibsen and Shaw to Shakespeare, including all of his girl page roles. While she considered herself primarily a stage actress, with the development and popularisation of film in Germany, and particularly Berlin (which became a cinematic hub), by the 1920s, Bergner was pushed into an equally celebrated film career. The actress' silent vehicles included *Nju* (1924), *Der Geiger von Florenz* (*The Violinist of Florence*) (1926), *Dona Juana* (1927), and *Fräulein Else* (1929). Her first sound film was *Ariane* (1931) (whose technique Bryher thought 'horribly old fashioned'), which was followed by *Träumunde Munde* (*Dreaming Lips*) (1932), Alexander Korda's *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (1934), and *As You Like It* (1936), with the lesser known Laurence Olivier.²⁹ By the 1930s Bergner had begun to work in English, with *Ariane* and *Dreaming Lips* both being translated from the German (the former by Bryher and Macpherson), while *Catherine the Great* and *As You Like It* were English productions. Following the Nazis rise to power in 1933 the actress fled to England with her primary director, the Hungarian, Paul Czinner (1890-1972) and upon their arrival in London they married. Following this, Bergner appeared in Kennedy's *Escape Me Never* in Manchester. An out-spoken critic of Nazism, Bergner subsequently took on a range of roles that underscored her dissent of the regime, including 'Anna the Hutterite' in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's third collaboration, *The 49th Parallel* (1941), a propaganda piece suggested by the Ministry of Information, which was intended to encourage the neutral U.S. to join the war.³⁰

²⁹ Bryher to H.D., 22 April 1931, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Folder 90, Beinecke.

³⁰ It was shot on location in Canada, yet when Bergner was asked to return to England to complete the studio scenes she refused, fearful of Nazi invasion. The actress therefore only appears in the out door shots, with Glynis Johns taking over the role. For further details of Bergner's career see David Shipman, *The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years* (London, New York, Sydney & Toronto: Hamlyn, 1970): pp.66-68; and Klaus Völker, *Elisabeth Bergner: Das Leben Einer Schauspielerin* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1990).

Bryher's account of cinematic happenings, 'Berlin April, 1931,' encompasses both the popular and the experimental extremes of Germany's filmic landscape. Before reporting favourably on the German metropolis' reception of POOL's own production, *Borderline* (1930), 'which created somewhat of a furore,' she decimates the latest Bergner-Czinner collaboration, *Ariane*, for its 'appallingly old fashioned' technique.³¹ The author's tepid note states that Czinner's film 'has popular appeal' but bemoans the over-used device 'of hearing dialogue whilst watching a blank screen' which was 'most tiresome'.³² According to Bryher, then, *Ariane* thus 'depends entirely upon the reaction of the audience to Elizabeth Bergner.'³³ As we shall see, this was not unusual, with Bergner often appearing in cinematic vehicles deemed artistically substandard, but which through her performance were somehow redeemed. The petite, gamine actress certainly provided the draw for Bryher in this instance, who censored her own ecstatic response to Bergner's performance from the public eye. Writing to H.D. in the spring of 1931, Bryher recounted the cinematic experience more extensively: 'Orgy of Bergner last night; she's the Colette of the screen, very melange of monkey and small girl as Ariane,' and continued: 'her figure is wonderful as ever, in bathing trousers, all but nude, in school dresses and then alas, she needs smacking, in crinoline muslin, short velvet coat and white KID gloves at opera scene.'³⁴ Indeed, a poster advertising *Ariane* depicts a stylised cartoon, all soft curves and decadent motifs, of a woman dressed in a kimono with fluted sleeves striking a provocative pose. Flanked by Bergner's name, she stares out at the viewer, the slinky garment gaping open to reveal the curve of a breast, as a cigarette smoulders in her outstretched hand. This depiction of the actress certainly seems to suggest that she was both as risqué, and, indeed, as mutable, as the French writer and performer, Colette, whose most scandalous work, *The Pure and the Impure* (1932) was on the brink of publication in France.³⁵

If we take the word of an early biographer, Thomas Eloesser, it was not only Bryher but the entire population of Berlin who was under the spell of the actress. In his 1927 hagiographic pamphlet, Eloesser observed:

³¹ Bryher, 'Berlin: April 1931,' *Close Up* XIII, 2 (June 1931) pp.132 &131

³² *Ibid*, p.131

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Bryher to H.D., 22 April 1931, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Folder 90, Beinecke.

³⁵ See Bryher, *The Days of Mars: A Memoir 1940-1946* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), pp.120-1, for Bryher's thoughts on Colette, whose work she admired.

Bergner is the most charming edition of the femme-enfant, and I hope that it will be a long time before we have finished reading her. A child that every man wishes to adopt, but in whom he also thinks – not without a special tenderness – of the woman. And Bergner is a witch, who perhaps she ought to be burned at the stake in good time like her saint Joan; for she is a ghost, a spirit of the air, a Puck, an Ariel, who unsettles and preoccupies a great, earnest hard-working city, who confuses the minds and even the senses of people – and not only those of the young and the men.³⁶

As Russell B. Jackson notes of this passage: ‘Duality is an inadequate term for such a polysemous, polyandrous being, who goes a few steps beyond the messianic virgin/apocalyptic whore figure represented memorably in the two Marias of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.’³⁷ While he does note that Eloesser admits a ‘good deal of *Eros* in Bergner’s appeal,’ and that the passage ‘offers almost limitless opportunities for meditating on the phenomenon of the male gaze,’ Jackson fails to note the suggestion that the actress may have in fact been attractive to an array of viewers, and thus potentially the site of a range of queer articulations.³⁸ Nor does he comment upon the latent hostility housed in this apparent celebration of the actress, which harbours a desire to punish her: ‘perhaps she should be burned at the stake,’ Eloesser jokes. Later on this sadistic subtext is developed into a seemingly playful warning, when the biographer writes: ‘Fathers warn their sons, mothers warn their daughters of seduction by this vampire, this Lilith. To everyone she appears as their darling.’³⁹

As well as once more flagging up Bergner’s ubiquitous appeal, all of these representations of the actress are infused, I suggest, with allusions to her ‘Jewishness’. By the early decades of the twentieth century, Jewishness, as Tamar Garb has noted, was no longer seen as a religious belief but as a racial identity, ‘one which could be observed, measured, understood, and pathologized.’⁴⁰ Like sexologists, then, the so-called ‘scientists’ of ‘race,’ mapped notions of racial degeneration onto the bodies of its subjects. In relation to this, Garb tells us that while the ‘Jew as abstraction is always constructed in the masculine; the Jewess, when differentiated as such, invokes fantasies of desire, exoticism, and guilt that specifically address a racialized femininity’.⁴¹ She goes on to observe that,

³⁶ Thomas Eloesser cited in (and translated by) Russell B. Jackson, ‘Filming *As You Like It*: a playful comedy becomes a problem,’ n.p. At: <http://www.societefrancaishakespeare.org/document.php?id=656>. Accessed on 18 May 2010.

³⁷ Jackson, ‘Filming *As You Like It*,’ n.p

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Thomas Eloesser cited in Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.85

⁴⁰ Garb, ‘Introduction,’ p.22

⁴¹ Ibid, p.26

‘In the Christian imagination, the sexuality of the Jewess is both dangerous and desirable. Modern day Judiths[, Liliths] and Salomes, they always threaten to become eternal seductresses, wild, wilful, and untrustworthy.’⁴² Moreover, the vampire was another resonant anti-Semitic stereotype, with Jews depicted as drinkers of Christian blood. Indeed, Michèle C. Cone discusses the ‘deceptively fascinating male or female vampire of nineteenth-century literature (and twentieth century film),’ who, she argues, ‘could feed the myth of a conspiring Jew out to get political power through charm or seduction.’⁴³

It was the queerness of Bergner’s various trouser role performances, however, that led Alice A. Kuzniar to consider the actress in her work on the queer German cinema. Indeed, Kuzniar’s research unearthed a kitsch tribute to Bergner by ‘Ethel’ in the German ‘lesbian’ magazine, *Garçonne*. In contrast to the representations above, Ethel aligns Bergner with natural images, writing:

Like water drops that in the sun
 Mirror bright and clear.
 Like quickened shadows in forest depths,
 Like sparkling, golden wine.
 Like silver lighting the ocean waves,
 as the shy, attentive doe.
 Like a primrose sensitive and fine
 And the mountain spring so pure,
 Just like a smile that shines through tears,
 As if to hide and if to yearn
 Like violin tones so soft and sweet:
 That is the Bergner strain.⁴⁴

Ethel’s clichéd romantic imagery includes recognisable ‘lesbian’ tropes, such as the silver moonlight (bringing to mind the Greek moon goddess Phoebe-Seline) and ‘the smile that shines through tears,’ gesturing to the bittersweet nature of that most ‘impossible’ love. It appears that as elusive as it was, ‘the Bergner strain’ was legible to viewers like Ethel and Bryher. And, as we shall see, for her own tribute to the actress the heiress similarly selected the genre of romance for her queer articulation, although her text also doubled, I shall argue, as a critique of one of its central tropes, that of the happy heterosexual couple.

⁴² Ibid, p.27

⁴³ Michèle C. Cone, ‘Vampires, Viruses, and Lucien Rebatet: Anti-Semitic Art Criticism During Vichy,’ in *The Jew in the Text Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, eds. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p.180

⁴⁴ ‘Ethel,’ *Garçonne* cited in, and translated by, Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, p.53

It is likely that Bryher first saw Bergner in 1927, featured in her second collaboration with Czimmer, *The Violinist of Florence*. Although her extant correspondence bears no trace of this, a private journal notes that a year later it was deemed worthy of a second viewing in Berlin. Indeed, an anonymously authored 'Comment and Review' subsequently appeared in the February 1928 issue of *Close Up*, containing an ecstatic account of the film. Marked by its psychoanalytic terminology – it speaks of father complexes and psychic wounds – and the author's glee at 'the pure Elizabethan cross-dressing comedy,' it is more than likely that Bryher authored it. Faring more successfully than *Ariane*, the reviewer proclaimed (unusually, for a Bergner vehicle,) that *The Violinist of Florence* was 'a classic among films.'⁴⁵

In September 1931, Edith Williams, Bergner's frequent travelling companion and a fellow analysand of Hanns Sachs, wrote to Bryher asking if she would translate *Ariane*, from German into English. Despite her disdain for its hackneyed technique, Bryher accepted and the friendship developed rapidly from there with Bergner and Williams visiting Bryher and Macpherson's recently completed home, Kenwin. Indeed, this is an event that H.D., writing under the pseudonym John Helforth (her own 'Ernest, which is John' persona), draws on briefly in her 1935 novella, *Nights*.⁴⁶ Here, Bergner – 'the diminutive mercurial waif with huge brown eyes and lilting Viennese speech' – is cast as 'Una' and Bryher as 'Renne,' with H.D. arguably summoning the spectre of Bergner's character in *The Violinist of Florence*, René/e.⁴⁷

Following Bergner's stay at Kenwin, the two women began a courtship of sorts, characterised by Bryher's dogged pursuit and Bergner's stalling and evasion, a pattern evinced, as Friedman has argued, in the love poem 'October'.⁴⁸ Addressed to a 'you,' the two-stanza poem is characterised by the theme of 'about-to-be' and potentiality: 'But if you came, you had no right to go.'⁴⁹ Published with the dedication 'for E.B.,' 'October' was issued in 1933 as part of a trio of poetry in the short-lived little magazine, *Seed*, alongside poems for 'M.M.' and 'L.R.' (the American poet Marianne Moore and most probably the German silhouette filmmaker Lotte Reiniger, both of whom were friends of Bryher).⁵⁰ The poem speaks passionately to the 'you' it addresses and bears witness to the

⁴⁵ Anonymous, 'Comment and Review,' in *Close Up* II, 2 (February 1928), p.71

⁴⁶ H.D. to Bryher, 16 December [1934] cited in Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, p.521

⁴⁷ Perdita Schaffner, 'Introduction' in H.D., *Nights* (New York: New Directions, 1986 [1935]), p.xiv

⁴⁸ See Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, p.186, fn.10

⁴⁹ Bryher, 'October,' *Seed* 2 (April-July 1933), p.10

⁵⁰ Bryher, 'Nautillus; Always the Islands; October.' *Seed*, 2 (April-July 1933): pp.8-10. For mention of Reiniger, and her own Berlin stories, see Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, pp.289-310

transformative nature of desire: 'you take my map and change it/ with new name'.⁵¹

Although 'October' attests to the ephemeral and transient nature of love, as autumn turns into winter: 'frost, the hypocrite/ was due last moon,' and is, moreover, haunted by 'dark blizzards,' it retains a hopeful note as it ends with imagery of 'bedded' bulbs, ready to flower in more temperate times.⁵²

Setting the Scene: Manchester, November 1933

In late November 1933 Bryher boarded a train from London Euston bound for the city of Manchester. Accompanying her was an old school friend, the writer and translator, Dorothea Petrie Townshend Carew.⁵³ Their four-day visit to the northern capital was occasioned by the premier of Kennedy's new play, *Escape Me Never*, which featured Bergner in her debut on the English stage as the naïve foreign waif, Gemma Jones. The play was adapted from the British playwright's own novel, *The Fool in the Family* (1930), a sequel to her immensely popular second book, *The Constant Nymph* (1924). Like Kennedy's two earlier works, *Escape Me Never* is a romantic melodrama, which takes as its focus the shenanigans of the Sanger family, a musical household purportedly based on the artist Augustus John's own caravan. Writing to H.D. from Manchester, following the opening night, Bryher described the play as follows:

⁵¹ Bryher, 'October,' p.10. Following its publication, Bryher wrote to H.D.: 'Heard from my aunt (I blush to write it) "I admire your poem October published in *Seed*. It is always such a beautiful month and your poem makes it still more beautiful." Now just how did she get hold of *Seed* and just what does she think that poem is about and exactly what is that little reptile E.[Elisabeth Bergner] up to.' Bryher to H.D. 22 April 1933 in Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, p.186

⁵² Bergner inspired numerous writers and artists – of both sexes – across her lifetime. According to Rodney Livingstone: 'under the impact of her relationship with Elisabeth Bergner, [the German writer] Claire Goll [(1890-1977)] wrote *Der Glaserne Garten* [1919], a celebration of lesbian love remarkable for its period.' Livingstone informs us that 'the story tells a tale of a love triangle between two women and a man' that ends 'with the reconciliation of the two women and with a kiss that smashes the glass that separates them.' Nonetheless, in a dismissive gesture, the critic concludes tritely that: 'it is no more than a passing phase for Claire Goll.' Richard Livingstone, 'Eroticism and Feminism in the Writings of Claire Goll,' in *Yvan Goll – Claire Goll: Text and Context*, eds. Eric Robertson and Robert Vilain (Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997): p.181. The most well known tribute (of sorts), however, is Mary Orr's 1946 story 'The Wisdom of Eve,' which apparently drew upon Bergner's relationship with her secretary. Orr's short story formed the basis of Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950), with Bette Davis' character, Margo Channing, therefore loosely based on Bergner. The film is famed for its 'covert' lesbianism, with Eve, the aspiring actress of the title, repeatedly being aligned with predatory lesbians of Hollywood's code-era, such as Mrs Danvers in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940). See Robert J. Corber's reading of the film, which focuses on Eve's queerness and her unsettling of homophobic cold war stereotypes of the lesbian, and which, therefore, has the trope of technological reproducibility – of imitation and repetition – at its centre. See Robert J. Corber 'Cold War Femme: Lesbian Visibility in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*,' in *GLQ* 11.1 (2005): pp.1-22.

Elizabeth is a girl who lives in innocence on the streets and has a baby. To support the baby of course she lives with Sebastian of the Sanger family and half the beginning of the play deals with the complications because Sebastian's respectable brother [Carol] who wishes a respectable wife is always being mistaken for Sebastian. [...] Then Sebastian tries to go odd with his brother's girl and stages a violent love scene also with Elizabeth who prevents it.

Times elapses – they are in a garret in London, Seb writes a ballet inspired by [his] brother's girl and to keep him and the dear little one, who is not his child, E[izabeth] goes out to domestic service. She is starved. The baby because she cannot look after it properly dies [...] she then has a perfectly terrible scene on the embankment when an old gentleman picks her up and leaves her when she goes mad – Seb tries to go off with the brother's girl and is prevented by brother and then into all this marches E[izabeth] in rags suddenly become sane, and bathe's Sebastian's black eye and the curtain goes down on Seb saying to Elizabeth she is the only girl he ever loved.⁵⁴

Kennedy's play bears the recognisable trappings of popular romance, with its brawling lovers overcoming the threat of another woman, poverty, an illegitimate child – and its death – before they are finally reconciled.

Focusing on another hackneyed aspect of the play, Charles Morgan, writing in the *New York Times*, concluded crushingly of *Escape Me Never*:

The plot is not worth recounting. It is based upon the sentimental-romantic assumption that it is, in some vague way, dull, bourgeois and inartistic to earn one's own living and to recognize one's limitations. [...] In brief, the play as a work of art and a mirror of life has the same value as the velvet-coated bohemian novels by which our fathers delighted to be shocked. It has all the unreality and worse of the saving charm of "Trilby."⁵⁵

Revealing his concern with the mawkish, and dangerously fantastical, vision of life it pedals, Morgan aligned the play with popular literary forms, in his comparison with George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), which was one of the best selling novels of its day. It was not du Maurier, however, but a well-known Victorian poet who provided the title for

⁵³ Bryher met Townshend (1895-1968) at Queenwood School, Eastbourne in 1909/10. Like Bryher, Townshend was also involved in psychoanalytic circles and would go on to translate many of Sachs' articles for *Life and Letters To-Day*, as well as for other English-language journals.

⁵⁴ Bryher to H.D., 22 November 1933, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 101, Beinecke.

⁵⁵ Charles Morgan, 'Within the Sound of Big Ben,' *New York Times*, 7 January 1934, p.3. Accessed via protest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2004), p.X3

Kennedy's play. She borrowed from the first line of Robert Browning's 'Life in a Love' (1855):

Escape me?
Never –
Beloved!
While I am I, and you are you.⁵⁶

Browning's fevered, and ultimately, unsatisfied lover, whose whole life, as the title suggests, is taken over by the pursuit of love, speaks to the entrenched, even, imperative, nature of heterosexual couplings in romantic texts.

Indeed, despite its lack of originality – or, most probably, precisely because of it – the play gripped the audience in Manchester. In the same letter, Bryher observed to H.D., that:

It ended in the white haired respectable old lady next to me, bursting into tears and moaning 'the sweet child, the poor dear waiif' and the entire theatre stormed and yelled and howled for about five minutes. Everybody sobbed, everybody muttered and squealed 'how sweet' just as in Berlin and it was the worst, most sentimental horror, imagination can possibly conceive.⁵⁷

For Bryher, however, as was the case with the majority of critics, the émigré actress was the play's saving grace.

Bergner's performance in Kennedy's play shot her to the English-speaking world's attention and garnered her much critical applause. In the *Sunday Times*, 'G.W.B' raved that 'Elisabeth Bergner is a genius in miniature and the dross is transmuted into the fine spun gold of human emotion.'⁵⁸ While in *The Sunday Dispatch* Lady Oxford and Asquith titled both her review, and Bergner, 'The Girl who Has Captured Britain,' and continued in this laudatory vein by asserting: 'I am convinced she would have held her own with Sarah Bernhardt, [Eleanora] Duse, Ellen Terry, or Mrs Patrick Campbell.'⁵⁹ The trite plot of *Escape Me Never*, then, did not prevent Bergner being labelled a rising star, a thespian original, 'a genius in miniature'. *Escape Me Never* was deemed a success, then, primarily due to Bergner's performance, and after modification of the third act, it transferred to

⁵⁶ Robert Browning, *Men and Women*, ed. Paul Turner (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.110. Bryher tells us that it was a Browning poem too, which (in part) led her to title her first novel, *Development*. See Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, p.33

⁵⁷ Bryher to H.D., 22 November 1933, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Folder 3, Box 101, Beinecke.

⁵⁸ G.W.B, 'Escape Me Never,' *Sunday Times*, 10 December 1933, n.p.

⁵⁹ Lady Oxford, 'The Girl Who Has Captured Britain.' *Sunday Dispatch*, 17 December 1933.

London in December 1933. The play, plus cast, and Bryher, who faithfully attended all three opening nights, traversed the Atlantic in January 1935, where it gained further laurels in New York. Kennedy's play was subsequently adapted for the cinema and appeared under the same title in 1935, directed by Czinner, with Bergner nominated for an Academy Award in the same role. The play, then, *was* adept at rebirth and reproduction, while Bryher's own version foundered.

Moreover, *Escape Me Never* brought the actress to the attention of J.M. Barrie, who was subsequently inspired to pick up his pen and compose what would become his last play, which was written after fourteen years of creative silence. Barrie allowed Bergner to choose her role and she selected the boyhood of David, a resonant theme considering the escalating situation in her homeland. Animated by Bergner and his subject matter Barrie composed *The Boy David*, which opened in Edinburgh in 1936. By 1936, however, Bryher and Bergner's relationship had waned, and the actress' performance as the Old Testament hero was the final one Bryher would attend (though she continued to follow her career from afar).

Sometime between the opening night of *Escape Me Never* and its move to the New York stage, Bryher composed *Manchester*. As the extract from her correspondence to Osbert Sitwell demonstrates, she had difficulty finding a publisher and, consequently, the novella was eventually issued in three parts between December 1935 and June 1936 in her own recently acquired magazine, *Life and Letters To-Day*. It did not, however, feature in the journal's first issue of autumn 1935, a fact which apparently irked Bryher considerably. In early August the same year, Macpherson wrote heatedly to the writer:

But Dog [Bryher], I'm livid, I'm so mad I can only froth at the mouth—those goddam sons of bitches, I mean *Life and Letters*—How literally DARE they, but I mean how does Bud [Robert Herring] have the blasted nerve to turn you down for the first number. Oh, words fail me.⁶⁰

Macpherson's outburst speaks clearly to the importance of the novella for Bryher, and her sense of urgency in getting it into print. Its significance becomes even more apparent when we consider that the 1930s were a period in which Bryher's creative output

⁶⁰Macpherson to Bryher, 5 August 1935, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 36, Folder 1286, Beinecke.

diminished considerably, with her critical writings coming to the fore instead.⁶¹ I now turn to her novella.

Manchester (1935-6)

Discussing Bryher's choice of the 'Ernest persona' in an early fragment of prose, written around the same time as *Two Selves*, Collecott avers that Ernest is a 'Henty-like hero whose name is as unequivocally masculine as 'Nancy' is contemptuously effeminate.'⁶² She then proceeds to note that Bryher would deploy this persona again over a decade later in order 'to narrate her passion for Elizabeth Bergner.'⁶³ Collecott's observations twin *Manchester* with the heroic narratives of the popular Victorian novelist of historical adventure stories, G. A. Henty (of whom Bryher was a fan), thereby suggesting it offers a traditionally male-led tale, packed with action and brave deeds. Indeed, these imperial romances for boys were, as Elaine Showalter notes, 'primer[s] for empire,' which provided a sort of training manual for English manhood, contributing to the moulding of the (middle-class) English schoolboy for their positions at the helm of empire and nation.⁶⁴ As we shall see, however, this was in fact antithetical to the project of *Manchester*. Indeed, like her earlier call to arms in *Close Up*, I argue that Bryher's novella instead urges the English population to heed the dire situation unfolding in mainland Europe, thereby fostering a transnational form of anti-fascist collaboration, a queer articulation.

Collecott's comments also suggest that the novella focuses on Ernest's journey, alone, yet, this is also not the case. In fact the novella resounds with a chorus of voices, as 'Bryher shifts abruptly among multiple viewpoints,' as Ruth Hoberman has noted, thus 'emphasizing the misconceptions or distortions inherent in any single perspective.'⁶⁵ It is, however, the voices of Ernest North and Hope Tiptaft that provide the novella with its structure. Bryher's work is an intertwined narrative which simultaneously charts the 'air-minded' agricultural salesman's misadventures as he travels from London to the industrial capital of the north to watch his actor-amour Cordelia's opening night in a play which is

⁶¹ Alongside *Manchester*, in the 1930s she published four poems and two short memoirs ('Paris, 1900' (1937) and 'Egypt, 1903' (1937-8) both in *Life and Letters To-Day*), considerably less than both the previous decade and the one to come.

⁶² Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance,' p.137

⁶³ Ibid. Collecott is quoting Friedman here.

⁶⁴ See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p.80.

⁶⁵ Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, p.92

never named, alongside the day-to-day life of his elderly secretary, Miss Tiptaft. It comprises eleven numbered sections – roughly equal in length – with eight dedicated to North’s voice, two to Miss Tiptaft’s (the second and seventh), and with the eleventh, and final, section suturing this narrative split and uniting Ernest and Hope. Written in the third person, the novella unfolds via the thoughts, reminiscences, and impressions of its characters as it cuts back and forth between past and present, and memories jostle alongside the two days’ events.

Although the novella’s title draws our attention to a particular location, the narrative actually moves between the urban centres of northern and southern England, between Manchester *and* London, with Hope stranded in the latter. The events unfold sometime in late November 1933, a detail alluded to when Ernest scans the newspaper (one amongst many of the mass cultural forms represented throughout *Manchester*) and his gaze alights on an article which notes that the ‘Geneva conference had been postponed till Thursday’ (*Manchester* III 74).⁶⁶ Nothing substantial happens over the course of the novella, with Cordelia’s performance – the thrust of Ernest’s journey and, thus, the narrative too, and, for which ‘he had waited six months’ (MI 90) – being screened from readers. Instead we are provided with the audience’s ecstatic applause after the curtain has dropped. Moreover, Cordelia is also veiled from readers; although copies of her image haunt the novella, featuring in posters – ‘his eyes fixed upon the photograph of Cordelia’s head.’ (MII 110) – and on various cinema screens, she never actually appears ‘on camera;’ indeed, she features just once, in the novella’s final section, and, then, only as a disembodied voice via the technology of the telephone. In Hope’s sections, we follow her quotidian routine, as she traipses the streets of London, moving between the office, her lodgings, the café where she lunches, and the cinema. She worries about the temporary nature of her employment with Ernest, and repeatedly revisits the unfortunate events that led to her redundancy from the department store, Tubbs and Barrow. The narrative ends full circle, with Ernest preparing to take yet another journey, this time to America on business, and with Hope’s anxieties momentarily quietened, as she house sits for her boss.

The tone of the Ernest strand of *Manchester* is farcical and ridiculous, zooming in on the absurd: ‘That at least was a slogan he could believe in, (at least in England) *always wear woollens next the skin*’ (MI I 89), Ernest considers early on. Later, our attention is drawn to a trivial notice in Ernest’s newspaper: ‘*Jumbo jangles junction*,’ which recounts how ‘a tired elephant had sat down upon the traffic-control at a cross-roads and blocked

the line for half an hour.’ (MIII 74). As the narrative progresses, Ernest is forced to contend with his London colleagues’ belief that he is travelling north for an illicit business meeting: ‘*I heard to-day in the City about Manchester,*’ his friend, Kyrold, warns him before he leaves; with the silliness of his travelling companion, the popular novelist, Theodora Wilton, (drawn from Dorothea Petrie Townshend Carew) as well as with the disruption of ‘the races’ which mean he has ‘to leave on Wednesday because a horse or jockey or some harness needs my room.’ (MI 110-111). Most problematically of all, North remains in perpetual fear that Cordelia will discover his presence in Manchester: ‘If you come up for the first night,’ Cordelia had said, ‘I shall never speak to you again.’ She would keep her promise.’ (MI 90).

Cordelia and Ernest’s affair is a modern love story, a Romeo and Juliet, it seems, for the screen age, with everyman North – who ‘had his breakfast at eight, he went to his office, he wrote letters,’ in sum, ‘He was the exotic flower of everyday life.’ (MI 91) – a source of disapproval for Cordelia’s friends. Indeed, the actress’ ‘life was the obstacle between them. What right had an obscure stranger (so they said, he knew) to a private moment of Cordelia’s voice?’ (MI 91). Nevertheless, their romance ‘was very historical, very poetical, and it was to culminate in Manchester.’ (MI 93). Indeed, Shakespeare’s tragic lovers are a *leitmotif* of the novella. Ernest makes repeated reference to having ‘seen her [Cordelia’s] Juliet’ (MI 92, MIII 83 & MIII 93) as well as mentioning ‘the Verona night’ they shared together (MII 111). Further, recalling the first time he spoke to her on the phone he remembers ‘an unforgettable voice,’ which had not said “‘*It was the nightingale and not the lark,*” but “you are there, yes, what is your name?” (MI 93).⁶⁷ These are Juliet’s words to Romeo upon waking after their first, and only, night together, when they squabble gently over the need for him to leave her before dawn breaks. Yet, as we shall see, Cordelia and Ernest’s tale diverges from that of the unfortunate couple, providing, I argue, a range of different stories and relationships in its place; Bryher offers instead numerous queer articulations.

Although ‘Cordelia was Juliet’ (MIII 83), it is the technology of film that first draws Ernest’s attention to her. Seeking shelter from the snow in a ‘tiny kino,’ North looks up to see ‘the image of his abstraction [...] and as he shifted in his seat, for there were caps in front of him and many heads, Cordelia had smiled. (MI 92). Indeed, despite the fact that the novella revolves around the performance of a theatre piece, the text is saturated with

⁶⁶ Citations from *Manchester* will appear in parentheses in the text, with parts signalled by ‘I,’ ‘II,’ & ‘III.’

⁶⁷ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p.184, 5.5.2

the cinematic. We witness not only Ernest, but Hope and her ex-colleague, Mr. Waite, viewing Cordelia on the silver screen, with, as we shall, contrary responses. Not only does film feature as a popular pastime amongst *Manchester*'s characters, but it also provides Ernest with a vocabulary for, and a means of describing, urban life. One meeting with the actress was 'really a strip of film left from that primitive age when alone they could have met as equals' (MI 91), while, later, describing a restaurant visit, he notes that the 'whole place jerked as if it were a strip of slow-motion film.' (MII 98). Another instance approximates 'a René Clair long shot' (MIII 75), while even Ernest's hotel 'loomed out of fog, a strip of negative rather than the positive print.' (MI 107). And, strikingly, the businessman suggests that should Cordelia's play succeed, it would be like "'a film projected on to a white and silent wall.'" (MI 111). I return to the significance of Bryher's focus on cinema later in the chapter following my readings of her *Close Up* articles, 'Dope or Stimulus' and 'The Hollywood Code,' when I suggest that Bryher uses the novella to encourage readers to consider their own consumption of the form.

Manchester's two strands differ in tone and style, though both are filtered through the thoughts and reflections of its characters, and correspondingly map 'mind time' against 'real' or 'clock time' (the novella is punctuated with notice of the passage of time). Thematically, Hope Tiptaft's story invites comparison with the genre of social realism as it describes and decries her economic and social deprivation. Her thoughts dwell on employment and financial security, housing and sustenance: 'No orders meant insecurity again' (MI 94); she notes 'the high cost of bacon' (MI 100), and only buys a paper 'every second day,' where her eyes fall on 'the photograph of a bread line in the States and an article "four years looking for a job.'" (MI 96). At home her 'window faced the neighbour's washing: a back yard hung interminably with white underclothes.' (MI 98-99) and, where, 'to save light' [Hope and her sister, Ada] went to bed immediately after supper.' (MII 103). Hope wears a 'decrepit hat' (MII 106) and a 'coat [which] seem[s] to have no warmth left in it. It was getting old as she was and as useless.' (MII 104).⁶⁸

Hope's story, however, is *not* a narrative of awakening working-class consciousness. Her political ignorance is not alleviated by *Manchester*'s close. According to Ernest, Hope 'supposed everyone in Russia wore black shirts. It is quite useless trying to make her class

⁶⁸ As is the case with the majority of Bryher's characters, Hope Tiptaft is based on an acquaintance, POOL's secretary, Maud Stevens. In manuscript fragments stored at the Beinecke, Bryher notes: 'Maud Stevens came to us in *Close Up* days I cannot remember the exact date, but I think about 1930. She did secretarial work and accounts. She stayed on with *Life and Letters* until the outbreak of war. [...] She was the original of Hope in *Manchester*. Naturally many of the details were altered.' See Bryher papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 72, Folder 2875, Beinecke.

conscious' (MI 89). Hope then collapses the black shirts of fascist Italy with the Bolshevism of Russia, conflating two radically opposed political regimes. Further, Hope's 'motto' had 'always been [...] put your work and employer first.' (MI 96). She is contrasted with her colleague, the aptly named Laura Marshall, who highlights her lack of class consciousness: 'Trouble with women,' Laura laments, 'is they simply won't stick together. A girl who is going to lick a man's boots has no business to practice it out in an office licking stamps.' (MI 94). Hope's belief in fate and a benign deity further prohibit her ability to act. 'Providence,' she thinks, 'will take care of you but you must trust Providence.' (MI 95), and a few pages later ingeminates: 'you see, Laura, you must *trust* Providence'. (MI 100). Hope's belief in a fate-bound universe renders political action or responsibility impossible.⁶⁹ Bryher's portrait, however, is a mild rebuff rather than a scathing lambasting, for, as I go on to argue, her critique is in fact levelled at the majority of *Manchester's* characters, and at England as a whole.

Although *Manchester* does seemingly deploy the subject matter of social realism it was, unsurprisingly, given her commitment to experimental, non-realist artistic practice, not a genre towards which Bryher was inclined. Five years after *Manchester's* publication, writing to the American novelist, May Sarton, Bryher observed that she did not favour 'English prolet novels and poems,' and explained that she considered them 'a fashion, and not assimilated material, [and] for this I am most unpopular.'⁷⁰ Indeed, she 'dislike[d] Auden,' who was a 'watered down Brecht,' an author she did, however, appreciate.⁷¹ Sometime later, Bryher complained to Sarton: 'I am so tired of the new crowd wanting us to be all Zolas.'⁷² These statements were made in the context of a vicious critical assault on Virginia Woolf in *The Times*, following the posthumous publication of *Between the Acts* (1941). Bryher considered it 'a shocking attack on all the young intellectuals of the last fifteen years,' and responded immediately with a piece in *Life and Letters To-Day*. She wrote: 'I am tired [...] of hearing about Mrs. Woolf's "ivory tower" (I wish somebody would show it to me) and the tirades of the blood and thunder school about her inhumanity and her aloofness from life'.⁷³ Bryher concluded by stating that literature needed to be

⁶⁹ Miss Bennett, of Bryher's *Civilians* (1927), an elderly Teutonic tutor in a girls' school, seems a precursor of Hope when she intones: 'Do your duty my dear and the future will take care of itself.' Bryher, *Civilians* (Territet, POOL, 1927), p.104

⁷⁰ Bryher to May Sarton, 19 April 1941, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 54, Folder 1993, Beinecke.

⁷¹ Bryher to Sarton, 27 September 1941, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 54, Folder 1993, Beinecke.

⁷² Bryher to Sarton, 22 August 1941, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 54, Folder 1993, Beinecke.

⁷³ Bryher, 'A Good Pasture Needs Many Grasses,' *Life and Letter To-Day* 30 (September 1941): p.195

various and variegated. She wrote: it may be a 'foreign and a stark conception to us, but a good pasture needs many different grasses; we choose what we will, remembering that no choice is better nor more human than the other but that each is necessary to the pattern of the whole.'⁷⁴ In private Bryher observed to Sarton that: 'There are, alas, signs of pure fascism in certain circles, and fascism fears both intellectual thinking and art,' as well as hankering after homogeneity.⁷⁵

Despite the apparent façade of farce and fun in Ernest's strand, fear stalks its pages, fracturing its jolly and jokey veneer. Conflict and war are subtly evoked in the 'spear points of Cymbeline's soldiers' (M 91), the mention of the 'chaos across middle Europe' (MI 90), in the comments that, 'There were too many armies' and that 'barbarians marched' (MI 106), as well as in the ominous prophecy that 'there will be wars' (MIII 91). Added to this is the sense of foreboding that clings to the figure of 'frightened Cordelia,' and which disrupts the otherwise leisured lives of the text. Ernest makes repeated mention of this: Cordelia 'had passed into a state of pure fear' and 'Cordelia's terror ... was sweeping into his own mind' (MI 101); her 'desperate voice, [was] more full of tragedy than she had ever acted' (MI 102), and, most sinister of all, 'torture [was] a step behind' (MI 106). Ernest also asks: 'Do you know what the end is for Cordelia if she fails tomorrow? I do. It is death. ... the worst kind of dying' (MII 99).⁷⁶ Moreover, images of stuttering or grounded planes are connected with Cordelia, further underscoring this sense of inescapable dread: 'He could see Cordelia only as a tiny aeroplane in a storm' (MI 102) and 'she might turn into a grounded plane, unready for flight.' (MIII 97).

Indeed, such imagery also hints at the reason behind the actress' debut in Manchester. More obviously, however, Cordelia is twinned with Shakespeare's plucky heroine from *As You Like It* (1599-1600). Ernest refers to the fact that Cordelia's 'background was lost, she herself forced to make Rosalind's journey,' (MI 106), while, on another occasion: 'She had looked at him, (stop being Rosalind facing banishment, he had wanted to shout) till, not knowing what to do, he had taken her hand again' (MIII 86). Alongside Cordelia's 'foreignness,' which is suggested by reference to her accent and her pronunciation of

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.197

⁷⁵ Bryher to Sarton, 13 April 1941, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 54, Folder 1993, Beinecke.

⁷⁶ This pervasive association between death and the Bergner character, Cordelia, (and, moreover, her silence for most of the text) recalls Freud's discussion in 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913) of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and his suggestion that as the third daughter, Cordelia 'is the Goddess of Death, Death itself.' Sigmund Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Techniques and Other Works*, p.297. At PEP Web: <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=se.012.0289a>. Accessed on 23 February 2007.

North's name – 'He liked the emphasis she gave to unexpected words' (MI 91), "'Er-nest, are you a taxi driver, to be so crude!'" (MIII 97) – this allusion to Rosalind/Ganymede's flight from the persecution of her uncle into the safe arms of the forest of Arden spoke to the many German and Austrian citizens already experiencing atrocities at the hands of the Nazis.⁷⁷ And, for those who followed the theatre or film press, a connection might very well have been made between Cordelia and the conditions that had led Bergner, who had by now achieved celebrity status in the UK, to take up residence in London in 1933 (and to become a British citizen five years later). It is to these facts I now turn.

'Well, it is most gloomy,' Bryher wrote to Macpherson in early summer 1932:

They had just passed the bill that in future no Jewish actor or actress may be employed in any State theatre, some say in any theatre, so the Bergner is knocked out from re-appearing in Germany. Everyone was leaving. Incidentally you needn't worry about anything happening in Germany, it has happened. Berlin is an armed camp patrolled by Nazis, and anyone recognised for a Jew except in main streets, is quite likely to get killed.⁷⁸

Similarly, in the article recounting her final visit to the German capital, 'Notes on Some Films: Berlin, June, 1932,' Bryher commented:

Berlin is too unsettled, too fearful of the coming winter to care much for cinema. [...] Only the hundred percent German will be allowed to work in German films in future. With this about, and election talk, and groups of Nazis on foot or on motor cycles, patrolling the streets in full uniform, is it to be wondered at that for the first time in many visits, the cinema lists are left unopened.⁷⁹

The Nazi's 'cleansing' of the German national body did not, then, just focus on the exclusion, and eventual planned elimination, of Jewish people and other 'undesirables' but, at least in its early phases, also focused on the realm of culture. Under Goebbels, the German fascist regime decimated the vibrant artistic cultures of Berlin, dispersing the producers of 'degenerate' art, which depicted bodies that – in Nazi eyes – should no longer be reproduced, either artistically or biologically. Indeed, in July 1937 the Nazi's

⁷⁷ It is significant that following their arrival in England, Czinner and Bergner's first project was a speaking version of *As You Like It* (1936) (which was the first talking version of any Shakespeare play). In remarking upon Czinner and Bergner's choice, Juliet Dusinberre reminds us that, 'What looks to a modern, Western democratic audience like a harmless frolic in the Forest has never been, for less liberated societies, just a play about a place where, like Celia, we willingly waste our time.' Juliet Dusinberre, 'Introduction,' in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), p.71

⁷⁸ Bryher to Macpherson, June 1932, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series I, Box 36, Folder 1282, Beinecke.

⁷⁹ Bryher, 'Notes on Some Films: Berlin, June 1932,' in *Close Up* IX, 3 (September 1932), p.196

showcased the *Entartete Kunst* – or Degenerate Art – exhibition in Munich, which intended to clarify to the German population what constituted *unGerman* art (or that which was not 100% German). It was an immensely popular exhibition, which, according to Stephanie Barron, attracted five times more people than visited the Great German art exhibition. Writing in 1991, she observed that the ‘popularity of *Entartete Kunst* has never been matched by any other exhibition of modern art.’⁸⁰

During the span of *Manchester*’s composition (roughly between November 1933 and November 1934) the social and political unrest in Europe had steadily grown worse. In January 1933 Hitler had become Chancellor of Germany and the Reichstag building was burned less than a month later. On the 19 May Nazis made pyres of ‘undesirable’ books on the Opernplatz in Berlin, including most of the library of Magnus Hirshfeld’s *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Research) as well as works by Freud and Thomas Mann, amongst others. The year 1933 also saw riots in Poland and an anarchist uprising in Barcelona. In November, with British unemployment at its highest, Oswald Mosley announced the formation of the British Union of Fascists. In the following January the Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe was executed, having been found guilty of setting the Reichstag building alight. In Vienna, where H.D. was in analysis with Freud, there was a Socialist uprising and its subsequent suppression. The summer was bloody. Over a couple of days in late June the Nazis ‘purged’ their own in a period that became known as the ‘Night of the Long Knives’. The following month Engelbert Dollfuss, Chancellor, and later Dictator, of Austria, was assassinated. Three months later King Alexander of Yugoslavia was murdered. In England, Mosley’s Fascist rally was held at Olympia, which similarly exploded into violence.

In Germany the gradual erosion of Jewish people’s rights began soon after Hitler’s election. Following the anti-Jewish boycott of 1 April 1933, which saw Jewish owned shops and businesses boycotted, leading to 53, 000 Jews – 10 percent of the German Jewish population – fleeing the country, Jews were then barred from positions in Government, as well as other public posts, in the spring and summer of that year.⁸¹ According to the same timeline, on 5 March 1934 Jewish actors were no longer permitted to perform on the stage or screen in Germany. As we have seen, Bryher’s *Close Up* article suggests an earlier date, but, whichever is correct, this restriction resulted in the Bergner/

⁸⁰ Stephanie Barron, ‘1937: Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany,’ in “*Degenerate Art*”: *The fate of the avant-garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York: Abrahams (for the) Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), p.9

⁸¹ See Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York : Franklin Watts, 2001), p.131

Douglas Fairbanks Jr vehicle, *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (1934) being shut down in March 1934, as a series of *New York Times* articles testifies.

These pieces illustrate that Bergner herself endured some unsavoury and deeply disturbing critical attention from Germany. Friedman suggests that this was a result of the actress' outspoken criticism of the German Government.⁸² On March 8 1934, the *New York Times* reported on the Berlin premier of *Catherine the Great*. The article notes that:

Trouble had been expected in the wake of the recent anti-Jewish stage edict of Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, Propaganda Minister, and the newspaper *Der Angriff's* [Attack] subsequent attack on Elisabeth Bergner. [...] Before the performance began a hostile crowd uttering invectives against Jewish plays and players forced an entrance into the theatre lobby. Storm troopers intervened and the performance itself passed without incident.⁸³

A day later, on 9 March, a follow up article in the *New York Times* informed readers that *Catherine the Great* had been banned, and that 'Films starring so-called émigrés will be barred from Germany hereafter'.⁸⁴ Moreover, a month later, on April 12, the *New York Times* again had its eye on Bergner, reporting that the actress had fainted during a performance of *Escape Me Never*. Describing Bergner as 'Frail and slight of figure [having] lost several pounds during the last weeks,' it went on to speculate that, 'Her condition was aggravated by the Nazi banning of her film 'Catherine the Great,' [and] also by the fact that she was banned in Germany under the non-Aryan clause.'⁸⁵ I suggest that we read *Manchester* as a response to this 'purification' of both the cultural arena and the German national body, through which Bryher sought to urge the English population to unite in transnational resistance to German fascism.

In place of its purgation of the artistic sphere – of abstract, non-mimetic art and expressionism – the Nazis installed a romanticised realism that has now become synonymous with what we understand as kitsch, though, as we shall see, the concept has various manifestations and is not easy to pin down. According to film scholar, Lotte H. Eisner, kitsch was a logical avenue of expression for National Socialism, which she suggests was somehow inherently related to the category. She observes: 'In a world as rich

⁸² See Friedman, *Analyzing Freud*, p.548

⁸³ 'Nazis Tame A Mob at Showing of Film: Storm Troops Bar Demonstration as 'Catherine the Great' With Elisabeth Bergner, Is Given,' *The New York Times*, 9 March 1934. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2004), p.4

⁸⁴ 'Reich Bans Film 'Catherine the Great' Starring Jewish Actress Elisabeth Bergner,' *New York Times*, 10 March 1934. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2004), p.6

⁸⁵ 'Bergner Play Closes,' *New York Times*, 13 April 1934. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers

in false values as the Nazi world, with all the false sentimentality of ‘*Blut und Boden*’ (blood and earth) or ‘*Kraft durch Freude*’ (strength through joy), kitsch becomes a matter of course.’⁸⁶ The American Trotsky-ite art critic Clement Greenberg, however, whose ‘*Avant-Garde and Kitsch*’ (1939) was the first attempt to trace the social conditions out of which both categories emerged, noted that: ‘The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects.’⁸⁷ It was also, however, a powerful ideological tool for sculpting the image of a homogenous national body, at the centre of which was the heteroreproductive (Aryan) couple.

What concerned both critics, then, was that kitsch, as indeed we shall see was the case with mass cultural forms in general, possessed the capacity to dull and dupe its consumers, rendering them susceptible to authoritarian political regimes. Yet, paradoxically, as I suggested earlier, German fascist propaganda drew upon a similar critical lexicon in its denigration of Jews and queers as ‘inauthentic’ and therefore needing to be uprooted from the German national body. Here, I briefly explore the various refractions of the binaries, kitsch-mass culture/avant-garde, inauthentic/authentic and copy/original.

In his important essay, ‘*Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other*’ (1989), Huyssen analyses how the dichotomy art/mass culture has been gendered from the nineteenth century onwards. Taking Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) – ‘One of the founding texts of modernism, if ever there was one’ – as his departure point, Huyssens observes: ‘woman (*Madame Bovary*) is positioned as reader of inferior literature – subjective, emotional and passive – while man (Flaubert) emerges as writer of genuine, authentic literature – objective, ironic, and in control of his aesthetic means.’⁸⁸ Huyssen extrapolates from Flaubert’s infamous novel to observe of the nineteenth century in general, ‘that mass culture is somehow associated with woman while real, *authentic* culture remains the prerogative of men.’⁸⁹

The New York Times (1851-2004) p.25

⁸⁶ Lotte H. Eisner, ‘Kitsch in the Cinema,’ in *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste*, ed. Gilles Dorflès. Translated from Italian. (London: Studio Vista, 1973), p.200

⁸⁷ Clement Greenberg, ‘*Avant-Garde and Kitsch*,’ in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1989), p.19

⁸⁸ Andreas Huyssen, ‘*Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other*,’ in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp.189-90

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.191

With reference to Art history and English literature studies, Pollock outlines how this hierarchized formation of culture fed into academic disciplines and canons, which ‘worked within a form of [Kenneth] Clark’s *Civilization*, identif[ying] Culture, capital C, with the great and the beautiful, the best achievements of Western humanity (male, white, middle class, straight, and so forth).’⁹⁰ Moreover, according to Carlston, in the early twentieth century, for many critics Jewishness would have shadowed the antithesis of their notion of Culture, being instead consistently connected with mass cultural forms. The literary scholar writes:

Conservative and fascist ideologies adapted the notion that Jews were alien to the national community to a cultural critique that attributed the inauthenticity of contemporary mass culture to Jewish influence. Jews, not having a fixed location, could not share in cultures rooted in the community of blood or soil and were therefore reduced to the imitation of other cultures, to artifice.⁹¹

She continues:

Fascism thus translated a commonly felt dissatisfaction with the superficiality and commercialism of capitalist culture into sexual metaphor. The idea of inauthentic, artificial, or commodified culture is frequently represented metaphorically in images of unnatural or commodified sexuality, particularly masturbation, homosexuality, and prostitution.⁹²

Mass culture, then, was not just gendered, as Huyssen outlined, but raced and, moreover, associated with the ‘perversions’ of homosexuality and prostitution too. Moreover, as I suggested earlier, Jews and homosexuals were further conflated in Nazi representations through their shared sterility, in contrast to the pastoral romance of reproduction that anchored the National Socialist dream. Indeed, Carlston contends that ‘representations of the newly created class of ‘homosexuals’ were, [in fact...] modelled on familiar figures of the Jew and Jewishness, as well as on prototypes of disease.’⁹³ According to Carlston, then, the ‘peculiar logic of this ‘chain of equivalences’ culminated in the notion that Jews

⁹⁰ Griselda Pollock and Fred Orten, ‘Memories Still to Come... An Introduction,’ in *Avant-gardes and Partisans Reviewed*, eds. Griselda Pollock and Fred Orten (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Manchester; New York: Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin's Press, 1996), p.xiv

⁹¹ Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, p.23

⁹² Ibid, p.38

⁹³ Ibid, p.18

actually invented homosexuality.’⁹⁴ Rather than homosexuality being a derivative or imitation of heterosexuality – the binary which Judith Butler deconstructs in her famous essay of 1990, ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination,’ thereby illustrating the lack of *any* original at all – following Carlston, in the prevailing anti-Semitic and homophobic climes of early twentieth century Europe, homosexuality was, in fact, a copy of another inauthentic and derivative subject, the Jew.⁹⁵

In the following section I return to Bryher, who, as the feminist, lesbian and queer scholarship of the last twenty years has demonstrated, was, like her female contemporaries of Left Bank Paris and Bloomsbury, already hard at work unsettling the gendered associations of the dichotomy, mass culture/ avant-garde art. Here, I consider two contributions to *Close Up*, which reveal the writer as an important critic of ‘the work of art in the age of its reproducibility’. Indeed, these articles form the critical backdrop of *Manchester*, thus helping to illuminate Bryher’s project in the novella.

Dope or Stimulus (1928)

In ‘Modernism and the People: the View from the Cinema Stalls,’ the cultural historian Jeffrey Richards selects an extract from Bryher’s *Close Up* article, ‘Dope or Stimulus’ (1928), to illustrate his assertion that British intellectuals – represented, in this instance, by F.R. Leavis, Aldous Huxley and T.S. Eliot – were cultural elitists, who, not only despised commercial cinema (in particular Hollywood), but were bent on policing its consumption too.⁹⁶ Richards observes that: ‘The poet ‘Bryher’ spoke for all such commentators when writing of film audiences in the intellectual film journal *Close-up*.’ He quotes the following:

They hypnotize themselves into an expectation that a given star or theatre or idea will produce a given result. They surrender to this all logical features in abeyance, and achieve complete gratification whatever the material set in front of them provided it is presented in an expected and familiar manner. . . . To

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.28

⁹⁵ See Judith Butler, ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination,’ in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993): pp.13-31.

⁹⁶ Although he does not employ the term ‘cultural elitist,’ it is certainly inferred when Richards observes that ‘Intellectuals left and right despised Hollywood, denouncing its films for lack of intellectual content, triviality and sentimentality, the glamorisation of false values, luxury and criminality.’ Jeffrey Richards, ‘Modernism and the People: the View from the Cinema Stalls’ in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, eds. Steven Matthews and Keith Williams (London: Longman, 1997), p.199

watch hypnotically something which has become a habit and which is not recorded as it happens by the brain, differs little from the drugtaker's point of view and it is destructive because it is used as a cover to prevent real consideration of problems, artistic or sociological, and the creation of intelligent English films.⁹⁷

After which Richards continues: 'For the likes of 'Bryher' there was an alternative film culture, a network of specialist film societies, intellectual film magazines, and reverence for continental and silent films. But this alternative film culture remained an intellectual minority, never commanding the universal support of mainstream commercial cinema.'⁹⁸

It seems evident, at least from the extract above, that Bryher's views were analogous to both the British intellectuals mentioned above as well as to the various members of the Frankfurt School, in particular the later work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Richards presents Bryher as viewing mass or popular culture as something that pacified audiences through its homogenous and predictable forms and themes. As Adorno and Horkheimer would later observe: 'culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part.'⁹⁹

Close Up's various expositions about film as a novel art form – exemplified by Macpherson's speculation in his first editorial that 'fifty more [years] will probably turn [film] into THE art'¹⁰⁰ – twinned with its on-going critique of Hollywood productions does indeed suggest an elitism comparable with the prevailing attitude of many literary modernists and critics of the time, who, according to Jonathan Rose, were at work policing intellectual boundaries in light of the increasingly educated masses.¹⁰¹ Bryher's position, however, needs to be read with more nuance, for, as James Donald suggests: 'Far from being aloof, contributors like Bryher, Dorothy Richardson and Ralph Bond energetically promoted amateur forms of production and exhibition'.¹⁰²

Articles like, 'How I Would Start a Film Club' (1928) and 'What You Can Do' (1928), illustrate Bryher's keenness to encourage English cinema spectators not just to engage with other European cinemas but to actively create an alternative English film

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997 [1944]), p.120.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is' in *Close Up* I, 1 (July 1927), p.5

¹⁰¹ See Jonathon Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn. & London: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁰² James Donald, 'Introduction' in *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, eds. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), p.vii

culture, with canny spectator-critics. Her position, then, is quite removed from that of the literary critics Frank and Queenie Leavis, who considered that, 'In any period it is often on a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends'.¹⁰³ Indeed, in their discussion of *Close Up*, Paola Zaccaria and Francesca De Ruggieri suggest that it was Bryher who 'played the role of mediator between mainstream culture and the avant-garde, thus turning the magazine into a cultural space for the discussion of cinematographic, literary and political issues.'¹⁰⁴ As we shall see shortly, this was the case with *Manchester* too, which, I suggest, worked as a kind of go-between bridging (as well as troubling) the apparent boundary between 'art' and popular culture.

Moreover, if we return to Bryher's article, 'Dope or Stimulus,' resituating Richards' extract and returning the excised section, it becomes evident that Bryher's critique was made in response to a specific event. These lines follow the first half of Richards' quote, where the ellipses set in:

To particularize, a thoughtful book happens to be written about a social problem widely discussed across the Continent. It is attacked by a cheap Press in a vulgar and stupid manner. Nobody protests. Yet the people who buy these papers go to theatres where the same subject and questions of sex in general are dealt with in songs and dialogues in the most suggestive and nauseating manner.¹⁰⁵

'Dope or Stimulus' was issued in the September 1928 issue of *Close Up*, two months after the publication of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in July of the same year, and just a month after James Douglas' caustic outburst in the *Daily Express*, which, as we saw in my last chapter, ultimately led to the novel's banning in November 1928. It is more than likely, I suggest, that Bryher was alluding to Douglas' vitriolic attack on Hall's novel and the corresponding furore that mushroomed from it. Rather than simply exhibiting a snobbish disdain for popular cinema, as Richards' would have it, Bryher, admittedly in hyperbolic fashion, is calling for audiences to take responsibility for what they consume. Like Robert Herring's stance in 'Puritannia Rules the Waves,' she also highlights the hypocrisy of British censorship practice, which allowed topics such as 'lesbianism' or

¹⁰³ F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930), p.13

¹⁰⁴ Paola Zaccaria and Francesca De Ruggieri, 'Close Up as Co(n)text,' in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, March 25-27, 2002*, ed. Marina Camboni (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), p.250

¹⁰⁵ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus,' in *Close Up* III, 3 (September 1928), p.59

'inversion' to be treated in 'a vulgar and stupid manner' in the press and theatre but banned Hall's 'thoughtful book'.

Bryher's article ends by calling for English film audiences to behave more like German ones. She recalls being part of an audience in Berlin, where she watched both 'a famous Hollywood picture' and 'a new German super film with a very popular star'.

Bryher writes:

The audience waited quietly in each case till the film finished. Then burst an inspiring riot of shrill derisive whistles. They knew that both the films were bad and were alive enough, critical enough to retaliate with their opinions.¹⁰⁶

Bryher is urging English audiences to realise that spectatorship has the potential to be an active, rather than passive, pastime, that the cinematic experience is 'not to forget but to live.'¹⁰⁷

To my mind, then, Bryher's views bear more relation to what Zoë Thompson calls Benjamin's 'cautious optimism' for film, and other technologies of mechanical reproduction, rather than to Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the culture industry's inescapably oppressive, controlling and infantilising nature.¹⁰⁸ As I discussed in my Introduction, Bryher and Benjamin knew each other, having been introduced by Adrienne Monnier sometime in the late 1930s, though, as Marina Camboni shows, they had corresponded at least once by late 1937.¹⁰⁹ In *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher mentions her final meeting with the scholar in December 1939: 'I spent the night with Sylvia [Beach]

¹⁰⁶ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus,' p.61. Camboni tells us that, 'As a foreigner, Bryher notes the differences between the English, Swiss, French and German audiences. In Berlin the cinema is frequented by a petty-middle bourgeois and proletarian audience and Bryher underlines how the cinema is a people's matter, from which the bourgeois elites keep themselves at a distance. In 1931, having become by this point an inveterate consumer of film and a frequenter of small and large movie theaters, she identifies the youth and the housewives, who with their shopping baskets seek in the dark of the movie theater a bit of amusement in the round of the day, the predominant audience, especially in the afternoon, when the ticket costs less.' Marina Camboni, "'Why, Berlin, must I love you so?": Bryher in Berlin, 1927-1932,' trans. Maria Stadter Fox, in *H.D.'s Web: An E-Newsletter* Winter 3 (2008): p. 15. At <http://www.imagists.org/hd/hdsweb/december2008.pdf>. Accessed on 01/09/09.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Bryher would have been cheered to hear, I think, that, as Tatiana Heise and Andrew Tudor note, René Clair's *Entr'Acte* (1924) was hugely controversial when first screened at The Film Society in 1926. Film critic, Ivor Montagu, observed of the event: 'Some started to boo, others scream and cheer, people got up and shouted, others shook their fists and even their neighbours – I have never seen an English audience so passionate.' (Montagu, 1970: 334-5). Ivor Montagu cited in Tatiana Heise and Andrew Tudor, 'Constructing (Film) Art: Bourdieu's Field Model in a Comparative Context,' *Cultural Sociology* 1, 2 (2007): pp.171-3

¹⁰⁸ Zoë Thompson, 'Ruin and Simulation: Urban Aesthetics in Benjamin & Baudrillard,' (Unpublished MA thesis. Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 2005), p.5

¹⁰⁹ See Marina Camboni, 'Bryher and Walter Benjamin: Between Barbarism and Modernism' in *H.D.'s Web: An E-Newsletter* Summer 4 (2009), pp2-12. At <http://www.imagists.org/hd/hdsweb/summer2009.pdf>. Accessed on 01/01/2010.

and Adrienne and at their apartment saw Walter Benjamin for the last time.’¹¹⁰ A decade later, in *The Days of Mars* (1972), in the ‘1940’ section, Bryher recalls learning about his death:

My own past caught me up. I walked across the edge of a forlorn Hyde Park full of guns and searchlights, to seek consolation in a bookshop. There, turning over the pages of a just-published volume, [Arthur] Koestler’s *Scum of the Earth*, I saw the name of Walter Benjamin and read of his death on the Spanish frontier. I had believed him to be safe.

The Previous April, Sylvia and Adrienne had taken me to meet him at a café near the rue de l’Odéon. He had seemed so much a part of Paris, of that blue, smoky atmosphere where everyone was sipping bitter coffee and arguing about metaphysics. The scholar is truly afraid that action, even if it is harmless, may disturb his contemplation and Adrienne had begun a dialogue with him that had carried them on a chase of some philosophical comet where neither Sylvia nor I could follow them.¹¹¹

Characteristically, Bryher plays down both her own interest and engagement with Benjamin’s writing, as well as her own academic capabilities. In a letter to Horkheimer, dated December 1939, however, Benjamin offers a different side to the story, observing that ‘‘Mrs. Bryher’ [...] has been following my works closely for a long time, and she too has become extremely concerned about my internment’.¹¹² As we have seen, Bryher’s concern led her to provide financial support to Benjamin through Monnier, thus helping to secure his release and, she had hoped, aid his safe passage to New York too.

Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility’ (1936), post-dates Bryher’s ‘Dope or Stimulus,’ and, indeed, *Manchester*, but nonetheless the comparison is, I think, instructive.¹¹³ With his development of a new critical vocabulary in relation to mass technologies, in his important essay Benjamin tentatively set out his hopes for the post-auratic arts. He discerned in mass cultural forms a potential for educating the masses, for providing the means by which the proletariat might become conscious of itself, and its situation, as well as gesturing to the possibility of democratising art. In relation to the latter, this might be achieved, for, as Benjamin observed:

¹¹⁰ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.342

¹¹¹ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, pp.22-24

¹¹² Walter Benjamin to Max Horkheimer, December 1939 cited in Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz and trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp.341-2, fn.8. Thanks to Zoë Thompson for this reference.

¹¹³ As the editors in the Harvard collection of Benjamin’s writings note, there were three versions of this essay. A shortened form of the second version, which was apparently the form in which Benjamin wished to see the work published, was, in fact, the first to be issued, when it appeared in translation in French in May 1936. Here, I use this second version of the essay. For further details see Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility,’ p.122

technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a gramophone record. The cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of the art lover; the choral work performed in the auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room.¹¹⁴

Thus, art becomes more accessible, thereby admitting the working classes into the sphere of Culture.

Moreover, Benjamin asserted:

film furthers insight into the necessities governing our lives by its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action [*Spielraum*].

Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris.¹¹⁵

Film thus renders the urban dweller's surroundings as suddenly unfamiliar, and reveals facets that had previously been hidden from her. The optical unconscious of the camera thereby provides spectators with novel insights into their own lives and allows them to see their circumstances afresh, from a new angle. Through its detonation of the landscape of the everyday, film, in Benjamin's view, possessed revolutionary capabilities.

As we saw in my last chapter, in her review of G.W. Pabst's first talkie, 'Westfront 1918' (1930) Bryher also suggested that sound film had the potential to further viewer's insights. She wrote:

What opportunities of deepening consciousness there are in this new use of sound, this mingling of speech that may be listened to without obligation to understand or to reply, that may be experimented with or played with, according to desire.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility,' p.103

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.117

¹¹⁶ Bryher, 'Westfront 1918,' in *Close Up*, VII, 2 (August 1930): pp.104-111

While, here, Bryher was clearly not writing from a Marxist perspective, and did not have the working classes in mind, Pabst's film is still represented as possessing the capacity to deepen thought, and, potentially then, prompt change (at the level of the individual). Film could, then, in Bryher's eyes, set the spectator off on a journey of adventure. Thirty years later, however, in *The Heart to Artemis*, the writer would state, in an echo of Benjamin, that 'the documentary was perhaps the true expression of the time. Such films caught the everyday and revealed it as *unfamiliar*.'¹¹⁷ For both writers, then, the cinematic apparatus revealed the quotidian as being different from what was assumed; by rendering the everyday uncanny, the mass technology of film provided an alternative view of life.

Further, in opposition to contemplation, the traditional mode associated with the consumption of art, in his 1936 essay, Benjamin introduced the concept of distraction, which, as Jean Gallagher notes was 'a peculiarly modern mass psychological state that developed in response to the fractures, shocks, and discontinuities of urban culture.'¹¹⁸ Benjamin drew a comparison between film and the art of the Dadaists, which, he observed, 'turned the artwork into missile. It jolted the viewer, taking on a tactile [*taktisch*] quality.'¹¹⁹ This, he asserted, 'fostered the demand for film, since the distracting element in film is also primarily tactile, being based on successive changes of scene and focus which have a percussive effect on the spectator.'¹²⁰ Film, therefore, according to Benjamin, '*has freed the physical shock effect – which Dadaism had kept wrapped, as it were, inside the moral shock effect – from this wrapping*.'¹²¹

In contrast to Camboni's contention that for Bryher cinema was only a means to 'build the spectator's very individuality,' I argue instead that, like Benjamin, she conceived of cinema as possessing the capacity to jolt, or blast, viewers out of their torpor. It held the potential to bring them to consciousness, not just of their own compromised situation, but to the difficulties suffered by others too. Yet, whereas for the German critic this was inherent in the cinematic medium itself, for Bryher, spectators needed to be urged, and, indeed, taught how to take up a critical stance, especially since the English film market

¹¹⁷ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.292. My italics. According to Bryher, both the documentary film and psychoanalysis had the ability to attune participants to the 'otherness' of the quotidian. She noted of her own analysis: 'My own perceptions were enlarged, it taught me the mystery behind everyday events.' Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p.299

¹¹⁸ Jean Gallagher, 'H.D.'s Distractions: Cinematic Stasis and Lesbian Desire,' *Modernism/Modernity* 9,3 (2002), p.408

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility,' p.119

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. Italics in original.

was awash with American productions.¹²² As both ‘Dope or Stimulus,’ and, as we shall now see, ‘The Hollywood Code,’ discussed, cinema might also have the opposite effect, actually preventing viewers from recognising the goings on of the world. In churning out films with the same ending – of a happy heterosexual coupling – difference was erased, queer articulations rendered impossible, and the scope for political action radically reduced.

The Hollywood Code (1931)

‘Dope or Stimulus’ introduces themes which Bryher would revisit in a later article, ‘The Hollywood Code’. Once again, the piece is at least in part a response to cultural censorship. In this instance, however, it was written with American censors in mind. Her title refers to the Production Code or Hays Code, which was adopted by the American moving picture industry in 1930.¹²³ Bryher’s main thesis is that the saturation of the English market with American productions – specifically talkies – is creating unquestioning spectators who mindlessly consume ‘the tinned ideas of Hollywood’.¹²⁴ The Hollywood Code is at fault since it only permits the production of particular stories and particular subject matter. Bryher argues that, because of this, Hollywood ‘can produce kitsch magnificently but cannot produce art.’¹²⁵ She bemoans both the American film industry’s failure to press for the new and – as she did in ‘Dope or Stimulus’ – the English viewing public’s indifference to difference, its acceptance of this bland uniformity in the cinematic fodder it consumes.

Laura Mulvey has discussed how the Hays Code forced sexuality, particularly women’s, to be signified otherwise. She writes: ‘the impact of the Code was to produce a cinema in which sexuality became the ‘unspoken’ [and where] [i]t became difficult, if not

¹²² Marina Camboni, ‘Bryher and Walter Benjamin,’ p.12.

¹²³ The Production Code was formally taken up in 1934.

¹²⁴ Bryher, ‘The Hollywood Code,’ in *Close Up* VIII, 3 (September 1931): p.238. As if to underscore her point that the English market is being flooded by American productions, Bryher’s article is capped by a film still of what seems to be a struggling young man submerged in water. The medium range underwater still captures his head and shoulders only, with the rest of his body either cut out of the shot completely or blending smoothly into the surrounding aquascape. With his eyes screwed shut, air bubbles billowing from his mouth, and in the absence of limbs to buoy him up, the title underneath, which reads ‘Swimming, by Jean Taris,’ seems inaccurate; ‘Drowning’ would perhaps be better.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.236

impossible, to represent autonomous female desire on the screen'.¹²⁶ Code era productions were marked by a morality that required, what Mulvey terms, a Manichaeian division between good and evil. Unsurprisingly, then, as well as prohibiting autonomous female desire the Hays Code also, as Judith Halberstam has noted, 'banned the representation of 'sex perversion' and insisted that 'no picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin'.¹²⁷ Though she does not argue this explicitly, Bryher's article, I suggest, is concerned with the Code's proscription of certain lives and subjectivities.

Bryher opens her article provocatively: 'During the past year an insidious danger has invaded the cinema, expressed most fitly by the excellent word Germany has found for it, *kitsch*.' She clarifies that 'Kitsch does not mean any bad film, but one that, having apparently artistic pretensions, is as shallow as any commercial film, once the surface technique is stripped away.'¹²⁸ In Bryher's definition, kitsch is synonymous with ersatz; it provides a convincing imitation of experimental film before it is unmasked. It is a guileful masquerader, successfully hoodwinking critics and spectators alike: 'through an extraordinary combination of events, kitsch and not art, is becoming the pre-occupation of the critics, and its conception of cinema is forcing experiment from the cinema.'¹²⁹ Kitsch, she avers, impedes and fetters the progress of cinematic art: 'Hollywood,' Bryher reiterates, 'has no room for the experimental mind'.

In his introduction to *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste* (1973), Gillo Dorfles asserts that Hermann Broch's 1933 essay 'heralded the beginning of literature on the subject'.¹³⁰ In fact, it is in the pages of *Close Up*, with Bryher's 'The Hollywood Code' and Hanns Sachs' 'Kitsch' (1932) that the concept in fact made its critical debut and was first considered a subject worthy of debate. Both Bryher's and Sachs' articles, then, predate those of the popularisers of the term, with Austrian writer, Broch's 'Notes on the Problem of Kitsch' appearing a couple of years later and, as we have seen, Greenberg's 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' coming six years later in 1939.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Commodities* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press; London: BFI Pub., 1996), p.45

¹²⁷ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p.177

¹²⁸ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code', p.234

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste*, trans. from the Italian (London: Studio Vista, 1973), p.7

¹³¹ See Hermann Broch, 'Notes on the Problem of Kitsch,' in *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles, translated from the Italian (London: Studio Vista, 1973): pp.49-76. 'Kitsch is certainly not 'bad art','

The 'danger' of kitsch, however, stems not just from its inhibition of vanguard art, but also. Bryher infers, from its ability to condition its consumers. She notes that 'gradually [the English cinema student's] critical perceptions become blunted through a continuous diet of Hollywood patent foods.'¹³² She observes that Hollywood 'has brains' and has learnt to manipulate the 'fundamental conceptions of human desire and response,' effectively reducing the viewer to '[a]n animal [that] is hungry, sees food and eats it.'¹³³

This correlation between consumption and control evokes the work of Russian physiologist, Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, who is now mostly remembered for his experiments on salivating dogs. Pavlov's research led to the description of the 'conditioned reflex,' also known as classical conditioning. The Nobel laureate's work influenced a number of early twentieth century thinkers, including Aldous Huxley and Bertrand Russell.¹³⁴ Bryher made this connection explicitly in 'Dope or Stimulus,' when she observed:

What has actually happened [to English audiences] is that like the monkey in Prof. Pavlov's experiment who reached always for food at the sight of a blue plate, they are not reacting directly to amusement or to art, but are reacting instead to a sequence of *familiar ideas*, that are not unfortunately true to the ideas or progress of to-day.¹³⁵

It is the addiction to 'familiar ideas,' she infers, that inhibits artistic experimentation and the 'progress of to-day'. This 'sequence of familiar ideas' becomes a predominant concern three years later in 'The Hollywood Code.' At the heart of the Hollywood narrative, Bryher observed, sat the nuclear family, to the detriment of any other story. She observed the Code's insistence that the presence of:

an idiot child is better than no child, co-operative feeling between the sexes is forbidden least it should lessen the power of illicit eroticism. The avalanche, the famine, must be subordinated to sex appeal.¹³⁶

Broch wrote, 'it forms its own closed system, which is lodged like a foreign body in the overall system of art, or which, if you prefer, appears alongside it.' Ibid. p.62

¹³² Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code', p.236

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ See, for instance, Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932)

¹³⁵ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus', p.60. Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849-1936) won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1904. Interestingly, Bryher refers to Pavlov's experiments with monkeys rather than those with dogs. As her comment indicates the monkeys were responding to visual stimuli – different coloured discs – rather than the beat of a metronome or a whistle, like many of the dogs.

¹³⁶ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code,' p.236.

Bryher followed on from this to offer a mocking parody of Hollywood cinema by imagining an American version of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Noting that '[m]aggots certainly would not be permitted' and '[i]nstead we should have opened with a sailor's bar, with plenty of females in sex-appeal promoting dresses, and a cheerful song,' she then suggests three routes the narrative might follow: 'simple love,' 'romantic drama' or 'a play of gangster life.' Bryher concludes, however, by noting:

But the end of all stories must be the same: a triumphal bridal procession down the Odessa steps, Cossacks in front with bayonets decorated with orange blossom, sailors behind, the folk songs of the world, and on the edges, children with doves. The difference between this story and *Potemkin*, is the difference between *kitsch* and art.¹³⁷

In her American interpretation of *Potemkin*, the murderous Cossacks jostle happily with the once seditious, but now sedate, sailors. Perhaps the most famous sequence in the film – the abandoned pram bouncing haphazardly down the Odessa steps – a symbol of the Tsarist regime's lack of any future – is overlain, in Bryher's version, with a vignette of a traditional wedding party. In its zeal for 'happy' endings, Hollywood, Bryher suggests, erases both political and artistic possibility.¹³⁸ Hollywood's need for the same conclusion prohibits both political commentary – Eisenstein's allusions are erased by Bryher's final saccharine scene – as well as the production of experimental art, as she emphasizes: 'The difference between this story and *Potemkin*, is the difference between kitsch and art'. In Bryher's account, then, the conservative (and fascist) associations of the binary kitsch/avant-garde art are turned on their head, as art is instead twinned with that which is 'inauthentic' or the 'copy,' with the opposite pole to that of the heterosexual: here, art is coloured queer.

Moreover, Bryher's kitsched-up *Potemkin* scene twins the marital with the martial, as its 'triumphal bridal procession' is overlooked by both Cossacks and sailors. In combining this coupling with her contention that Hollywood considered 'an idiot child [...] better than no child,' Bryher offers a romanticised vision of a heterosexual triad, which resonates with what Carlston refers to as the 'matriotism' of fascist discourse, in which a particular conception of motherhood buffered patriarchy and militarism. The kitsch fantasies of

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.238.

¹³⁸ Indeed, in an early *Close Up* article, 'Defence of Hollywood' (1928), Bryher had asserted: 'And there is a curious cleavage in their [American] films: the settings, the crowds, the minor characters will emerge with a startling reality but the hero and heroine are obliged to follow a preconceived "story psychology" that has little or no link with actual life.' Bryher, 'Defence of Hollywood,' *Close Up* II, 2 (February 1928): p.45

Hollywood chimed, then, with the reproductive thrust of fascism, both of whose sentimental narratives possessed the capacity, according to critics like Greenberg and Bryher, to dull and thereby potentially indoctrinate their consumers to devastating effect. Further, with the introduction of the Hays code, undergirded as it was by a high-minded moralism, America cinema became an exclusive, and thus exclusionary, arena of culture. In its desire to cleanse the medium of all that might sully its viewing public, American censors arguably deployed a fascist logic, as they sought to produce a homogenous and 'pure' cultural landscape.

Bryher's critique of English film audiences and Hollywood cinema is bound up, then, with her rejection of the popular or commercial film as ideologically charged, as helping to install particular, circumscribed public fantasies. In other words, she construes such cinematic products as the heteronormative opium of the people, for which there is no apparent antidote or alternative, no obvious means of weaning them off, since censorship practices have banned them. Bryher's *Close Up* articles, then, recognised the importance of the cinema as a mass media that engages, but also potentially controls and conditions, the masses. She is concerned by the homogenous nature of Hollywood's productions, which all end in the same manner. Indeed, the texts at the centre of my last chapter – POOL's *Borderline* and Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* – offer specific examples of the types of subjects, subject matter, and endings, which the moral guardians in the US and the UK did *not* find palatable. Both were banned, with *Borderline* being impounded by American customs in 1931.¹³⁹ There was limited scope, then, for queer articulations or utterances to be made in such censorious circumstances.

Bryher recognised too, I suggest, that exclusionary practices such as cultural censorship, which fostered sameness rather than difference, had ramifications at the level of subjecthood too. Drawing upon the work of Teresa de Lauretis, Zaccaria and De Ruggieri contend that: 'Cinema is already being seen in *Close Up* as one of those technologies which produce the socially, historically and ideologically determined body.'¹⁴⁰ They continue: 'In other words, cinema produces gender, understood as 'the meaning effects and self-representations produced in the subject by the social-cultural practices, discourses, and institutions devoted to the production of women and men'.¹⁴¹ It is

¹³⁹ Although *The Well of Loneliness* was also tried in the U.S., it was not found obscene, and Hall's novel remained in circulation. See Leslie A. Taylor, "'I Made Up My Mind to Get It': The American Trial of *The Well of Loneliness*, New York City, 1928-1929,' *Journal of History of Sexuality* 10, 2 (April 2001): pp.250-286

¹⁴⁰ Zaccaria and De Ruggieri, *Close Up as Co(n)text*, p.251

¹⁴¹ Zaccaria and De Ruggieri (citing Teresa de Lauretis), *Close Up as Co(n)text*, p.251

evident, however, that alongside producing a specific gender formation, cinematic censorship practices ensured that mainstream film produced men and women along heteronormative lines.

Via cinema's omnipresence in the pages of *Manchester*, Bryher gestured to the mass medium's significant capacity to sculpt public fantasies, as it reached both working- and middle-class consumers, but also to its role in moulding modern subjects. This is most evident in the character of Ernest, whose consciousness, as we saw earlier, is permeated by the cinematic, with experience after experience being rendered through the vocabulary and structure of film: this was 'a René Clair long shot' (MIII 75), and that 'a strip of film left from that primitive age when alone they could have met as equals' (MI 91). Moreover, the novella ends with Ernest lying in bed as the 'panorama of the last days unrolled itself in his mind' (MIII 98), like a film. Bryher also identified that the only antidote to the homogeneity of Hollywood productions was to foster the creation of canny spectators, who possessed the critical ability to read otherwise, to queer, or render different, normative narratives. Indeed, Bryher ended 'The Hollywood Code' by offering a sort of creative remedy to the 'dangerous' situation faced by British viewers, whose screens were awash with American films. She wrote: 'Next time a *Close Up* reader visits the cinema we suggest that he tries to turn the American story, into the story an Eisenstein could have made'.¹⁴² Indeed, this, I argue, was the strategy she deployed in *Manchester*, in whose pages she queered the romantic narrative, thus offering readers not just an alternative ending but a range of queer articulations, or joinings, too. In the following section, I take up these debates in relation to the project of *Manchester*.

A Different Ending: Manchester's Queer Art(iculations)

As I outlined earlier, Bryher's novella appears at first to be unconcerned with either the chase for the 'new,' showing none of the formal experimentalism so evident in the other (avant-grade) texts I have considered in this thesis, or with the production of a politically responsible writing. In fact, with the Ernest strand invoking one of the original romantic narratives in the western canon, it seems bent on recounting a tale whose resolution involves a happy heterosexual coupling, with Bryher even adopting a male persona in

¹⁴² Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code,' p.238

order to achieve this. *Manchester*, in this count, is pure entertainment. Yet, as Bryher's two *Close Up* articles clearly demonstrate, nothing is just entertainment, with mass cultural forms being centrally implicated in the play of power, and being moulded by the forces of ideology. It is this consideration that forms the substance of Bryher's novella, which features a text within a text, as well as representing various instances of both cinematic and theatrical spectatorship. In an inversion of Bryher's observation that 'Kitsch does not mean any bad film, but one that, having apparently artistic pretensions, is as shallow as any commercial film, once the surface technique has been stripped away,' *Manchester*, dolled up in the togs of the popular, if stripped to *its core* reveals distinctly artistic intentions.¹⁴³ While it is not a text animated by the dynamic of the veiled disclosure, then, Bryher did, I suggest, cloak her critique of the homogeneity of mass cultural forms in a popular coil, in order to smuggle it into the hands – and minds – of the widest readership possible. As well as offering a different ending to that of 'the triumphal bridal procession,' I argue that Bryher also urged her readers to reflect upon how and what they consume, and with what implication.

The stories in *Manchester* are not the same, as Bryher queers the traditional romantic narrative, providing a range of alternative social formations in place of the heterosexual couple, which, we might recall, also sits at the centre of the grand romance of nation too. In other words, the novella features an array of queer articulations. The majority of Bryher's characters are single. Hope, for instance, is invariably titled 'Miss Tiptaft,' being introduced to the reader as such: 'Miss Tiptaft unlocked the office door and peeped timorously about.' (MI 93). It is only with the introduction of Laura Marshall that we learn her forename. Hope's spinsterhood is therefore highlighted throughout. It is also apparent that her unwed status is not regretted, as she observes: 'People spoke of marriage, but there, what has her sister Ada got out of it? A husband who had not done a stroke of work up to the day he had deserted her. Yet fools wrote to papers about women having jobs at all.' (MII 108).¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Hope Tiptaft's sister, Ada, is the only married female character in *Manchester*, yet she is 'sour,' a result of the curdling of the romantic dream of marriage, of her husband's flight and 'the daughter having trouble with her lungs' (MI 98). Similarly, the other married character, an ex-Tubbs and Barrow man, Mr Waite, does not

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.234

¹⁴⁴ There is mention, too, of another type of family in *Manchester*, comprising Hope and her fellow workers at the department store, Tubbs and Barrow. But this too is destroyed, with Tubbs and Barrow being shut down as a result of the terrible financial climate and poor management. As Hope laments: 'it seems almost

live in a nuclear household either: ‘he had no daughter to wait for him at the gate, only an invalid wife who nagged almost vulgarly, “sometime Harry, I think you never realise your blessings. I’d like to see you walking up and down all night with a kid, just because it has eaten itself sick.”’ (MII 109). The triumphal bridal procession, Bryher highlights, does not often lead to wedded bliss.

Indeed, *Manchester* repeatedly critiques the notion of the happy, heterosexual ending, flagging up instead what is ignored in the pursuit of such romantic fancies. In opposition to Miss Tiptaft, Cordelia is only ever referred to by her forename: she is patronymic-less (like Bryher). The actress is thus symbolically removed from the exchange of marriage. Invoking the inveterate Hollywood ending, Ernest explicitly announces his desire for Cordelia: “Do you want me, darling? I could make you very *happy*.” This fantasy, however, is punctured immediately, as Cordelia replies scathingly: “Er-nest, are you a taxi driver, to be so crude!” (MIII 97). While, on another occasion she tells him, more gently: “love is not for me, Ernest, surely you understand?” (MIII 93). It appears he does, having noted earlier himself that ‘Manchester is not Hollywood’ (MI 102). Moreover, as if to correct his ‘crude’ behaviour, Ernest later concedes that, with regard to the actress, ‘there is something quite beyond love, and understanding and unhappiness, it is what my friend of that winter, called the “ultimate schönheit” [ultimate beauty]’ (MIII 84). Once again, then, ‘true’ aesthetic experience, or art, is wrenched from its normative association with the heterosexual (in the binary heterosexual/homosexual), and instead rendered as different, as queer.

With the happy heterosexual couple rendered defunct, Bryher’s novella concludes instead with the spinsterly Hope crossing the threshold of North’s home, since, as she informs Laura: ‘Mr North [...] wants me to look after his flat while he is away. It is six months certain and it might just possibly be permanent.’ (MIII 95). In her reading of *Two Selves* as lesbian romance, Collecott has remarked upon the fact that Bryher’s early prose works similarly refuse a clichéd romantic heterosexual ending. Following Rachel Blau DuPlessis’ contention that in the nineteenth century novel, ‘the rightful end, of women in novels was ... marriage ... or ... death. These were both resolutions of romance,’ Collecott informs us that pausing on the threshold is a trope in the early writings of both H.D. and Bryher.¹⁴⁵ She explains:

lonely, just the two of us, after being a member of such a big family, I must say, for so many years.’ (MIII 106).

¹⁴⁵ Rachel Blau Duplessis cited in Collecott, ‘Bryher’s *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance,’ p.138

We have seen how Bryher, writing and re-writing her account of July 17, 1918, approaches such a point of closure: 'This was the place. She knocked ... A tall figure opened the door' (*Two Selves*); 'I knew then that it must be the right place and knocked. The door opened ...' (*The Heart to Artemis*). The entire novel, and the chapter of the memoir, stop at this threshold, without retreating from it into threatened death, or stepping over it into marriage.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, in *Manchester* Bryher provides an alternative to death or marriage. Vacating his nest, at *Manchester*'s close we find Ernest on the wing again, as the narrative comes full circle, and he prepares to set out for North America: 'Hope had a job, Cordelia was happy. In forty-eight hours, he would be tossing in mid-Atlantic' (M III 98).¹⁴⁷ Rather than offering us a couple, then, we are left with 'happy' single Cordelia, as well as the odd pairing of Hope and Ernest, as the novella concludes with the separate, though intertwined, sections of North's and his secretary's stories being merged together in the final section. And, significantly, it is Hope – rather than a newly wed couple – who crosses the threshold of Ernest's home.

Denis Flannery unpacks the distinction between the pair and the couple in his essay 'Robert Mapplethorpe's Queer Aesthetic of the Pair' (2005). 'The why of the couple,' Flannery tells us, 'is self-referentially evident, the why of the pair difficult to access.'¹⁴⁸ He continues by observing that 'Many a nineteenth century novel, to allude to a powerful means whereby grand narratives have announced and naturalized themselves, ends with the establishment of a couple.' Flannery goes on to stress that the couple 'is both generated by and in turn ensures the perpetuation of large narrative models (proper gendering, sexual conformity, fidelity, the nation, the family).'¹⁴⁹ In contrast to the couple, then, the pair is decidedly non- or even anti-normative, and thus, according to Flannery, bears a 'resistance to grand narrative.'¹⁵⁰ As such, and as is certainly the case in *Manchester*, the pair's capacity to disrupt and unsettle normative social relations and narratives flavours it as queer. Moreover, rather than functioning as a prop for nation and empire, as, in contrast,

¹⁴⁶ Collecott, 'Bryher's *Two Selves* as Lesbian Romance,' p.138

¹⁴⁷ Indeed, it does not seem a coincidence to discover Bryher making reference to Osbert Sitwell's short story, 'Happy Endings' (1931) in *Manchester* (MI 107). As a review in *Time* notes in "'Happy Endings,' [the] best story in the book, the narrator describes his pre-War crammer's school for the Army, the queer lives of its personnel,' and 'what happy endings the late great War brought to them.' Anonymous, 'Atheism to Theosophy,' *Time*, 9 February 1931. At <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,741043-2,00.html>. Accessed on 17 February 2008.

¹⁴⁸ Denis Flannery, 'Robert Mapplethorpe's Queer Aesthetic of the Pair,' in *American Visual Cultures*, eds. David Holloway and John Beck (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), p.265

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Henty's novels did, through *Manchester*, as I suggested earlier, Bryher sought to invoke an international response to fascism's ultra-nationalism, by urging its readers to heed the events unfolding outside Britain's national borders.

Alongside Bryher's disruption of the idealised happy heterosexual ending, through the dissolution of Ernest and Cordelia's coupling, we are also offered the pairing of Theodora and Penelope, a portrait of female friendship, which segues into queerness. Like Ernest, Theodora travels to Manchester to support another character connected to the play, with her trip being made on behalf of its author, Penelope Bush. Upon Penelope's arrival in Manchester, Theodora tries to soothe her: 'My dear child,' she tells the fraught writer, 'you have had a long journey and a worrying time. Come right upstairs to bed and relax' (MII 102). Not only does Bryher's syntax allow for the fact that the pair might share a bed, her ellipses, which, as we saw in my third chapter, became loaded with significance, following the trial of Hall's novel, encourage readers to reflect upon their chosen form of relaxation. Thus, the passage, in combination with this coupling which echoes the romantic thrust of Ernest's own trip, invite readers to speculate about Theodora's devotion to the playwright.¹⁵¹ Indeed, another instance of queer coupling crops up as Ernest peruses the newspaper, which carries an advert that reads: 'Gentlewoman (maid kept) seeks lady with congenial tastes to share cottage forty miles from London; must be dog-lover.' (MIII 74).

Moreover, in her choice of Theodora (an inversion of her travelling companion's name, Dorothy or Dorothea) Bryher, I suggest, alludes to the cross-dressed protagonist of Théophile Gautier's 1835 raunchy epistolary novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Théodore. Like Shakespeare's crossed-dressed comedies – and, indeed, *As You Like It* is an important intertext in Gautier's text – Théodore/de Maupin's cross-dressed guise produces moments of sapphic sauciness in the romantic novel.¹⁵² As Gautier's mordant preface makes clear,

¹⁵¹ Indeed, we might read this as a riposte to Townsend's own interest in Bryher and Bergner's relationship. 'The Townsend keeps hinting I must be careful downstairs or they will think I am precisely what I am,' Bryher observed cryptically to H.D. in a letter from Manchester, 'And she'd die of shock, in spite of two years p.a. [psychoanalysis] if I told her 'don't worry, I am.' Bryher to H.D., 21 November 1933, H.D. Papers, YCAL MSS 24, Series I, Box 3, Folder 101, Beinecke. Indeed, the ridicule and mockery with which Bryher blankets Theodora was noted by Sachs, who commented: 'Poor Theodora, your description in the novel is so good she cannot help being hurt, disguise or no disguise.' Hanns Sachs to Bryher, extract from Bryher Papers, MSS GEN 97, Series II, Box 72, Folder 2856, Beinecke.

¹⁵² The most titillating episode occurs when the beautiful young widow, Rosette, in desperate pursuit of Théodore, takes him/her to a secluded cottage in a final effort at seduction (again, this is another inversion of the usual romantic narrative). Recounting the failed attempt to her confidant, Théodore/de Maupin writes: 'I felt her angry, half-naked breasts springing against my chest and her interlaced fingers clenching my hair. A shudder went through my whole body and my nipples stood on end.' Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, ed. Helen Constantine (London: Penguin, 2005), p.271

such scandalous matter as lesbianism was intended to irk the censorious literary critics of his day. In a total splintering of the usual outcome of romantic narrative, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* concludes with Théodore's seduction of Chevalier D'Albert, through whom, we are led to infer, she learns to pleasure women. Before departing for adventures further afield, s/he moves on to the bed of the beautiful widow, Rosette, to spend a final night of pleasure. Like *Manchester*, then, though in a more blunt and risqué fashion, Gautier's novel resists a conventional ending; there is a pursuit, a tryst, and even a consummation, but no marriage. We might even see *Manchester* as a sort of centenary celebration of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, which had been published almost exactly a hundred years before.¹⁵³

Finally, it is significant that not only are most of Bryher's characters single, but that her novella comprises an almost completely all female 'cast'. The main exception is, of course, Ernest (who, for those in the know, might best be seen as akin to the cross-dressed girl page of Elizabethan dramatic writing, or Gautier's hero/ine) plus a few cameo roles: Mr Waite, Mr Pryce, a nameless plumber, and Kyrold. *Manchester* is quite literally an economy of women. All Bryher's characters work, supporting themselves as secretaries, landladies, actors, writers, and even a superintendent of a home for wayward girls. The latter, blue-stockinged Miss Peck – 'a footnote to the eighties, preserved not in amber, but in flannel' (MIII 80) – also has the distinction of having 'visited the Yoshiwara, disguised as a male missionary.' (MIII 80). Bryher, then, provides a range of different possibilities for women, other than that of wife and mother.

As such, *Manchester* brings to mind Leontine Sagan's contemporaneous 'lesbian' anti-fascist film, *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), with its own famous all-female cast. Indeed, this facet of the film clearly enthused Bryher, for, on a programme preserved from the London Film Society's screening of the film – dated 'Sunday, February 28, 1932' – she pencilled:

¹⁵³ The first volume of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was issued in November 1835, with the second following in January 1836. In her earlier novel, *Two Selves*, Bryher's protagonist, Nancy, notes that 'Gautier she enjoyed, yet his prose was over ripe with sweetness; rather it was a richness that was unrestrained by thought. She turned to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* hopeful of boyishness, but the psychology, subtle as it was, had blent with it such impossible imaginings, the whole seemed a little false.' Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, Wisconsin and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 168-9. The novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, also makes an appearance in American playwright, Lillian Hellman's contemporaneous 'lesbian' play, *The Children's Hour* (1934). Hellman deployed Gautier's novel to suggest that her young protagonist, Mary Tillford, was not the innocent she subsequently pretends to be.

Splendid
Without a Man! ¹⁵⁴

Sagan's film provides a pertinent comparison here in its emphasis on the reproduction of the same, that is, the heterosexual reproductive couple, in fascist discourse. As the title, *Girls in Uniform*, suggests, the principal (Emilie Unda) considers it the purpose of the school to breed (military) uniformity: 'You are all soldiers' daughters and, God willing, you will all be soldiers' mothers,' she informs the young women.¹⁵⁵ *Mädchen in Uniform*, then, directly references what Carlston refers to as the 'matriotism,' which bolstered fascist mythology, or what Bryher hinted at in her 'triumphal bridal procession' in that 1931 article 'The Hollywood Code' (published the same year as Sagan's production was released). Throughout the film, however, the relationship between the protagonist Manuela and Fräulein von Bernburg, and, indeed, the majority of the girls' female crushes, disrupts this heteroreproductive thrust. Carlston has observed that both *Mädchen in Uniform* and Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* 'make overt connections between the suppression of eros and fascist culture, or, alternatively, the celebration of eros and the resistance to fascism.'¹⁵⁶ For Bryher, however, it was not just the suppression of eros but fascism's violent repression of difference that was the main concern.

Alongside offering a range of queer articulations, which worked to counter the homogeneity of Hollywood cinema (and fascist discourse), Bryher embedded a critique of popular cultural viewing habits in her text too. In doing so, I suggest, she sought to encourage the development of canny, and thoughtful, reader-spectators, as she had done in 'Dope or Stimulus' and 'The Hollywood Code.' As I mentioned earlier, *Manchester* is clearly concerned with the consumption of mass forms, from newspapers to mainstream theatre, and, most crucially, the cinema. The arguments that I sketched out in my previous sections, relating to Bryher's concern for experimental art in the face of Hollywood kitsch, permeate *Manchester*, where they reappear most obviously in a discussion between Ernest and Cordelia about popular theatre. According to North, the English theatre is 'not an art, but a ritual, a family affair' (MIII 86). In other words, it is kitsch: repetitive and content with the familiar (in the guise of the nuclear family). This is underscored as he observes: 'People went, not to see something new, but to repeat an illustrated calendar of their youth'

¹⁵⁴ *London Film Society Programme*, 28 February 1932, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series VIII, Box 170, Folder 5682, Beinecke. Bryher expanded upon this, noting: 'It is directed by a woman and acted entirely by women.'

¹⁵⁵ *Mädchen in Uniform*, Dir. Leontine Sagan. Germany, 1931.

¹⁵⁶ Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, p.39

(MIII 86). Evoking the stage for Cordelia, Bryher's protagonist suggests that she 'think instead, of a father and a mother and two children. They want a sentimental little piece that the girls may imagine is the love story of their parents' (MIII 86). English audiences are not interested in difference or novelty, they desire, Ernest suggests, the reproduction of the same, which bolsters their own story, that of heterosexual romance and its telos in the nuclear family, alongside the grand narrative of nation too. Bryher highlights that it is this which is clichéd and worn and unoriginal, and, most crushingly, Ernest states: 'In England people are ashamed of art' (MI 91). Indeed, he predicts scathingly that Penelope's, 'was going to be another pseudo-romantic play, with the Victorian emphasis on sex in little daring sentences. How could people listen, he wondered, to these adolescent stories? Drama was about one, like the waves of a sudden sea, not to be escaped' (MIII 88). More obviously than her allusion to Rosalind's flight, which would only have been resonant for the educated middle-classes, here, Bryher draws her readers' attention to the drama about them, which is obscured, she suggests, by such homogenous tales. The passage also echoes Bryher's earlier contention that in American film, 'The avalanche, the famine, must be subordinated to sex appeal.'¹⁵⁷

Indeed, *Manchester* chafes against the political apathy of Britain, offering a portrait of an anaesthetised population. Bryher's populace is constantly napping: on the train on the way up '[b]oth the old gentlemen were peacefully asleep after their lunch, even Theodora had consented to doze.' (MI 106). The city of Manchester is also similarly full of drowsy inhabitants: 'An old lady, asleep over her teapot' (MII 95) then 'gave a slight snore' (MII 96), and 'stirred, opened her eyes drowsily and shut them again.' (MII 97). Hope Tiptaft's lack of a political consciousness is underscored by her desire for rest and sleep: 'With a hot water bottle and her old down quilt Hope was soon warm, and as comfortable as she had ever known herself to be.' (MII 103). More obviously, however, she falls asleep at the cinema, in front of an unnamed Cordelia film: 'It was all so quick, that she began to be too sleepy to follow the story.' (MII 108). The perpetual fog, which accompanies Ernest and Theodora north, even condenses to form an insulating quilt for the sedate inhabitants of Manchester: 'chimneys and atmosphere and sky merged into a curious blanket overprinted with outlines, puffed out with humps.' (MI 107). Like the drugged English spectators of Bryher's 'Dope or Stimulus,' who surrender 'all logical features in abeyance,' Manchester's citizens are drawn in opposition to that spirited German audience she had experienced, who were 'alive enough to retaliate,' had gone to

¹⁵⁷ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code,' p.236

the cinema ‘not to forget but to live,’ and, again, who appreciated that ‘[t]o watch may be a vital way to live.’¹⁵⁸ In a later essay, Bryher stated that Berlin, a city ‘full of poems and painting and plays, written in a fresh and stimulating idiom, [...] was alive whilst London was asleep’.¹⁵⁹ Bryher’s critical and creative writings of the 1930s, I argue, constitute an effort to amend this situation and to rouse the English population from its apathy.¹⁶⁰

In contrast to Manchester’s dozing inhabitants both Cordelia and her performance are associated with rejuvenation and awakening. Ernest refers to the period before he had met Cordelia as ‘a fog of hibernating days’ (MI 92). While after her debut ‘[t]hings seemed clearer,’ to him, ‘there were more lights. Perhaps there was less fog.’ (MIII 94). While, ‘It was still so vividly alive in him, that he forgot for the moment where he was’ (MIII 84) and, ‘He could feel in his own arms the nerves that were now a voice’ (MIII 89). Most explicitly:

Ice cracked; the sun shone. Circulation surged again in a long-forgotten self; growth began, there were prickings in unexpected nerves. Perhaps that was why she always complained of sleeplessness. (MII 111).

Cordelia’s performance is electrifying and animating, it transforms Ernest. Moreover, in *Manchester*’s final section Ernest is himself asleep – ‘completely and slothfully unconscious’ (MIII 96) – but not for long: ‘The telephone, for which he had listened in vain and for so long, exploded through the darkness. It rang and rang’ (MIII 96). It is Cordelia who rouses him: ‘there was only one voice in the world that broke his name up that way, into two long syllables ... ‘Er-nest darling’’ (MIII 96).

Further, as was the case with her 1931 essay, in which Bryher inverted the sexualised associations of the binary kitsch/experimental art thus rendering the latter queer (in opposition to the ‘triumphal bridal procession’), in *Manchester* she undermines the fascist conception of the Jew, the perpetual foreigner, as inauthentic and affiliated with inferior cultural forms. Instead émigré Cordelia is consistently associated with the opposite pole, that of art. Following her debut, for instance, Ernest states that Cordelia ‘was working where there were no barriers, but all arts met’ (MIII 92), while earlier we saw that he referred to her as the “ultimate schönheit” (MIII 84). Moreover, as I argued

¹⁵⁸ Bryher, ‘Dope or Stimulus,’ pp.60-1. My italics.

¹⁵⁹ Bryher, ‘Bertolt Brecht,’ in *Life and Letters To-Day* 33 (May 1942): p.98

¹⁶⁰ The trope of an inert and slumbering populace, sunk, not in a rejuvenating sleep, but in a blinkered and useless one recurs in other texts of the period too. Bryher’s works foreshadow writers such as Murray Constantine (Katharine Burdekin) in *Swastika Nights* (1937) and Louis MacNeice in *Autumn Journal* (1939).

was the case with Nancy in my second chapter, in preventing us from ‘seeing’ Cordelia directly, Bryher confounds anti-Semitic stereotypes that conceived of ‘the Jewess’ as a dark, exoticised Lilith, whose racial difference was stamped indelibly on the flesh. Indeed, we can see such practice as resonating with queer theory’s intention to disrupt and trouble categories of persons, tied, as they are, to the naturalisation, normalisation, and, ultimately, confirmation, of certain identities and subjectivities over others.

Cordelia’s absence, I suggest, also has the effect of separating her from the female stars of Hollywood, those unblemished icons of the screen, the beguiling constructs of the close up, the shot which manufactured what Ernest refers to as the ‘smeared lips and woolly faces’ of commercial films (MI 92). Our attention is drawn instead to Cordelia’s flight, her fear and nervousness. Through Ernest, we witness her ‘tighten into a hunch of gloom under her blue rug’ (MI 91), are aware of her ‘state of pure fear that was beyond feeling’ (MI 101), and her ‘rage and tears,’ which make her ‘a tiny aeroplane in a storm’ (MI 102). The final product – the unnamed play – is similarly screened from us, with our attention instead being repeatedly drawn to the labour that goes on behind the scenes: the scriptwriting, rehearsals and, in the case of Cordelia, her plight.

Whether intentionally or not, *Manchester* also muddies the distinction between the dichotomy art and kitsch, for Cordelia’s artistry (as it is identified by Ernest) occurs in spite of the fact that she performs in a production he considers a ‘made-to-order tale’ (MI 111), and despite the fact that the majority of the audience ‘would not step outside the hypnosis of its romance’ (MIII 91). It is precisely, then, the sort of kitsch material that Bryher had railed against in both ‘Dope or Stimulus’ and ‘The Hollywood Code.’ Instead, however, Bryher’s text seems to suggest that the crucial factor is not the material itself but how (and, consequently, as we shall see, by whom) the text is consumed. The distinction between art and kitsch is also unsettled in Sachs’ 1932 *Close Up* article, ‘Kitsch.’ Here, Bryher’s analyst considered the mass appeal of popular film from a psychoanalytic angle, an argument that extended Freud’s 1908 essay, ‘The Creative Writer and Day-dreaming’. Following Freud’s assertion that ‘a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one,’¹⁶¹ Sachs contends that ‘Kitsch is the exploitation of daydreams by those who never had any.’¹⁶² As well as suggesting that there are a variety of categories of kitsch, Sachs also asserted that: ‘Judged by present-day notions of intellectual property Shakespeare

¹⁶¹ Sigmund Freud cited in Laura Marcus, ‘Introduction,’ in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, eds. *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998), p.244

¹⁶² Hanns Sachs, ‘Kitsch,’ *Close Up* IX, 3 (September 1932): p.202

would rank as the most shameless plagiarist.’¹⁶³ Shakespeare, *the* literary luminary of English high culture, is, according to Sachs, nothing more than a copyist; he is, then, cast as inauthentic and unoriginal. Moreover, while the psychoanalyst does offer a loose definition of kitsch, which, like Bryher’s own, is related to its ‘reli[ance] on safe and long *familiar effects*’ (in contrast to the novelty of ‘authentic’ art) he subsequently offers a case study that troubles this binary.¹⁶⁴ He discusses a patient for whom a kitsch film produced the same ‘deep impression such as is generally only produced by a genuine work of art.’¹⁶⁵ Sachs writes:

I once observed an effect of this nature [kitsch producing the same result as art] during an analysis where I was quite able to understand it. The person I was analysing had been deeply and lastingly stirred by the [Bergner-Czinner] film, *The Fiddler of Florence*, which, despite the acting and some interesting details, must certainly be ranked as Kitsch.¹⁶⁶

Sachs’ suggests that his analysand (remarkably, the second of his clutch to be consumed by the spectacle of the Austrian actress) was so moved by this early Bergner vehicle because it repeated her own psychological history. It mirrored her own experience of emotionally tussling with a stepmother over her father’s affections and her resulting ‘flight into masculinity’. Sachs’ interpretation thereby dissolves the difference between art and kitsch as he suggests that the viewer’s reactions to mass cultural forms depend on an individual’s particular life trajectory, which might allow kitsch to have the same effect as does the ingestion of ‘original’ art.

Bryher takes this notion up further in *Manchester* as she represents three contrasting scenes of cinematic consumption. For Hope, as we saw above, Cordelia’s nameless film simply puts her to sleep. ‘She stared at the screen,’ and sees:

Only a man, and was it a child? There was a sweep of hair, moving so swiftly that you could not tell if it were fair or dark, and a figure that looked as if the people and the room and the fur collar on her coat were all too heavy; rather as if (and Hope was pleased that she had discovered this idea) a windflower were caught in a galloping north-east gale. (MII 108)

Cinema is represented as confusing to this anti-modern character, for whom its distracting qualities (a locus of revolutionary possibility for Benjamin) simply make it

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

incomprehensible to her: 'It was all so quick, that she began to be too sleepy to follow the story.' (MII 108). Indeed, Hope's only moment of satisfaction comes when she transforms the star into a natural image – 'a windflower caught in a galloping north-east gale – which belongs to a traditionally Victorian poetic idiom. Moreover, afterwards, Hope decides that 'she knew too much [...] really to get full value out of films.' (MII 109).

Sitting beside the secretary at this screening is Mr Waite, whose response is entirely different. He enters the cinema with little expectation, predicting 'Some love-story' (MII 107), and is in fact more bothered that the picture house offer somewhere 'dim and comfortable and dry, [...] like the warm chelter [sic] of a lifeboat' (MII 107). Following Cordelia's film, however, he is enlivened, exclaiming: 'This is art, this is poetry' (MII 109). Yet, this awakening comes through a rose-tinted lens, and arises from a particular familial fantasy. Mr. Waite notes:

when the wind blew the hair back from her forehead and she stared at the trees like a despairing baby, he wanted to rush from his seat and put his own arms around her and lead her into the finest room Tubbs and Barrow had ever decorated. He would take her to the sofa under the rosebud shades and say, now you are never, never, to be frightened any more. (MII 109).

Rather than a heterosexual coupling, this is a paternal romance, which extracts the actress from the matter of the film and sets her instead into a fantasy setting of his own contrivance. In doing so, Cordelia is reduced to the role of passive, helpless daughter, whom Waite can then rescue. His choice of setting, a room in best Edwardian style, whose furnishings are bedecked with rosebuds, colours his vision of art as kitsch. It fails to awaken him to other possibilities, to difference.

While Waite's response apparently echoes Ernest's own, for, as we saw earlier, Cordelia is the live wire that jerks him awake, the substance of their responses is markedly different. In the businessman's first vision of Cordelia, when, if we recall, he too sought shelter in a 'tiny kino':

He had looked up at that precise second to see in front of him not an aeroplane, but the image of his abstraction. He had stared at a figure standing by a stream, as long ago Imogen had stood by rushes "*and for two nights together have made the ground my bed*" (MI 92).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

¹⁶⁷ The italicised lines are drawn from Imogen's first outing in boy's clothes. She declares: 'I see a man's life is a tedious one./ I have tired myself, and for two nights together/ Have made the ground my bed.' William

Ernest, then, casts Cordelia as yet another of Shakespeare's heroines, this time the cross-dressed princess Imogen/Fidele from *Cymbeline* (c.1611). Here, the 'foreign' actress is again aligned with art and, more specifically, the highest achievements of *English Culture* (even if, according to Sachs, the playwright was a plagiarist). Moreover, North's vision is one of difference; it does not draw upon a recognisable cultural repertoire of either romantic or familial relations. Here, North is not a Romeo hankering after his Juliet, indeed, it is unclear what exactly animates Ernest's desire: is it the actress, or is it her transvestite role, her boyishness? This indecipherability renders the vision distinctly queer.

Although space limits a full address here, it is necessary to note that these three scenes of spectatorship are clearly and problematically classed. As Christine Gledhill has observed:

While the political avant-garde audience deconstructs the pleasures and identities offered by the mainstream text, it participates in the comforting identity of critic or *cognoscente*, positioned in the sphere of 'the ideologically correct,' and the 'radical' – a position which is defined by its difference from the ideological mystification attributed to the audiences of the mass media. This suggests that the political problem is not positioning as such, but which positions are put on offer, or audiences enter into.¹⁶⁸

Though not explicitly referring to classed viewing positions, Gledhill's contention that the crux of the problem lies in the positions which 'are put on offer' by critics is relevant to my reading. For, here, Hope and Mr. Waite, who are both positioned as resolutely working-class, are represented as being ideologically stymied, with the cinema unable to jolt them from their stagnant positions. Instead, they continue to wait and hope, as their names suggest, rather than being moved to revolt or act upon their own, or others, compromised circumstances. In contrast, Ernest, the sole bourgeois viewer, is the only one to successfully negotiate his way (at least according to the tenets of Bryher's earlier articles) through the dangerous mire of popular film. Here, the experimental mind, it seems, can only be a middle-class one.

Yet, as well as focusing on the consumption of mass media texts, in *Manchester* Bryher also trained her critical gaze upon its (middle-class) producers and purveyors too. Here, further mention must be made of Ernest's companion, Theodora Wilton, 'the

Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, ed. Martin Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.172, 3.6.1-3. Italics in the original.

favourite author of hundreds of *quiet homes*' (MI 102), who is 'all the adjectives in R, religious, royalist and romantic' (MI 101), a conservative, whose popular serials, Bryher suggests, contribute to the inertia of the English population. Ernest observes that it was her 'absolute belief in the slogans of 1900 [that] had insured her success' (MI 102) and, moreover, 'anything her slogans excluded, did not exist' (MI 103). Theodora regurgitates the same old stories, and is set firmly against the experimental. Similarly, her friend Penelope, whose own play made the Manchester audience coo and weep – Ernest notes disdainfully that 'In front, the white satin toga heaved, beside him, tears fell on to a tiny lace handkerchief (MIII 92-3) – would herself 'not leave harbour. She clung to the anchor of a safe tradition.' (MII 99). And, recalling one of their first arguments, Ernest remembers Theodora's fixed stance on the content of her serials:

Yes, yes, Ernest, I know as well as you do, that October is the loveliest month on the coast. But my readers don't know that; they expect mimosa and orange blossom. It would be far too original to make the heroine hide there before December. (MI 103).

This evokes Bryher's *Potemkin* parody, which ends in the predictable triumphal bridal procession, and which is led by 'Cossacks in front with bayonets decorated with *orange blossom*'.¹⁶⁹ Like the producers of Hollywood film, Bryher suggests, Theodora panders to the desires of her readers, who hanker after the uncomplicated satisfaction of the familiar, with its inevitable conclusion in a bridal coupling.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, for Theodora the realm of culture bears no relation at all to economics (or society): "Oh, business," Theodora comments, "what has that got to do with the first night of Penelope's play?" (MI 103).

Daniel Tiffany has observed that: 'The same modernist critics who constructed the opposition between kitsch and avant-garde tended to view kitsch as a form of degraded Romanticism, suggesting that the attempt to isolate kitsch from art is related to the antagonism displayed by modernist writers towards Romantic poetics'.¹⁷¹ This consideration illuminates Theodora's stance further. Indeed, she betrays how tempting it is to believe in her own fictional contrivances as she gives herself away through a distinctly Romantic fantasy: 'I simply adore sleeping high up in a tiny attic full of lavender and

¹⁶⁸ Christine Gledhill, 'Pleasurable Negotiations' in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Prentice Hall, 1998), p.238

¹⁶⁹ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code,' p.238. My italics.

¹⁷⁰ In a *Close Up* article Bryher had observed: 'the foreign trade papers quite cynically print warnings that in England only a "happy ending" is possible and the versions sent to Wardour Street usually arrive with their continuity destroyed.' Bryher, 'How I Would Start a Film Club,' *Close Up* II, 6 (June 1928): p.33

cobwebs, and have the birds wake me in the morning...’ (MII 100). Penelope is quick to puncture this fallacious image of the lonely Romantic writer-genius starving in his garret (a distinctly gendered and classed fantasy), replying: ‘But, Theo, you never do. And lavender doesn’t grow on roofs.’ (MII 101). Bryher, again, emphasises the ease with which consumers fall under the spell of such Romantic fancies at the expense of paying attention to the ‘the avalanche, the famine,’ or we might add, impending war in mainland Europe or the persecution of Jews and other ‘undesirables’ by the Nazi regime. It is noteworthy too, that Theodora is also associated with empire and nation. She suffers ‘empress fantasies’ (MI 101) and ‘saw herself with slaves sprinkling gold dust on her hair’ (MI 102). Later, Ernest notes that ‘Theodora lifted a white gloved arm, in imperial gesture’ (MIII 82) and subsequently ‘swept out in front of him, Britannia, her cloak, as she struggled into it, held out trident fashion.’ (MIII 93). Once again, Bryher gestures to the connection between homogenous popular forms, which tell the same story and thus suppress difference, and the buttressing of imperialist conceptions of nation.

Yet, although Bryher is clearly critical of both unthinking producers and consumers of mass cultural forms, she neither calls for the elimination of Hollywood film from the cultural landscape nor suggests that its consumption be policed. Indeed, *Manchester* features a host of different and divergent cultural texts, which jostle quite happily beside each other. William Beckford and Lord Byron nestle beside the Chinese wallpaper of Ernest’s hotel room, while notices in daily newspapers feature nearly as frequently as does reference to the cinema. Even Miss Peck paints: ‘it was rather like the photograph of a terrier on a jig-saw puzzle, recognisable, with blurred edges and quite without character.’ (MIII 81); Ernest is not impressed. Moreover, despite her repeated critique of Hollywood productions, Bryher (like Benjamin) does allow for the fact that (some) American films might be enlivening. In a moment of contemplation, Hope reflects that:

It was really the American films, she supposed, that had brought this unrest into the world, the films and the war. How could people retain a belief in Providence if they laughed at Mickey Mouse? Those fragments of a tail, or a whisker, it must do something to the mind. There was something vulgar about daisies forming designs that they could not form in nature. (MI 96).

Here, Disney films gain a queer gloss, as their unnatural, and hence potentially denaturalising, fragmented features clearly unsettle Hope, threatening to ‘do something to

¹⁷¹ Daniel Tiffany, ‘Kitsching the Cantos,’ *Modernism/Modernity* 12, 2 (2005): p.330

the mind'. While in this instance there is no deepening of consciousness the 'percussive effect' of film is certainly registered, sending a jolt through Bryher's most atavistic character.

As was the case with her defence of Woolf five years later, in *Manchester* Bryher endorses cultural diversity. Indeed, as we have seen, her novella offers an exemplary 'pasture,' with a wide range of different grasses, and, moreover, it similarly aimed to remind readers that 'no choice is better nor more human than the other but that each is necessary to the pattern of the whole.'¹⁷² This sentiment was evident too in the summer 1936 editorial of *Life and Letters To-day*, the issue that carried the final part of *Manchester*. Herring wrote:

The world is narrower while knowledge is wider, and that the former be not destroyed, it is essential all branches of the latter be related. No one group, be it of artist or artisan, socialist or psychologist, painter, photographer or printer, can live in ignorance of implications of the others.¹⁷³

Bryher, then, does not fall back onto a fascist flavoured logic, which wants to expunge what is deemed undesirable, leading, ultimately, to the elimination of difference. Instead, like Herring, she sought to encourage understanding and collaboration between different (creative) groups. As such, the heiress highlights that what is so dangerous about 'the tinned ideas of Hollywood' is their homogeneity, the fact that American film (re)produces the same ending, thus buffering a circumscribed vision of life, where queer difference is suppressed. Moreover, in its desire for this particular story, which was undergirded by the emergence of the Hays Code and an attending desire for a 'pure' cultural landscape, Hollywood mirrored the heteroreproductive ideological thrust of fascism, as well as its exclusionary logic.

Veiled in the clothes of popular romance – masquerading as a modern Romeo and Juliet, with an everyman and a famed actress taking up the leads – I have argued that, instead, *Manchester* disrupts this normative narrative by offering a range of queer articulations or joinings, in contrast to the predictable 'triumphal bridal

¹⁷² Bryher, 'A Good Pasture Needs Many Grasses,' p.197

¹⁷³ 'Editorial' (*Life and Letters To-Day* 14 Summer 1936) cited in Renata Morresi, 'Two Examples of Women's "Hidden" Cultural (Net)work: Nancy Cunard's Onion and *Life and Letters To-Day*,' in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, March 25-27, 2002*, ed. Marina Camboni (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), p.375

procession'.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Bryher's novella ends with an odd pairing of sorts, that of Hope and Ernest, in place of the expected heterosexual coupling with Cordelia. Moreover, like her earlier *Close Up* articles, in *Manchester* the writer encouraged viewers and readers to think about what they consume, for, as Marek observed, Bryher located in the individual the potential for political resistance (we might say, then, that she anticipated Foucault, recognising the capillary nature of (micro)power, which moves laterally as well as vertically, and which is at work at the level of the subject).¹⁷⁵ Further, Bryher identified the importance of mass cultural forms, in particular the cinema, as a crucial site for such power struggles, hence her drive to encourage canny spectatorial practice. Urging viewers to consider what stories, and lives, are suppressed in the drive for the satisfaction of the same, she sought to draw attention to the devastation unfolding in Nazi Germany, where the violent repression of difference – of Jews, Romany peoples, queers, and people with impairments as well as those who simply thought differently – was already at work. At the centre of this attempt, and the novel too, was Bryher's homage to her paramour, Elisabeth Bergner, the ethereal Cordelia. As such, Bryher endeavoured to enact a transnational form of anti-fascist collaboration, in order to counter the ultra-nationalism of Nazism. It was a call, then, for a coalition-based politics forged *across* difference, for the formation of queer articulations.

¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Bryher's strategy chimes with André Breton's argument in the Second Surrealist Manifesto that surrealist art must conceal itself within mainstream cultural forms in order to fulfil its revolutionary potential. André Breton cited in William Brown, 'Not Flagwaving But Flagdrowning, or Postcards from Post-Britain,' in *The British Cinema Book*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute, 2009), p.148

¹⁷⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998).

Conclusion

Now I had naturally read Marlowe during my first Elizabethan period during the 1917-18 years, I had certainly been captured by his 'mighty line' but his ideas, plays, history was not so near to [me?] as Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Dekker or Middleton had been. Suddenly I saw him, I do not know quite how to explain it in words, as the secret agent who might have been struggling to get out of Switzerland or France with all the fears, the chances that some quite ordinary but careless act might lead to betrayal, the counter espionage, the combined terror and exhilaration. [...] I was not precisely hunted but I came near enough to have some idea of such a person's feelings. As I write, I saw Marlowe suddenly not as in some hallucination in front of me, no, but as a living being some of whose actions and emotions I could perfectly understand. So, though we may not know history in one sense, I think we can comprehend perfectly in another.

— Bryher, *Manuscript Fragment*, Beinecke.

I conclude my own dialogue with the past – the effort to train my ear to the queer articulations of Bryher and POOL, and, thus, myself become a node in a transhistorical queer articulation or joining – by considering Bryher's own image of turning to the past in this fleshy haunting by the Elizabethan playwright, Christopher Marlowe.¹ It is a passage that encapsulates a number of the issues with which this thesis has dealt. From a base in gender theory, I have argued for the necessity of using a queer theoretical lens in order to explore Bryher's, and POOL's, efforts to articulate queerly – both to 'speak out' and 'speak back' – in three interwar texts. In the fourth, *Manchester* (1935-6), I considered Bryher's attempt to simultaneously represent, and forge, queer articulations in the context of National Socialism's 'cleansing' of both the cultural sphere and the German national body. As my use of the manuscript fragment suggests, this has also been a project based in the Bryher archive at Yale University, which, I suggested, constituted the writer's own effort to reach out to future readers. Alongside her published works, her diligent preservation of the matter of her own life, and that of H.D.'s, was her own attempt, I

¹ Untitled Page, Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97, Series II, Box 72, Folder 2872, Beinecke.

argued, to counter the bias of the historical record and evidence the existence of different queer desires, lives and practices.

Filed with drafts of her 1963 memoir *The Heart to Artemis* in the Bryher Papers, this manuscript fragment depicts a relation to the past that is realised through comprehension rather than via knowledge. It is not, then, concerned with scouring the limited, biased historical record, so indelibly marked and shaped by barbarism, for the ‘truth,’ but about making a connection with the past through understanding. This resonates with my own reading of Bryher’s early prose works as an effort to resist critical and sexological modes of interpretation which located the ‘truth’ of the deviant/autobiographical subject in her body, and thus sought to ‘unveil’ it. Further, Bryher’s conjuring of Marlowe in her own moment figures an alternative temporality, one which disrupts a traditional conception of historicism, of the linear, triumphal march to the present.

In this passage, moreover, Bryher considers her relation to Marlowe through her own experience of the anti-fascist resistance work she undertook in the 1930s. This was a period, as we saw in my last chapter, during which she highlighted the need for a transnational response to German fascist nationalism, with a call to arms that worked *across* difference. This has been a constant thematic of my thesis, and, I have argued, of Bryher’s work too. This sort of coalition-based praxis resonates with contemporary queer and feminist responses to subject-centred politics, which have evolved in an attempt to counter the various exclusions and problematics of identity-based politics.

It is, of course, significant that Bryher is haunted by a queer revenant.² According to Nicholas F. Radel, by the early decades of the twentieth century, in opposition to the notion of a ‘normal,’ heterosexual Shakespeare, there was the conception of a queer Marlowe (as well as an alternative Beaumont and Fletcher). Indeed, Radel sees Havelock Ellis’ (recovery) work on the Elizabethan dramatists as playing a pivotal role in moulding this dichotomy. He observes: ‘Ellis initiated a binary discourse of alternative sexualities and something that begins to look like modern heterosexuality within the early modern canon.’³ Marlowe, then, became aligned with the ‘inferior’ term in the emergent binary, homosexual/heterosexual, which, as we saw in my previous chapter, also fed into debates about mass technologies, as well as playing a part in the formation of national bodies. In

² The ghost or spectre is in itself a highly suggestive queer figuration, with the lesbian – the ‘invisible woman’ – often being represented, or considered, through images of hauntings. See, for instance, Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp.28-65

her historical vision, Bryher suggests she is able to relate to Marlowe due to their similar experiences, having both felt the heady combination of fear and exhilaration resulting from espionage work (a description which is also evocative, I think, of pre-Stonewall queer life, of the chance ‘that some quite ordinary but careless act might lead to betrayal’). It is through common experience, then, rather than via a common desire or identity, that this queer articulation arises. We could also read this ephemeral connection across time as an image of a transhistorical queer community, whose apparent fragility and evanescent nature might in fact be a boon. Following feminist theorist Iris Marion Young in ‘The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference’ (1990), I am cautious about the apparently all-embracing ideal of community, which has often led to the policing of boundaries and, thus, unanticipated exclusions.⁴ Scepticism towards the notion of community, even alternative ones, is also a marked feature of the ‘anti-social’ facet of queer theory, in the work of scholars such as Heather K. Love and Lee Edelman.⁵ Yet a desire for community, alongside an on-going dedication to fashioning a range of different connections, especially through the production and consumption of literature and cinema, is evident throughout Bryher and POOL’s textual and life practices. Indeed, I argued in my second chapter that the heiress attempted to remedy her own isolation through writing (and reading), while POOL, if we recall, held hopes for silent cinema as an *Esperanto* which might unite war-torn Europe.

My epigraph also highlights another queer facet of Bryher’s work (and, indeed, life), that is, the prevalence of cross-sex queer dynamics. Such cross-sex crossings are apparent in the various collaborative relationships Bryher undertook throughout her life, most obviously in the POOL group. Moreover, *Development* (1920) and *Two Selves* (1923) exhibit Bryher’s habit of queer borrowing, as she re-signified and re-fashioned homosexual tropes and signifiers in order to provide a language of female same-sex desire.⁶

³ Nicholas F. Radel, ‘Havelock Ellis’s Literary Criticism, Canon Formation, and the Heterosexual Shakespeare,’ *Journal of Homosexuality* 15, 8 (November 2009):pp.1046-7.

⁴ Iris Marion Young, ‘The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,’ in *Feminism/ Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990): pp.300-323

⁵ Heather K. Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁶ Sarah Walters also identifies such queer cross-sex dynamics as a significant feature of Bryher’s historical fiction, and which she refers to as her ‘romance’ of maleness’. Sarah Waters, ‘Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions 1870 to the Present’ (Unpublished PhD thesis. London, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1995), p.215

Yet, Bryher's own depiction of her queer articulation with Marlowe did not make the final 'cut' of her memoir. *The Heart to Artemis* was issued in 1963, thus coming on the heels of a period of dire homophobic stricture and censorship in the U.S., a country with which Bryher had close links. Indeed, communists, homosexuals and 'fellow travellers' were constructed as a threat to American national security with the figure of the spy being affiliated with all three. With this depiction of her haunting by Marlowe shot through with reference to espionage, perhaps Bryher considered the passage just too risky. This moment of queer disclosure – a transhistorical queer articulation – was therefore extracted (as, indeed, was any reference, except the most elusive, to Bryher's paramour, Elisabeth Bergner). In contrast to this blunt form of self-censorship, my research has considered the creative negotiations which Bryher and POOL employed in earlier experimental literary and cinematic works in order to articulate queerly in the equally censorious years between the two world wars.

I argued that Bryher's early prose works, *Development* and *Two Selves*, constituted an attempt to 'speak out,' rather than come out, and in doing so, comprised an effort to forge a queer reading community as a balm not only for her own loneliness, but to temper that of other others too. Yet this articulation had to be concealed, for, as Nancy herself observed: 'If you spoke straight out your thoughts they called you queer and shut you up.'⁷ I introduced the concept of 'veiled disclosure' to consider how Bryher revealed to readers attuned to difference what must remain concealed from the audience at large. The veiled disclosure was reliant on both Bryher's formal experimentalism, as well as her deployment of a range of queer intertexts. I suggested too that Bryher's novels sought a home and readership in the expatriate circles of the Parisian avant-garde, a literary arena in which she was beginning to move.

Following this, I transported the notion of the veiled disclosure into the arena of cinematic modernism to read POOL's *Borderline* (1930) in light of the trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). As scholars such as Laura Doan and Joanne Winning have argued, this was a formative moment in the emergence of a public image of the 'lesbian' in the English cultural imaginary. I argued that POOL constructed its manageress, played by Bryher, through a range of signifiers connoting 'Radclyffe-icity,' in order to 'speak back' to English censors on behalf of the reviled mannish woman or female invert. POOL's disclosure was similarly enabled by its use of the novel medium of film,

⁷ Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.286

and its technique of ‘clatter montage,’ which certainly rendered *Borderline* obscure to a number of viewers, while allowing it to ‘reveal’ to those with ‘open minds’. Moreover, the group’s riposte to censors was interweaved with an anti-racist politics, a twinning which, I argued, showed POOL’s acute awareness of how artistic censorship chimed with the exclusions taking place at the level of nation, which would reach devastating effect with the rise of National Socialism three years later.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, disinterring Bryher’s critically ignored novella *Manchester* from the dust of the archive, I read it alongside two *Close Up* articles, ‘Dope or Stimulus’ (1928) and ‘The Hollywood Code’ (1931), in order to suggest that it was not simply a ‘screened fictionalisation’ (though the technology of cinema was indeed a central concern) of Bryher’s visit to Manchester in 1933 to support Elisabeth Bergner.⁸ Instead, I argued that the writer undertook a critique of the homogeneity of Hollywood, and its trope of ‘the triumphal bridal procession,’ by offering a range of queer articulations, or joinings, to provide an alternative to the sole vision of a heterosexual coupling. As was the case with *Borderline*, I also suggested that Bryher recognised how artistic censorship practices enforced in the arena of culture resonated with the repressions taking place at the level of nation, in the desire for a ‘pure’ and homogenous people. I argued that *Manchester* also functioned as a call to arms to English citizens, urging them to respond to the devastation unfolding in mainland Europe. Bryher, I argued, recognised the mass technology of cinema as a crucial site of struggle with fascism, and moreover, my reading reveals her as an important and prescient critic of such popular forms, especially in relation to the category of kitsch.

This project comes to fruition at an exciting moment for scholarship on Bryher. The writer and critic has begun to slowly edge out of the shadow of H.D., as scholars have recognised the significance of her work in contributing to the expansion of the traditional notion of modernism (Joanne Winning) and as a hub in a range of intertextual relationships (Jean Radford and Marina Camboni), as well as her significance as a critical thinker (Jayne Marek and Susan McCabe). This thesis, however, has argued for the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to Bryher’s output, moving as it does across various fields, including the literary and cinematic, as well as muddying the division between the avant-garde and the popular.

⁸ The phrase derives from Susan Stanford Friedman, *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher and their Circle* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2002), p.548

So, what direction might we now take? My thesis has only been able to consider a fraction of Bryher's diverse and wide-ranging output, and only examine a fragment of the Beinecke's holdings: there is more work to be done, and an abundant archive in which to explore. Further, the use of a queer lens brings to light connections and relationships that would otherwise be obscured or ignored, and there are other dialogues to engage with. Such research would also contribute to mapping the disclosure, or emergence, of the modern lesbian as a particular category of person. And, in recognising what Walter Benjamin termed the 'weak messianic power' of the past, in seeing the multiple queer possibilities inherent in previous moments, such work has the capacity to unsettle our vision of the present, thereby differencing our own moment.⁹

I end with a beginning, with lines drawn from Bryher's 1933 poem, 'October: for E.B.,' with its resonant image of queer creative possibility:

The white bulbs are long bedded under pine,
 jonquil and jacinth sealed in paper rind;
 all the gold poplars, each a separate sun,
 hear the dark blizzards, drum the distant snow.¹⁰

A product of desire – of 'bed' and 'pin[ing]' – the bulbs are set to outlive the 'dark blizzards' and 'distant snow' that thwart their growth in the present. Bedded down in their white paper rinds, they are envelopes stuffed with queer literary potential: written and sealed they await a reader to initiate a different sort of flowering. In this thesis, using a queer theoretical lens, I have helped coax four of Bryher and POOL's texts into bloom and I have suggested that this is the *now-time* for Bryher.

⁹ See Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History,' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et al (Cambridge, Mass. & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.390

¹⁰ Bryher, 'October: for E.B.,' *Seed 2* (April-July 1933), p.10. Jonquil is a type of narcissus and jacinth a sort of hyacinth, both flowers, then, linked to homoerotic Greek myths. Like Narcissus, Hyacinth was a beautiful youth, who was beloved of Apollo. The god, however, accidentally struck him with a discus, causing his death. In his grief, and to prevent his love being claimed by Hades, Apollo transformed Hyacinth's spilled blood into the deep purple flower. The poem, then, constitutes yet another example of Bryher's queer cross-sex borrowing.

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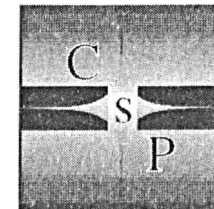
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Edited by

Zowie Davy, Julia Downes, Lena Eckert,
Natalia Gerodetti, Dario Llinares
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bound and Unbound: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Genders and Sexualities, Edited by Zowie Davy,
Julia Downes, Lena Eckert, Natalia Gerodetti, Dario Llinares and Ana Cristina Santos

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List of Images.....	vii
Introduction Editors	1
Encountering Boundaries	
“The Truth is....”–Lesbian Narratives of Gender Fabienne Jung.....	9
Innocent Boys, Unruly Women: Professional ‘Oversights’ in Sex Crimes Anna Tijsseling.....	25
Ethnographic Research into Intersexuality–Bound to the Third? Lena Eckert.....	40
Contesting Boundaries	
Transpeople’s Intimate Partnerships and the Limits of Identity Politics Tam Sanger.....	58
Contesting the Astronaut as a Masculine Ideal: Narratives of Myth in Tom Wolfe’s <i>The Right Stuff</i> Dario Llinares.....	76
Ambiguous Bodies, Ambiguous Readings: Reflections on James M. Murphy’s ‘Christine on the Cross’ Susannah Cornwall.....	93
Embracing Boundaries	
Bound to the Dual-Sex/Gender System: (Trans)Gendering and Body Modification as Narcissistic Self-Regard Zowie Davy.....	112

Embracing Victim Status in German Memorial Debates – Identity Politics Reloaded Scout Burghardt.....	131
Veiled Disclosures and ‘Speaking Back’: <i>Borderline</i> (1930) and the Presence of Censorship Fiona Philip	146
Redefining Boundaries	
‘It’s Not a Political Thing for Me - Just Sexual’: Gay Men and Nazi Fetishism Danny Beusch.....	164
‘Let Me Hear You Depoliticise My Rhyme’: Queer Feminist Cultural Activisms and Disruptions of Conventional Protest Julia Downes	181
Transgressive Bodies: Textual Constructions of the New Indian Woman Shari Daya	201
Contributors.....	219
Index.....	223

LIST OF IMAGES

6 – Figure 1. James M. Murphy, <i>Christine on the Cross</i>	102
6 – Figure 2. James M. Murphy, <i>Christine on the Cross</i>	105

With kind permission of the artist.

CHAPTER NINE

VEILED DISCLOSURES AND “SPEAKING
BACK”: *BORDERLINE* (1930)¹
AND THE PRESENCE OF CENSORSHIP

FIONA PHILIP

‘So’, observed Robert Herring in his acerbic review of the British cut - or massacre - of G.W. Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* (1929), ‘in the English version the Lesbian part [of Countess Gershwitz], so marvellously played by Alice Roberts, is cut out’. He added sarcastically, ‘We mustn’t know about them.’ (Herring, 1930: 423). Published in May 1930 in the British film journal, *Close Up*, his article bears witness to the homophobic and censorious zeitgeist of interwar Britain. Herring’s account attests further to the violence – both real and symbolic – of cultural censorship. Films are literally cut up while illicit subjectivities are cut out.

The literary record of the interwar period is equally cicatrised by censorship. Arguably the most infamous incident in British literary history was the 1928 banning of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. It was infamous because Hall’s novel was patently not obscene and because it signalled the stranglehold which the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, and his colleagues had on freedom of artistic speech in England. The infamy was further compounded because female same-sex desire not only became uncomfortably visible, but was endowed, as Laura Doan has argued in *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001), with a public face: that of Radclyffe Hall. As Doan observes the trial is considered ‘the crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian subculture,’ an event

¹ *Borderline*. Dir.: Kenneth Macpherson. UK/Switzerland: POOL. 1930. This reading is based on the British Film Institute’s copy of *Borderline*.

which resulted in ‘a narrow set of cultural signifiers [being grafted] onto an ostensibly legible homosexual body’ (Doan, 2001: xii).

The Well was published in July 1928 by Jonathan Cape, the same month that *Close Up* was celebrating its first anniversary. Hall’s fifth novel recounted the tragic and misunderstood life of the British aristocrat Stephen Gordon from early childhood to her late-thirties. Closing with Stephen’s self-imposed exile, and her anguished cry to God, ‘Give us also the right to our existence!’ (Hall, 1999: 447), *The Well* was an overt apologia for sexual inversion.

Initially, *The Well* received favourable reviews, the prevailing opinion being that Hall treated the subject admirably and inoffensively. On August 19th, however, James Douglas, the editor of the *Sunday Express*, launched his own one-man crusade against *The Well*. He called for it to be withdrawn from print in his notorious article, ‘A Book That Must Be Suppressed’ (reproduced in Doan and Prosser, 2001). Though widely disdained and ridiculed, especially by the liberal literati, Douglas’ polemical outburst initiated a concatenation of events that brought about *The Well*’s eventual banning in November 1928. Like the Wilde trials, a scandal with which Douglas drew a parallel, it was an event that prompted greater scrutiny and censure of illicit subjectivities. ‘We mustn’t know about them’, Herring’s mocking aside, aptly speaks to this and was arguably written with *The Well* in mind. His review’s linkage of lesbianism and censorship would undoubtedly have recalled the almost contemporaneous scandal to readers.

As we shall see, Hall’s novel also haunted the February 1929 ‘censorship number’ of *Close Up*, which, along with its 1930 silent film, *Borderline*, constitutes the avant-garde cinema group POOL’s most outspoken critique of British cultural censorship. POOL was a collaborative enterprise with roots in the literary avant-garde. The group comprised the English writer and modernist impresario, Bryher, the American poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and the Scottish artist, Kenneth Macpherson.² The group was not just a creative affair but also a personal and sexual one: Bryher, H.D.’s life-long partner, was married to Macpherson, who had been the poet’s lover since 1926.

This chapter explores the impact which cultural censorship had on POOL’s remarkable experimental film and, more specifically, how the almost contemporaneous banning of Hall’s novel informed *Borderline*’s production. I read the film as an attempt to ‘speak back’ to censors, in a political and social climate which was heavily policed. This reply, I argue,

² From its base in Territet, Switzerland, POOL produced *Close Up*, as well as publishing a number of film-related titles and making films.

was mediated through the figure of Hall, whose image had begun, as Doan has so convincingly shown, to signify 'lesbianism' or 'sexual inversion'.

The Figure of the Censor

Herring's contribution to *Close Up's* censorship issue, 'Puritannia Rules the Waves', was one amongst many defences of free speech that followed the banning of *The Well*. Herring's article focused on what he termed 'the English state of mind', the reactionary sensibility which stymied individuality and inhibited freedom of expression:

Most of us, if we want to live in England, have to wear coats and mufflers and fur gloves. Fur gloves don't make for a light touch, nor is clear thinking induced by a cold in the head. We are all muffled up, and kept warm by Puritannia. (Herring, 1929: 31-2)

The ageing 'Mother Puritannia', 'that elderly lady, about whom the only thing elastic is the side of her boots,' (Herring, 1929: 32) was Herring's mocking parody of censors, of establishment figures like Douglas, Joynston-Hicks and the Chief Magistrate, Sir Chartres Biron. 'Mother Puritannia' was Herring's own spin on Mrs Grundy, the Victorian figure of censorship.

Sitting at the heart of Herring's diatribe was the spectre of Hall's novel. 'Someone wrote a book', he commented, 'in which the sex wasn't quite the same. The Attorney General observed forthwith that nothing more 'corrosive or corrupt' had ever been written' (Herring, 1929: 26). Herring discretely supported Hall, referring to her novel as 'a worthy book' and one 'beyond [...] pornographic punch' (Herring, 1929: 26-7). He also highlighted the hypocrisy of a government which allowed free circulation of Denis Diderot's lascivious lesbian novel, *The Nun* (Francis Birrell's translation was published by Routledge in 1928), but proscribed Hall's comparatively chaste book.

Herring was part of a more radical and ingenious attempt to 'speak back' to British censors through his part in *Borderline*. Directed by Macpherson, its leads were played by the actor and singer Paul Robeson, his wife Eslanda, H.D. and Bryher. Herring played an effeminate pianist, whose look is constantly drawn by Robeson's character, Pete. In a film perhaps best described as a visual poem, one which works through symbolism and gesture, close ups are used to pick out the pianist's dandified accoutrements. Shots linger on his ring, bracelet and cigarette holder. The pianist's cross-gendered style is underscored by the masculinity of the café manageress, acted by Bryher. As the inverse of

Herring's effeminate character the manageress wears neither jewellery nor makeup, has cropped hair and smokes a cigar.

Scant critical attention has been paid to the character played by Bryher; readings mostly focus on the double cynosure of Robeson and H.D. (see Friedman, 1986; Debo, 2001; McCabe, 2002). When scholars have addressed the manageress they have almost exclusively interpreted her as a masculine lesbian. Richard Dyer identifies 'the dyke style of the innkeeper' (Dyer, 1987: 132); Jean Walton describes her as 'butch-looking, cigar-smoking Bryher' (Walton, 1999: 244) and Susan Stanford Friedman as the 'butch figure played by Bryher' (Friedman, 2002: 304, fn.54). Susan McCabe takes a step further labelling her a 'lesbian sign' (McCabe, 2002: 647). These designations are problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, butch and dyke are anachronistic, (American) slang terms which entered the British lexicon after the production of *Borderline*.³ Secondly, such descriptions elide a masculine sartorial style with lesbianism, collapsing the signifier into the signified, a move illustrated most obviously by McCabe's assertion that the manageress - the 'lesbian sign' - 'wears a man's suit' (McCabe, 2002: 646). She does not. For most of the film Bryher's character is dressed in a simple round-necked jumper with a plain, heavy skirt (never trousers). This costume varies in one scene only, when her dress is supplemented with a dark, mid-length jacket. Such readings obscure the polyvalent nature of sartorial masculinity in the interwar period and make assumptions about how women who dressed in plain, tailored fashions would have been interpreted by contemporaries.

In this chapter I argue that the manageress might be more fruitfully read as gesturing to Radclyffe Hall, who by 1930 was an iconic figure. This interpretation is integral to my understanding of *Borderline* as an attempt to 'speak back' to homophobic censors. I not only suggest that Bryher's performance be read as an effort to represent a proscribed identity, but that it constituted a 'politics of representation', a queer intervention. The term 'queer', rather than 'lesbian' or 'sapphic', 'gay' or 'homosexual', is apposite for a number of reasons. Queer stretches to encompass both the male and female members of the bar staff, the dandified pianist who yearns after Pete, and the mannish manageress with her feminine partner. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has remarked: 'The immemorial current that *queer* represents is antiseperatist', it is about inclusion rather than the policing of boundaries. Sedgwick continues by

³ According to Eric Partridge, 'butch' first appeared around 1945, while the OED posits 1954. 'Dyke' or 'dike', following Partridge, was adopted circa 1935, while the OED suggests 1942. Both terms are originally American. (See Partridge, 1984).

observing that, '[k]eenerly, it is relational, and strange,' (Sedgwick, 1994b: xii) which introduces the second reason for choosing queer: its descriptive quality. As Denis Flannery observes, 'queer is all about impact, that which is and which denotes the 'strange, odd, eccentric... shady, suspect' (Flannery, 2005: 268).⁴ As I will go on to illustrate, queer evokes the unsettling feel of *Borderline*. Finally, the term is befitting for a film which so utterly troubles, disrupts and ruptures the heterosexual status quo.

The manageress and the film comprise a powerful retort to the censors, those figures responsible for ostracising queer subjectivities from the realm of the symbolic. As such, Bryher's is a queer performance which speaks back on Hall's behalf, not, it should be noted, for Hall as a private individual, but for what she had come to represent: the female invert, or mannish woman. This effort, however, was necessarily covert since POOL also needed to deflect the censor's gaze. Central to the group's strategy was what I term 'veiled disclosure,' a move by which POOL revealed to the cognoscenti what must remain concealed from the audience at large. The group's attempt to rebuff British censors is inflected by and itself informs POOL's anti-racist polemic.

What, then, does the paradoxical term 'veiled disclosure' mean? The concept turns upon the binaries of knowledge/ignorance and public/private polarities which, as Sedgwick has shown, had, since the late nineteenth century, become 'not contingently but integrally infused with one particular object of cognition: no longer sexuality as a whole but even more specifically, now, the homosexual topic.' (Sedgwick, 1994a: 74). The veiled disclosure, as I conceptualise it, constitutes a breach of the public/private divide but relies on the retention of the bar between knowledge and ignorance. To employ a trope that is integral to Sedgwick's study, the veiled disclosure performs a 'coming out', an emergence from the closet but—and this is the crucial thing—only to those 'in the know', to readers/viewers able to discern and interpret the gesture. For the rest, including those who might censure such content, it must be taken at face value. POOL's retort similarly depends on the fact that seeing does not necessarily equate to knowing.

⁴ Flannery is himself quoting Sasha Roseneil in *Common Women, Uncommon Practices* (2000).

***Borderline*: a 'conglomerate of weird shots and queer situation'**

(Anonymous review cited in Friedberg, 1983: 157)

Shot in stark black and white, evocative of German Expressionist cinema, *Borderline* is marked by a compulsive use of close ups, unusual and affected camera angles and by sequences of frenetic montage. Shots of a woman's dancing feet are rapidly spliced with white hands scaling a piano and beer sloshing in a glass. A shot of a black man's head against a bank of cumulous cloud is cut with the tumult of a cataract to giddy effect. Such montages contrast with shots which voyeuristically linger on bodies, or pause meaningfully on objects, creating at times a tense and claustrophobic atmosphere. These descriptions, however, do not quite capture the strange, disturbing, queer quality of the film, which makes watching it an unnerving and uncomfortable experience. The film's abstract modernist aesthetic was wrought from a mixture of Sergei Eisenstein's cinematic theories of montage and Freud's psychoanalytic theories of the mind. In *Borderline*, bodies and gesture also play a crucial role in signification, with POOL commandeering the cast's different physical appearances, their sexual difference, gender, and race. Intertitles are used sparingly (there are just twenty-three screens) as *Borderline* subordinates the verbal to the visual.

Summarising the film is a complicated task. Not only elliptical and disjunctive, *Borderline* resists narrative coherence. In attempting to describe *Borderline*'s diegesis, critics have tended to defer to the 'libretto' a two-page summary produced by POOL and intended for distribution at screenings. The libretto runs roughly as follows. Set for the most part in a café-bar in a 'Borderline' town in the Alps (in springtime), the film dramatises the crumbling relations between a black couple, Adah (Eslanda Robeson) and Pete (Paul Robeson), and a white couple, the neurotic Astrid (H.D. as Helga Doorn) and the dipsomaniac Thorne (Gavin Arthur). The film begins as Adah and Thorne's interracial affair ends, with her preparing to leave the rooms she has been sharing with the white couple. Unbeknownst to Adah, her estranged husband, Pete, is working in a café-bar in the same town; soon the couple are reunited. In contrast, Astrid and Thorne's already jaded relationship spirals further into decay. The white couple struggle over a knife and Astrid is accidentally killed. Her death precipitates the eruption of an already simmering racial hatred from the white townfolk. Incited by a malicious old woman (Blanche Lewin) Pete is held responsible. Adah leaves town, blaming herself, while Pete remains, only to be expelled by the mayor. Having been acquitted of any

responsibility in Astrid's death, Thorne begins to recover, helped by his reconciliation with Pete.

Like McCabe, who observes that the libretto 'belies the film's experimental method' (McCabe, 2002: 644), I also believe recourse to POOL's text is problematic, though for different reasons. The libretto is a censored account of the film. A summary is necessarily a simplification but what is immediately noticeable to viewers of *Borderline* is that the libretto pares the film down considerably, bowdlerising it and effectively erasing the roles of a third group of characters. This 'censored' coterie comprises the white employees of the café-bar: Bryher's cigar-smoking manageress, and her cohorts, an energetic barmaid (Charlotte Arthur) and Herring's jazz-playing pianist. The trio features significantly in the film, most of which unrolls in the café-bar. In the libretto, however, the pianist is cut out completely while the café manageress and the barmaid feature only once:

A little old lady, symbolic of small-town "rectitude," warns the café manageress that "the negroes" will be trouble. "Why blame the negroes," asks the barmaid, "when people like Thorne are at the root of the trouble?" (Reproduced in Friedberg, 1983: 150)

The members of the bar staff are the most sympathetic white figures in the film, frequently defending Pete and Adah from the racist townfolk, as the above excerpt illustrates. McCabe has suggested that we might read *Borderline* as a riposte to D. W. Griffith's vitriolically racist *Birth of a Nation* (1915) (see McCabe, 2002), while Annette Debo contends that it 'speaks against lynching' (Debo, 2001: 374&5). Rather than acknowledging this anti-racist effort, however, POOL's only explicit claim for *Borderline* was made in relation to psychoanalysis. After pronouncing the film heir to Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul* (1927), Macpherson wrote, 'instead of the method of externalised observation, dealing with objects, I was going to take the film into the minds of the people in it' (Macpherson, 1930: 226). According to Macpherson, then, the film's focus was the invisible psychological processes then being elucidated by Freud and his followers. Scrutinising the figure of the manageress, however, brings another hidden facet to light, revealing POOL's (queer) politics of representation.

The Manageress

As well as being contrasted with Herring's effeminate pianist, the manageress is also paired with the barmaid, who is conventionally feminine with waved hair, beads, flowing skirts and high heels. Their

coupling is emphasised in a drawn out shot of the two women standing side by side, which lasts for about twelve seconds. The camera returns repeatedly to them in this scene, zooming in on their heads and shoulders. The barmaid has her arm draped over the manageress' shoulder, only shifting her position to ruffle her partner's hair affectionately. POOL's coupling of the women works to underscore the masculinity of the manageress and highlight her difference from Charlotte Arthur's more normative femininity. The barmaid's womanly clothing contrasts with the manageress' plain skirt, long round-neck jumper and her flat lace-ups. While both women have short hair, the barmaid's is waved in a more feminine fashion while the manageress' resembles a shingle cut. Finally, the manageress smokes a cigar, a more robustly phallic version of the barmaid's cigarette.

Andrea Weiss is the only critic to relate the manageress' masculine sartorial style to contemporaneous theories of sexuality and gender when she reads her as an embodiment of Edward Carpenter's 'intermediate sex', asserting: 'Bryher, with her short hair and cigar, more consistently occupies an androgynous zone.' (Weiss, 1992: 18). Rather than evoking the esoteric texts of sexual science, however, I would argue that POOL was instead drawing on a more pervasive and well-known set of signifiers, provided by the image of Radclyffe Hall. Doan has argued that it was specifically the mass dissemination of the photographed image of Hall during the trial that developed the indistinct image of the lesbian, derived from decadent and sexological literatures, into sharper focus, becoming, *pace* Hall, the mannish woman.

Even before the trial, according to one newspaper, Hall was considered 'the most easily recognized artistic celebrity in London' (cited in Castle, 1996: 19). Studio photographs taken in 1927 show Hall looking like a glamorous dandy.⁵ In both images her shingle has a distinctive kiss curl. In one photograph she is swathed in a cape, while in another she wears a high collar and jacket; in both, her features are accentuated by a touch of makeup. The images that saturated the print media following the obscenity trial, however, depicted Hall dressed in a more masculine, tailored style, and frequently showed her holding a cigarette or smoking (see Doan, 2001). The image Douglas chose to illustrate his poisonous article, 'A Book That Must Be Suppressed', was of a particularly dour and mannish looking Hall. She stands gazing out to the left with one hand in the pocket of her skirt, while the other is positioned over her chest, holding a cigarette

⁵ See Radclyffe Hall by Peter North, *The Graphic*, April 30 1927 and Radclyffe Hall (anonymous), *The Bookman*, May 1927. Reference negatives 34026 and 34025 at the Heinz Archive Library, National Portrait Gallery, London.

and monocle. She wears a silk smoking jacket over a high-collared shirt and bow tie (see Doan, 2001).

In *Fashioning Sapphism* Doan quotes from the correspondence of Bryher and H.D. to illustrate that for some contemporaries Radclyffe Hall's name literally became 'a byword for lesbian' (Doan, 2001: 194). In a letter dated mid-December 1929, Bryher wrote to H.D.: 'Lady Macpherson shattered [us] by saying . . . Mrs. Arthur is a . . . is a . . . well, you know, Radclyffe.' (cited in Doan, 2001: 28).⁶ In Bryher's anecdote, Hall's name stands in for a type or category of person that her mother-in-law finds unspeakable. This equation of the unutterable, same-sex desire and the name of a scandalised author resonates with Maurice's struggle to describe himself to a doctor, in E.M. Forster's eponymous novel: 'I'm an unspeakable, of the Oscar Wilde sort', he pronounces (Forster, 1972: 145). Whereas Maurice's allusion to Wilde leaves us in no doubt as to what 'sort' he is, Lady Macpherson's meaning is far from clear. What exactly does 'Radclyffe' signify? Lesbianism? A masculine sartorial style? Or both? We cannot be sure.

Returning to the film, the manageress' style is reminiscent of the disparaged author. Like Hall she boasts a shingle, smokes, and wears a masculinised costume, a combination of signifiers which arguably connoted 'Radclyffe-icity'.⁷ It is crucial to note, however, that the manageress does not cite Hall but gestures to her. The particulars of Hall's sartorial style, her penchant for collars and ties, her ever-present monocle, are notably absent. Indeed, the manageress (nameless and always positioned in the public space of the café, her job constitutes her identity) couldn't be further removed from Hall (a wealthy aristocrat) in the hierarchy of the English class system. This difference is important for if, as Doan has argued, Hall's style was in the process of coming to signify lesbianism, too close an association would risk drawing the censor's gaze. The manageress, then, is a distorted and condensed version of the iconic Hall; her masculine accoutrements function synecdochically for the author. The polysemous nature of 'female masculinity', however, cloaked POOL's illicit disclosure.

⁶ In Bryher's account Lady Macpherson uses 'Radclyffe' to describe Mrs Arthur, whom Doan does not identify. To my knowledge the only Mrs Arthur with whom H.D. and Bryher were acquainted was Charlotte Arthur, the actress who played *Borderline*'s barmaid and the manageress' partner.

⁷ See Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text* for his development of 'Italianness'. Barthes writes: 'Italianness is not Italy, it is the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian.' (Barthes, 1990: 48).

The 1920s, as Doan has illustrated, was the era of the 'garçonnette' and the 'boyette', when a masculinised style was in vogue. As Doan has observed, for viewers in the twenties and early thirties the mannish woman had a plethora of meanings attached to her:

the women we now read as lesbian or 'butch' [may have been read] in any number of ways: as the quintessence of the ultramodern, [...], or as slightly antiquated holdovers from the New Woman [...], or as women who were sexually attracted to others of their sex [...], or as eccentric. (Doan, 2001: 181)

Doan's slew of 'ors' foregrounds the protean nature of female sartorial masculinity, which remained unanchored from a specific signified for much of the interwar period, and which thus allowed the manageress 'to pass' in *Borderline*. The manageress' performance then is a veiled disclosure, with 'Radclyffe-icity' smuggled in with the mannish woman, thus revealing to the cognoscenti what must remain concealed from the censors.

Bryher's performance, however, does not simply gesture to Hall, it rescinds the figure of the ostracised invert, offering a recuperative vision of the mannish woman. Her character is (one of) the most sympathetic white figures in the film, in stark contrast to the racism of Astrid and the townfolk. The manageress and the barmaid, moreover, are the only couple to survive the film, while the heterosexual pairs are violently riven. As *Borderline* draws to an end Pete waits on the empty train platform, having been deserted by Adah, and Thorne walks alone on the mountainside, after Astrid's death. In contrast, the barmaid goes about her usual business, filling glasses and polishing the bar, while the last shot is reserved for the manageress, who with pen in mouth, checks her figures before shutting her folder. This stance recalls both Hall, the author, and her writer protagonist, Stephen.

The trial of Hall's book was a moment when the private, sexual self was dragged into public view. Virginia Woolf's brief digression in *A Room of One's Own* illuminates this:

Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words that I read were these – 'Chloe liked Olivia . . .'. (Woolf, 1992: 106)

Woolf dramatises the dissolution of the boundary between public and private which the trial entailed, the fear that 'the privacy of our own

society' was at risk from invasion by the law, embodied here as Biron, and consequently admits that self-censorship is now a necessary mode. 'Chloe liked Olivia . . .' Woolf implies, is all a writer could now hazard. In *Borderline* we only ever see the public faces of the manageress and the barmaid as they work in the café. The camera is never permitted to stray into their private realm, as it does repeatedly with characters like Pete, Astrid and Thorne. The censorial gaze is stopped at the bedroom door and the women are left to like women in peace.

Through Bryher's performance POOL returned an agency and subjectivity to the maligned mannish woman. This transformation, more specifically, this *inversion* provides a powerful metaphor for both *Borderline* and this chapter. Alongside its sexological definition, 'inversion' is also a rhetorical term meaning 'The turning of an opponent's argument against himself'. *Borderline* offers such a volte-face. It inverts the position of the (female) invert, transforming her from a 'decadent apostle' to a sympathetic character. This movement, the inversion, is undoubtedly queer. According to Sedgwick the term 'comes from the indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.' (Sedgwick, 1994b: xii). This torsion suffuses every aspect of the film. For *Borderline* also inverts the censor's powerful position in society, as wielder of the gaze, as well as visiting (some) of their violence back upon them.

Reading *Borderline*: Artistic Censorship

Critics of *Borderline* have offered a number of interpretations of the film's disjunctive and giddy construction. For both Debo and Hazel V. Carby *Borderline's* form gestures specifically to its concern with racism, to the violence afflicted upon the black male body through lynching (see Carby, 1998; Debo, 2001). McCabe suggests that its form speaks more generally to the formation of subjectivities. She writes, the 'self-conscious cutting highlights the film's obsession with racial and sexual body marking; by disrupting the seamless narrative, the act of montage reveals itself as capable of taking apart installed cultural fantasies and refashioning them.' (McCabe, 2002: 640). Whilst acknowledging these enlightening readings, I want to suggest another interpretation, which both works through and informs those already offered. *Borderline's* form gestures repeatedly to another concern of POOL's, and one vividly evident in *The Well's* trial: artistic censorship.

If one knew nothing about *Borderline* it would be easy to conclude that it too was a mutilated survivor of censor's scissors, whose cutting was

responsible for the film's distinctive jagged and dizzying sequences. Herring noted that in the English cut of *Pandora's Box*, 'All rhythm, of course, vanished' (Herring, 1930: 423). Again, like Pabst's massacred film, *Borderline* is full of diegetic gaps and incoherence: conversations are entered *in medias res*, questions are frequently left unanswered, and the two letters included as intertitles are fragmentary: both begin with ellipses. The lacunae are particularly apparent when the film's actual unfolding is contrasted with the melodramatic narrative of the libretto, which, as I noted earlier, lends the film a coherence that in reality it does not possess.

The instruments of censorship, knives and scissors, recur in *Borderline*, whose 'central character', as McCabe observes, is 'cutting' (McCabe, 2001: 641). In an early scene Thorne plays with a knife in the bedroom, running it down his face and letting it hang suggestively between his legs. This knife becomes the means of Astrid's death when the white couple struggles over it in a pivotal scene. Although we are not party to Astrid's fatal wound, she inflicts a number of cuts on Thorne's face and hand. Yet another knife is clutched between the teeth of the barmaid as she simulates a Russian dance in the bar. The tools of censorship, however, also double as the instruments of filmmaking, an irony of which POOL was not unaware. A scene in the bar captures the barmaid cutting some dark fabric with scissors as she twirls around to the (silent) music of the pianist. She ceases dancing as, with aplomb, she places a hat onto her head. The two characters and their movements are rapidly intercut, imbuing the barmaid's attempt at amateur millinery with the pianist's accomplished playing, and gesturing to the cutting and editing implicit in this construction of the film.

Though *Borderline's* form alludes to its concern with censorship, POOL's most important riposte to censors is entwined with and inflected by its critique of white racist society. Debo forcefully argues that POOL 'addresses the machinery of white racism' by 'condemning racist individuals and governing institutions' (Debo, 2001: 372-3). *Borderline* reveals the hypocrisy at the heart of Western racist society as Pete is ejected from the community, and needlessly blamed for Astrid's death. Thorne, meanwhile, walks free. As McCabe asserts: 'The borders of sex and race overlap' (McCabe, 2002: 648), and Pete's banishment arguably speaks to the figure of the ostracised female invert too, who was symbolically exiled through the suppression of *The Well*. Moreover, *Borderline's* ending echoes that of Hall's novel: in both texts the sympathetic protagonists are left outcast and alone in order to illuminate and critique society's damaging racism/homophobia. In addition to what might be termed the iconic veiled disclosure, which I traced earlier,

Borderline then performs a textual veiled disclosure too. The film gestures to a gesture. Hall's *cri de coeur* of two years earlier is evoked as *Borderline* effectively ends with Pete's cry to God, 'Give us the right to our existence!'

The elision of inversion and racial difference is brought into greater relief through a close reading of Pete and the manageress. From the film's outset, Pete, as an employee of the café, is linked to the queer bar staff. This is underscored at frequent intervals in the film: the barmaid defends Pete against the local racists; the pianist keeps a photograph of Pete propped on his piano, and along with the manageress intervenes on Pete's behalf when Thorne barges into his room. It is the manageress, however, who is repeatedly connected with Pete.

The crucial scene occurs midway through the film. In his room Pete kneels to light and then tend the flame of his stove, gestures and actions which recall the manageress only minutes before as she makes coffee in the café below. Sharing the table with Bryher's character are the old lady and a bespectacled, moustachioed man, played by Macpherson.⁸ The old lady rants at the manageress, wagging her finger vigorously and declaims (via intertext), 'If I had my way, not one negro would be allowed in this country'. The intercutting between Bryher's character, the effervescing coffee and the apoplectic old lady, constructs the manageress, alongside Pete, as at the root of her ire. Following shortly after this scene intradiegetic shots depict the old lady brandishing a broom or thumping her fist into her palm while superimposed on a black background with flames licking her. These shots ground her more solidly as the racial censor.

Later on Pete shares a joke with the bar staff. Robeson's character accepts a rose head from the barmaid, which he places behind his ear, simultaneously clasping the headless stem in his right hand and holding a silver platter behind his head with the other hand, simulating a flamenco dancer. Pete's feminine pose, which inflects him with the cross-gendered style that so clearly marks the pianist and, more obviously, the manageress, underscores his pairing with Bryher's character.

The most transparent incident of linkage, however, occurs during an exchange that takes place when Pete discovers he must leave town. This sequence contains one of the more sustained uses of intertext in the film. Having read the letter of expulsion he asks the manageress, 'What do you think?' She shrugs and displays her dismay by ripping up the letter and placing it on the bar in front of her, then replies, 'Sorry, Pete! What makes it worse is they think they're doing the right thing. We're like that!' Their interchange ends with Pete directly echoing her, 'Yes, We're like that.'

⁸ See (Debo, 2001) for her identification of Macpherson.

The manageress' slippage in her use of pronouns emphasises her affiliation with Pete: 'they' conveys her conscious separation from the racist townsfolk, though 'we' problematically suggests her complicity in his banishment.

POOL's ironic comment on the workings of a racist (and homophobic society) are underscored by its representation of Pete's judges, who also double as caricatures of censors. Though the power they wield is presented as tangible and harmful the judges themselves are given no credibility in the film. They are figured only obliquely. The mayor appears via a signature in the letter of expulsion while the police are depicted as the disembodied silhouette of an arm projected on the opaque glass of the police station. As such they are robbed of the gaze, the 'tool' of censorship, a practice founded upon sight. In the absence of the town authorities the little old lady and the drunken rabble that mindlessly follows her comprise *Borderline*'s racists.

Lewin's character is dressed in a Victorian style, with white gloves, a cameo brooch and a swath of lace around her neck. Her age and dress gesture to the most well known figuration of censorship, Mrs Grundy. *Borderline*'s most vitriolic racist, however, seems drawn from the pages of Herring's 'Puritannia Rules the Waves'. She evokes his parody of British censors, 'Mother Puritannia', 'that elderly lady, about whom the only thing elastic is the side of her boots' (Herring, 1929: 32). In later scenes the old lady's outfit is supplemented by the addition of a fur muffler, which recalls Herring's description of a nation suffocated by censorship (see above). In *Borderline* the stifling tendency of 'Mother Puritannia' is infused with hyperbole and transported to another level in those sequences in which the old lady is superimposed on a black fiery background. The flames allude to the most well known means of destroying banned books, including *The Well*: incineration. POOL, however, goes further, using the new language of film to (symbolically) revisit the violence back on censors.

Censorship is founded upon the gaze and upon scrutiny, a point that H.D. underscores in 'The Cinema and the Classics I' when she characterises the censor as 'the Cyclops' and 'this Polyphemous' (H.D., 1927: 26&34). Her choice of the mythological Greek giant, with its single huge eye, emphasises the crucial role which looking plays in censorship. Within the bounds of *Borderline*, 'Mother Puritannia' is effectively divested of her censorial gaze, as her sight is repeatedly blocked. When first introduced, Lewin's character is cast as an onlooker, standing in the doorway of the café surveying the unfolding events. She is shot, however, through the beaded curtain which covers the entrance, thus rendering her

oblique to viewers and consequently occluding her own sight too. This shot is repeated, foregrounding her disrupted gaze. In another instance, Astrid stares out of the window shortly before her death. The camera cuts to the old lady on the street below. The lingering shot captures Lewin's character standing behind an iron fence, holding a basket of rhubarb. The old lady becomes the spectacle, caught by another's gaze and deprived of the means to 'look back', symbolised by the fence.

The disruption of the authoritarian gaze, however, is most evident during the altercation which occurs between Pete and the old lady's compatriot, the bespectacled man, acted by Macpherson. As Pete and Adah pass through the café on their way out, the nameless client verbally assails her, presumably uttering a racist slur. In her defence Pete punches this man, who is sent sailing across a table onto the floor. This client is one of only two figures in the film to wear glasses, an obvious signifier of the gaze, which aligns him with censorship. To foreground this further, immediately preceding his verbal assault on Adah, shots of the 'loathsome' man are intercut with the image of the old lady gesticulating in the flames, suggesting her influence on the incident. As Pete approaches the man he rips his glasses from his face before being sent sprawling, sightless, to the ground. Pete's violent response captures in minutiae what POOL was attempting in its experimental film.

McCabe has suggested that *Borderline* 'questions and displaces the authority of the gaze' through its deployment of 'avant-garde' montage (McCabe, 2002: 641). Building upon this premise she argues that 'the same camera which objectifies Robeson also opens up a space from him to 'look back' (to use Silverman's term) at the white gaze' (McCabe, 2002: 641). Against the backdrop of the banning of *The Well* and in the context of POOL's riposte, McCabe's reading is a salient one. The film, however, does not favour Pete, as McCabe suggests, providing him alone with a means to 'look back' at the dominant gaze. Rather, POOL's 'clatter' montage, as H.D. termed it, had the effect of creating a network of looks. The pianist stares at a photograph of Pete, as well as the man himself, the manageress and the barmaid exchange glances, and Adah even 'looks back', her eye caught reflected in a compact mirror.

This complex of looks foreshadows Laura Mulvey's call to arms in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). In her groundbreaking essay, Mulvey identifies three different gazes in the cinema, that of the camera, the spectator and the diegetic looks between characters. She argues: '[t]he conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third' (Mulvey, 1985: 816). Since 'the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form', as Mulvey

argues, Hollywood narrative cinema has been inscribed with society's 'sexual imbalance', rendering women as 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and men as the 'bearer of the look' (Mulvey, 1985: 803, 809-810). Moreover, since such films are structured around a male protagonist, the man becomes 'the bearer of the look of the spectator' too (Mulvey, 1985: 810). In attempting to disrupt this powerful and pervasive gender imbalance embedded in narrative cinema Mulvey forcefully argues for the creation of a 'new language of desire' (Mulvey, 1985: 805). She writes, 'The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions [...] is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment.' (Mulvey, 1985: 816). *Borderline*'s use of montage executes these blows, with no one character functioning as 'bearer of the look', which is instead freed into a heterogeneous network. As such the look is returned to those who had previously been the object of its scrutiny, in the context of my argument, the masculine woman or invert. This volte-face, then, replaces the furtive gaze of censors with that of the manageress, who has her 'eye clamped to the keyhole' (Bryher, 1963: 308).

This chapter has argued that POOL's silent film *Borderline* speaks back to British censors, on behalf of the abjected female invert who was symbolically ostracised by the banning of *The Well*. The crux of POOL's queer sexual politics, and my chapter, is the figure of the manageress played by Bryher. Through the manageress' posturing to the iconic figure of Radclyffe Hall, the face of female sexual inversion, POOL subtly and ingeniously inscribed an illicit subjectivity into its film while simultaneously deflecting the censor's gaze. Bryher's character also leads the antistrophe which counters 'Mother Puritania's racist chorus, producing an alternative ethos within the bounds of the film. Moreover, Bryher's queer performance offers a sympathetic portrait of the maligned masculine woman. POOL's film thus inverts the position of the (female) invert, transmuting her from pariah to pacifier, and from martyr, Stephen Gordon's ultimate fate in *The Well*, to manager(ess).

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