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**'Recrossing the Ritual Bridge':  
Jane Ellen Harrison's Theory of Art in the  
Work of Hope Mirrlees**

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## Abstract

This thesis considers the dominating element of ritual in the works of Hope Mirrlees, a theme and structuring framework that grows out of her relationship to the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison. Harrison's theory, which draws on modern theories of anthropology and psychology and up-to-date archaeological excavations of antiquities, comments on the modernist period through the unique lens of her ritual theory of art. I explore how the grounding of her theory in these fields as well as the visual-tactile practice of archaeology and the body-focused aesthetic of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood point towards a materialist, performative aesthetic centred on process and desire. Her ritual theory, I argue, can be read as a diagnosis of the cultural, intellectual and aesthetic climate of her day, calling for a greater emphasis on emotional, embodied experience in religion as well as art, challenging the individualist intellectualism of theology and what she sees as the static, lifeless nature of realist representation. This thesis concerns itself with the way the writer closest to Harrison, who claims to owe her entire worldview to her, absorbs Harrison's ideas and takes on this challenge. Mirrlees's work shows a preoccupation with the process of representation, particularly representation of aspects of experience that evades rational understanding and expression: dreams and the workings of the unconscious, and mystical experience. Mirrlees turns to the Romantic tradition for its engagement with these things, locating herself within a strain of Romantic writing that foregrounds dreams, gothic fantasy and mysticism – a strain that Mirrlees, using Harrison's theory, argues has its roots in primitive ritual. Harrison's formulation of the ritual origin of art provides a framework for her to pursue her quest of representing the unrepresentable, producing a highly performative literary aesthetic which, like Harrison, never loses sight of the religious, magical function of art.

The gem of Mirrlees's oeuvre, this thesis argues, is *Paris*, which is discussed over two chapters. The first examines the presence of ritual elements in the poem's verbal content, considering how it enacts a post-war ritual of transition into a new age, fuelled by a desire and hope for spiritual renewal and yet marked by a deep ambivalence regarding the future. The second chapter on *Paris*, the third chapter of the thesis, shows the ground-breaking originality that *Paris* demonstrates in the way it harnesses typographical space to facilitate an integrated verbal-concrete enactment of ritual. This analysis highlights the importance of the hand-

printing tradition from which *Paris* emerges, and makes use of a broad history of the book and reading habits to show how in itself this crafting tradition and the poem's use of space signify a ritualisation, in Harrison's sense, of book-making; I argue that in making this connection evident with its grounding in ritual theory, *Paris* marks a unique intersection between ritual and the history of the book. Mirrlees's antiquarianism is a central component of this analysis, as for her it is also a practice steeped in the materiality and mystical experience of ritual, and leads to the artefact-like quality of her concretely spaced, rare hand-printed and hand-bound masterpiece with its enclosed, esoteric ritual. Antiquarianism and a focus on the performativity of language are, this thesis argues, also central to Mirrlees's fantasy novel *Lud-in-the-Mist*, which can be read as a self-reflexive investigation into the themes, tropes and function of the fantasy genre. I highlight the novel's interrogation of language and narrative as signifiers of reality, and its defence of fantasy as a mode rooted in the psychological processes that give rise, in Harrison's theory, to primitive ritual.

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This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my grandmother.



# Introduction

It is at the outset one and the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theatre.<sup>1</sup>

A swift, fleeting sense of the past is as near as I have ever got to a mystical experience . . . a sudden *physical* conviction (like fingering for the first time the antiquity one had so often gazed at through the glass case in the museum), that Horace and Virgil did *really once* travel together to Brandusium, and that Horace was kept awake by mosquitos and the love-songs of tipsy boatmen [....].<sup>2</sup>

[I]f poets could only be antiquaries! For antiquaries alone among mortals can restore the past and preserve the present, *tangibly*.<sup>3</sup>

[T]he Written Word is a Fairy.<sup>4</sup>

The first of the above statements, from the opening paragraph of *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) by Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), announces the main theme of her ritual theory of art, and the starting point of this thesis. In her examination of Greek religion, Harrison excavates what she sees as the religious impulse that develops into art and theology. This impulse finds its fullest expression in primitive ritual, she argues, applying modern anthropological findings to ancient Greece. She makes her findings directly relevant to her own time by observing in 1913 a return to a more ritualistic approach in the arts as well as religious attitudes (*Ancient Art and Ritual* 112-137; ‘Rationalism and Religious Reaction’).

Joining a number of authors of the period – including T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Mary Butts and H.D. – who draw on classical and other archaic mythology as frameworks for their writing, the work of Hope Mirrlees (1887-1978) mines primitive myth and ritual as tools for literary experimentation. Her approach harnesses specifically Harrison’s theory with a keen sensitivity to its nuances that reflects the closeness of their relationship. While Harrison relied for her findings on the apparatus of archaeological excavation in her feminist classicism,

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1).

<sup>2</sup> Mirrlees, ‘Listening in to the Past’ (670).

<sup>3</sup> Mirrlees, *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton* (92-93).

<sup>4</sup> Mirrlees, *Lud-in-the-Mist* (273).

Mirrlees assumes the role of the imaginative excavator of myth and ritual in her writing. Her quest echoes that of the Dorset-born novelist Mary Butts, who also drew keenly on Harrison's theories, and who in her journals announces at one point that 'it is for art to take over the anthropologist's material' (qtd. in Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism: The Enchantment of Place* 17). Here, Butts refers to the way her project investigates areas once considered purely scientific - the origin of human communities and the myths which sustain them,<sup>5</sup> a task undertaken also by, for example, T.S. Eliot,<sup>6</sup> and a task which is central, as well, to Mirrlees's project.

The two primary literary texts by Mirrlees treated in this thesis are *Paris: A Poem* (1920) and *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926), both of which highlight the recovery of forgotten myth and ritual through the figure of the antiquary, a person who, Mirrlees argues, performs the antiquarian 'magic' of resurrecting the past and preserving the present. This antiquarian project, as the second quotation above implies and this thesis will show, is for Mirrlees a mystical undertaking; it is steeped in ritual and eludes direct verbal representation. Thus, as the third and fourth quotations above suggest, Mirrlees's writing reveals an impatience with the limits of language as a representational medium and an interest, instead, in its magical potential. The primary sources by Mirrlees examined here – and a number of supporting texts – show her pointing to these inadequacies of language while at the same time attempting to resurrect, along with lost religious practices and mentalities, what she sees as a lost magical function of language born out of primitive ritual. *Paris* and *Lud-in-the-Mist*, as a result of this experiment, deploy a performative quality that harnesses certain formal, aesthetic implications inherent in Harrison's theory and methods. Harrison's ritual theory of art emphasises the emotion-fuelled, embodied mystical process of ritual over what she see as its eventual products: aetiological myths, drama and other art forms that emerge as abstracted representations of this process. Her archaeological approach – contrasting with the more standard linguistics-based classical research of her day – underlines her preference for concrete, visual, embodied engagement over a more abstract, intellectualised understanding of

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<sup>5</sup> See Radford's *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism: The Enchantment of Place* for an in-depth analysis of Butts's work, treating among other things her anthropological approach to literature.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Crawford.

the classical past, religion and art. This suggests a formal aesthetic that highlights immediacy, performativity and the role of emotion, and problematises the act of representation. This aesthetic potential is mined by Mirrlees with the magical pasts her texts seek to recover; her imaginative archaeological explorations into myths and rituals of the past are also an exploration of their connection to language and its function. The ritual is performed as it is excavated. *Paris*, an excavation of ritual, is itself a ritual performance; *Lud-in-the-Mist* is a fantasy pointing to the ritual origin and historical function of fantasy. The focus of this study is thus the way in which Harrison's theory acts as a valuable resource which Mirrlees puts to inventive and original use in *Paris*, hailed 'modernism's lost masterpiece' by Julia Briggs in 2007 ('Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism' 261), but gathering increasing attention ever since, and *Lud-in-the-Mist*, a cult classic among fantasy readers but only beginning to be given serious attention within literary criticism of the period.

These two texts have been chosen for this thesis because they show a thoroughgoing engagement with Harrison's theory on both a thematic and formal level. Mirrlees's historical fiction *Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists* (1919) and *The Counterplot* (1924), a realist novel but containing a full-length play, are not treated in this thesis even though in them Mirrlees does draw heavily on Harrison's theory. These books explore key aspects of ritual, particularly the act of representation, its roots in desire and the difficulty of bridging the gulf between life and art. However, while they complement *Paris* and *Lud-in the-Mist* in their engagement with ritual, this engagement is largely thematic; they depict the workings of ritual in the way art is born, but ritual is not strongly evident in the formal devices used in these texts. Of *Madeleine*, Mirrlees notes years later in an interview that

It is cluttered up with learning, weighed down, utterly ruined. There are two people in me—one a sort of poet the other a sort of scholar, and in the case of *Madeleine* the scholar has killed both the poet and the book. (Qtd. in Henig, 12)

Mirrlees's own judgement of her novel should not be taken as the benchmark for appraising its literary and historical worth. Indeed, the feminist reappraisal of the seventeenth-century *précieuses* and the connection she makes between this literary movement and Jansenism comprise an original and very carefully executed application of Harrison's ritual theory; moreover, Mirrlees's use of the genre of historical fiction functions in a similar way to her use of the fantasy genre in *Lud-in-the-Mist*. However, her comment that the book is weighed down by scholarly fact is not undue. With its emphasis on explaining rather than performatively

demonstrating it does not harvest the aesthetic potential of Harrison's ritual theory with the same clarity as the texts chosen here.

*The Counterplot*, on the other hand, is immensely readable, and formally experimental to the extent that it includes a play within the novel – staged by the protagonist in a ritualistic sublimation of unconscious desire. On the whole, however, it employs a realist style and little or no engagement with mysticism. Thus its focus is quite different from the texts studied here. While closer study of these works is certainly warranted and overdue, the focus of this thesis has been necessarily selective in order to highlight the work by Mirrlees that most boldly and innovatively exploits both the thematic and formal, aesthetic implications of Harrison's theory and to explore this literary use of the theory in depth. Thus, while these novels could have organically been read alongside the chosen texts, their treatment has, due to constraints of space, to lie beyond the scope of this project. Mirrlees's later collection of poems, *Moods and Tensions*, published in growing volumes between 1963 and 1976, has not been considered here due to the complete change of style and content in her work by this point. Conservative both formally and thematically, these poems do not make the original, experimental use of Harrison's theory found in her earlier work and as such would not fit with the aims of this study.

This thesis also makes extensive use of non-literary materials by Mirrlees. These include essays appearing in journals, all of which can now be found in Sandeep Parmar's 2011 collection of Mirrlees's poems and essays; unpublished essays and other archival material, including research on Romanticism and notes for her never completed biography of Harrison, and a few instances of Mirrlees's and Harrison's letter correspondences. Mirrlees's biography of the Elizabethan antiquary Robert Cotton, entitled *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton* (1962) is also heavily drawn upon.

This project was incited by Harrison's obvious prominence in Mirrlees's texts, urging me to discover what a writer so close to Harrison could have done with a theory so rich in thematic and formal potential and so in tune with its time. One of the aims of this thesis has thus been to explore the potential of Harrison's theory as a resource for a modern writer. Shanyn Fiske notes Harrison's (along with J.G. Frazer's and Freud's) leading role in recreating through their anthropological studies a 'seductive and practically usable space for the modernist imagination' ('From Ritual to the Archaic in Modernism: Frazer, Harrison, Freud, and the Persistence of Myth' 175). Harrison's version of the classical world, this thesis argues, provided a particularly pertinent antidote to widely felt religious, social and aesthetic lacks,

and as such significantly contributes to existing narratives of the period and ongoing revisions of these narratives – something which she is gradually being recognised for. The inclusion of Fiske’s chapter on Harrison, Frazer and Freud in the 2013 edition of *A Handbook of Modernism Studies* underlines Harrison’s increasing visibility in modernist scholarship. Harrison has received increasing attention over the past few decades, the groundwork being laid by studies situating her theory within the evolution of ritual theories of myth,<sup>7</sup> aided by accounts of her life as one of the first professional British female academics.<sup>8</sup> Harrison is the central figure of an important recent study by Fiske, entitled *Heretical Hellenism: Women Writers, Ancient Greece, and the Victorian Popular Imagination* (2010), that considers the Hellenism of Victorian women whose access to Hellenism lacked the formal classical training given to men of the middle and upper classes. She connects Harrison’s insecurities about her competence in ancient Greek with her archaeological and anthropological approach. Importantly, she highlights what Harrison’s refers to as the ‘sympathetic imagination’ that enables an intuitive, creative sense of continuity with the ancient past, transforming her inadequate linguistic training ‘into an epistemology of loss and a rationale for imaginative recovery’ (162).<sup>9</sup>

Harrison has been fruitfully read in relation to modernist writers who drew inspiration from, and are intertextually in dialogue with, her anthropological, feminist classicism. Studies have emerged sporadically that trace the echoes and use of Harrison’s theory in the works of Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and H.D.<sup>10</sup> Jean Mills points out in relation to her own recent study on Harrison and Woolf that her research not only sheds new light on Woolf’s

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Ackerman’s *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (2013, originally published 1991), and Segal’s ‘In Defence of Mythology: The History of Modern Theories of Myth’ (1980).

<sup>8</sup> See Robinson’s *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* and Beard’s *The Invention of Jane Harrison*.

<sup>9</sup> For another study on Harrison’s impact on the classics, and the stir caused in this field by her unorthodox views, see Arlen.

<sup>10</sup> For a pioneering study of Eliot’s use of Harrison’s anthropological ideas, see Crawford’s *The Savage and the City in the Work of T.S. Eliot* (1987); for an investigation into the use of anthropological motifs from Harrison’s theory in the work of Woolf, Joyce and Eliot, see Carpentier’s *Ritual, myth, and the modernist text: the influence of Jane Ellen Harrison on Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf*; for studies on Harrison and Woolf, see Maika’s *Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts and Jane Harrison’s Con/Spiracy* and Shattuck’s ‘The Stage of Scholarship: Crossing the Bridge from Harrison to Woolf’; for an analysis of intersections between Harrison, H.D. and Isadora Duncan, see Anderson’s ‘Dancing Modernism: Ritual, Ecstasy and the Female Body’. Phillips’s 1991 essay ‘Jane Harrison and Modernism’ maps out some general overlapping themes between Harrison’s work and modernist literature.

work but helps to refresh our knowledge of Harrison's work as well: 'Jane Harrison's work becomes renewed and re-vitalized precisely because Virginia Woolf can be read through the prism of Harrison's work' (2). In the same vein, this thesis, in highlighting Harrison as an important source for Mirrlees, not only shows Mirrlees engaging in an original, sophisticated adaptation and transformation of Harrison's ideas, which brings her credit, but Harrison's work, too, is given new life by being read as underlying such formally innovative and exciting works as *Paris* – 'obscure, indecent, and brilliant' in Woolf's estimation<sup>11</sup> – and *Lud-in-the-Mist*, which are beginning to be appreciated for their participation in the elaboration of literary modernism.

Since Julia Briggs's analysis and annotated facsimile of *Paris* was published in 2007,<sup>12</sup> Mirrlees has gradually become a familiar name to scholars of modernism although as yet little research has been done to highlight continuities in her work and consider the intellectual, cultural and aesthetic trends with which they might be in dialogue. Briggs's annotations of *Paris* are crucially useful to newcomers to the poem who might otherwise be put off by the amount of detail pertaining to Paris of 1919. Briggs's own analysis of *Paris* focuses on ways in which the poem draws on Continental poetic experiments in typography. This reading is useful for understanding Mirrlees's engagement with contemporary poetic innovations, and has been useful in attracting attention to her, but can be viewed, rather than as the last word, as a foundational building block for further study on an immensely complicated, daring and learned writer.

When this project began, Mirrlees's work was a research area that was only beginning to be mapped out; since then there has been a steady increase in attention given to Mirrlees within modernist studies.<sup>13</sup> Michael Swanwick's biography *Hope-in-the-Mist* was published in 2009, giving interested academics a sense of Mirrlees and an introduction to *Lud-in-the-Mist* by a fellow fantasy writer, but also giving the book a slightly narrow focus. Three short

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<sup>11</sup> For Woolf's comment, see for example Briggs ('Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism' 267).

<sup>12</sup> While Mirrlees had in fact already been 'rediscovered' by Suzanne Henig in her article 'Queen of Lud: Hope Mirrlees' in 1972, Henig's article has not had the impact that Briggs's work has had on further research on Mirrlees.

<sup>13</sup> A panel specifically on Mirrlees at the 2012 'Material Modernisms' conference hosted by the EAM in Kent, and a panel whose call for papers specifically invited papers on Mirrlees at the following EAM conference, 'Utopia', in Helsinki, also testify to this surge in interest.

introductions to Mirrlees were included in a 2011 issue of *Time Present: The Newsletter of the T.S. Eliot Society*, one of them noting the Harrisonian themes in the poem (Gish, Connor and Pondrom). *Lud-in-the-Mist*, republished in 1970 and then in 2000 and 2005, has been popular among fantasy readers since its rediscovery but is only beginning to receive critical attention. It has been included in two recent studies on fantasy: Brian Attebery's *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (2014) which also considers aspects of a Harrisonian frame for the novel, and Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008).

Sandeep Parmar's 2013 collection of Mirrlees's poetry and essays marks a promising turning point in Mirrlees's inclusion in the canon of aesthetic modernism;<sup>14</sup> the texts included, and Parmar's extensive biographical introduction to the works – not an easy feat when the subject did not keep a journal or carry out lengthy correspondences – are invaluable materials for scholars interested in Mirrlees. However, while Parmar's introduction includes her own reading of *Paris*, focusing on the 'I' of the poem – the self as shifting between immersion in the flux of life and individual personality – and an overview of *Moods and Tensions*, much work remains to be done in the way of offering a way in to the texts for those encountering Mirrlees for the first time.<sup>15</sup> A theoretical framework, connections between texts, attention to recurring themes, are much needed tools for the development of a critical body of work on Mirrlees. This thesis hopes to contribute to this as yet scant body of work with an in-depth investigation into a core theme of Mirrlees's writing.

Chapter 1 seeks to understand Harrison's theory within the context of the emerging social sciences and developments in the arts. Here, I outline the evolution of the anthropological scholarship of myth on which Harrison's theory builds. In my overview of Harrison's work I highlight the way in which her theory challenges the rationalist, progressivist assumptions underpinning the theories of anthropological mythographers predating and contemporaneous with hers. The core characteristics of ritual that mark her theory – mysticism, embodiment, performance, process and flux, indeterminacy, the centrality of female figures – emerge as a reaction to these studies of myth and the 'sweetness and light'

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<sup>14</sup> The book received, furthermore, a very insightful review by Patrick McGuiness in *The Guardian* noting the mystical theme of *Paris* and highlighting the immediacy of its poetic effects and its foregrounded engagement with the modern urban everyday at the time it was written.

<sup>15</sup> This point has also been made in a review by Rosie Šnajdr.

model of classicism that still held much sway at the turn of the century. I consider the way her ritual theory draws on key developments in archaeology, anthropology, psychology and the arts that defined the cultural-aesthetic climate of her day: the physical excavation of ancient Greek ruins, theories of the ‘primitive’, the scientific approach to the unconscious and the ‘herd instinct’, the rekindling of Catholic ritualism through the Oxford Movement and the iconography of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and anti-Enlightenment philosophical positions culminating in the widely popular vitalist theories of Henri Bergson. This chapter examines, furthermore, the intersection of the ritual theory of art with developments in aesthetic trends. Considering examples from a number of art forms – visual art, dance, theatre, literature – I highlight the focus on performativity, embodiment and process that Harrison shares with what are generally considered the crucial shifts towards a ‘modern’ aesthetic. Harrison’s observation that ‘[a]rt in these latter days goes back as it were on her own steps, recrossing the ritual bridge back to life’ (*Ancient Art and Ritual* 113) thus emerges as a fruitful framework for considering key developments in the arts in the early twentieth century. Indeed, Harrison’s theory connects with so wide an array of shifts in thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that her theory, I argue, provides a kind of lens on the period. As her friend Prince Mirsky (with whom Harrison and Mirrlees collaborated on their Russian translations) observes, ‘the way walked by her from the study of Greek vases through that of primitive religion to Freud and to Tolstoy will be recognised as one of the most illuminating expressions of the intellectual evolution of the English mind at the turn of two historical epochs’ (‘Jane Ellen Harrison and Russia’ 102).

This chapter considers the main ways in which Mirrlees’s work draws on and engages with Harrison’s theory. The mysticism at the heart of Harrison’s description of primitive religion, I argue, pervades Mirrlees’s writing. This is evident from the content of her works but also, perhaps more originally, in her experimentation with language. Mirrlees struggles in many of her works with the issue of representation, which she conceptualises in Harrisonian terms as the divide between life and art. A persistent wish appears to be to make language express the inexpressible – the mysterious, unconscious, or as Harrison terms it ‘aneikonic’ aspects of life. I consider how her antiquarianism is an engagement with this problem of representation, and this focus on the mystical bridging of the tangible and intangible emerges in different contexts in her writing. Her Catholicism, I argue, can be seen as an answer to this need for mystical embodiment in form – the Word becoming Flesh. This discussion of

Mirrlees's attitude paves the way for my readings of *Paris* and *Lud-in-the-Mist* in the following chapters.

The investigation into Mirrlees's work begins with an analysis of *Paris*, which this thesis sees as Mirrlees's most sophisticated work. Here she wields the ritual theory in such a way as to create what can be termed a formal ritual aesthetic. This text gives the most comprehensive literary shape to the theory, as in addition to harnessing ritual as a theme the poem incorporates the performative dimension at the heart of religious rites. Here I investigate the ritualistic structure of the poem and how it enacts a ceremony of regeneration in the wake of the Great War. This analysis of *Paris* is in two parts, discussing the workings of the two constituent elements of ritual – myth and performance in turn.

Chapter 2 examines how myth operates in the poem, how it provides the narrative framework for the poem's ritual performance, which centres on a transition into a new age, fuelled by the desire and hope for spiritual renewal. Here I analyse the ways in which classical and ancient Greek mythology are woven into the modern setting of post-World War One Paris, presenting a palimpsest of religious signification. In this *Paris* recalls what Harrison refers to as her 'apologia pro vita mea', namely the enjoyment of 'great things in literature, Greek plays for example,' precisely 'when behind their bright splendours I see moving darker and older shapes' (*Reminiscences of a Student's Life* 86–87).<sup>16</sup> Through the speaker's role as ritual initiate or high priest – while also the *flâneuse* observing and pondering the urban sights on her day-long journey – there is an attempt in the poem, I argue, to regenerate religion itself, specifically modern-day Catholicism, by tapping into the potency of older, primitive rituals and myths of which it is a direct descendent. To perform this ritual, the speaker announces the need for a 'holophrase', a primitive word, invoking the magical function of words in primitive ritual, and enters what Harrison calls the 'supersensuous world' of dreams, trance, hopes, fears and imagination which is the world of primitive, mystical ritual. Of all her works, *Paris* most overtly engages with mysticism and what Harrison describes as the mentality from which religious life springs.

Chapter 3 considers how this ritual performance in *Paris*, expressed on the verbal level, goes hand in hand with a physical performance of the text and the book as a crafted

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<sup>16</sup> Cited henceforth as *Reminiscences*.

object. A parallel is made in this chapter between Harrison's ritual theory and a point in the history of the book that intersects with it: both are marked by an emphasis on space and body, indicating an integration of verbal and spatial elements. In Harrison's theory this takes the shape of highlighting ritual as the lost physical, spatial element of religious practice. In the history of book-making this manifests itself in the way concrete bibliographical elements regain a lost visibility as writers gain control over the means of production of their texts. The spatial element highlighted in both Harrison's theory and this coinciding moment in the history of the book is contrasted with a hitherto dominant temporal element – the spoken word or myth in Harrison's theory, and a subservience of spatial elements of the book to the speaking voice. In both cases, the balance between speech and physical performance (the human body and the body of the text) is redressed. This chapter argues that *Paris* should be considered in the context of a tradition researched by textual theorists and bibliographers seeking to highlight the importance of the 'bibliographic code' of texts – in contrast to merely the 'linguistic code'. These theorists argue that such research is essential to understanding the historical conditions of how texts have been produced, which offers a deeper understanding of the book itself and the historical period in question. The texts in the literary tradition examined by these theories, found to stretch back to the manuscripts of William Blake, through William Morris's experiments in hand-printing and the work of Ezra Pound, are seen as invoking a historical context through typography and other concrete bibliographic elements.

In this chapter I examine Mirrlees's antiquarianism, which in its emphasis on craft and the material signification of texts echoes Morris's, and then perform an analysis of the spatial, concrete elements of *Paris* – its handcrafted nature and its typography. I consider *Paris* as an antiquarian gesture; the figure of the antiquary merges with that of the initiate/*flâneuse* who performs the poem's ritual, dredging up the forgotten past into the present. Moreover, the poem performs the antiquarian task of preserving the moment of its creation, not only in its content – snapshots of the city in the spring of 1919, and the ritual of regeneration performed in the wake of the War – but in its performative use of typography and self-conscious craftedness as historical artefact. It is at once a ritual of regeneration for Paris of 1919, and a ritual performing the 'antiquarian magic' of preserving this moment for future generations of imaginative archaeologists. I examine the way the ritual performance in the text is given a spatial dimension through its typography, integrating the spoken and concretely performed dimensions of ritual. This integration is at once also the spatial and temporal dimensions of textual and bibliographical production, and in this way the text uniquely marks the intersection

of Harrison's ritual theory and the history of the book. *Paris* becomes a mystical artefact of its time, providing a mapped out hand-held ritual enabling future readers to repeat its integrated oral-visual performance that may provide the 'swift sense of the past' that Mirrlees argues antiquarian object potentially impart (and/or again serve its original regenerative purpose).

Chapter 4 considers Mirrlees's exploration of the rift between life and art – experience and representation – in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, where her suspicion of language and narrative as signifiers of lived experience comes to the fore more polemically than elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> The novel centres on the trickery of words and what lies forever out of their reach: rationally unrepresentable experience which can only be expressed indirectly through riddles, music, dance, or a terrifying Note that haunts the protagonist Nathaniel Chanticleer. My analysis draws on Mirrlees's own research into the history of Romantic poetics and philosophies, which connects the fantasy element in this tradition to ritual. I trace the novel's intertextual allusions to fantasy writing over the centuries and consider the argument that the novel, itself written in the genre, self-reflexively makes about fantasy. A Nietzschean framework – a significant framework for Harrison's classicism – is employed to explore what can be seen as the interaction of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Socratic forces in the novel. Harrison's emphasis on the Dionysian is echoed in the novel, but her aversion to the Apollonian – the chilly personification of representation – is challenged. While Harrison says of ritual – the bridge between life and art – 'on that bridge, emotionally, I halt' (*Reminiscences* 84), Mirrlees takes a step further and attempts with *Lud-in-the-Mist* – as she does with *Paris* – to rediscover ritual in art. The novel, I argue, makes a case for the potential of fantasy writing – while an art and, thus, an Apollonian image – to express what lies in the depths of the unconscious, the psychological source, according to Harrison, of the mystical revelries of primitive ritual and mythology.

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<sup>17</sup> Except, perhaps, her treatise on antiquarianism in her biography of Sir Robert Cotton.

# Chapter 1: Harrison and Mirrlees: cultural and aesthetic context

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce Harrison's ritual theory as a framework through which to explore Mirrlees's work in subsequent chapters, and to show how the work of the two women together form a highly original response to a number of key early twentieth-century cultural and aesthetic concerns. It provides a brief overview of how Harrison's thinking on ritual and myth grows out of and diverges from the scholarship on myth and ritual by her predecessors in the decades running up to her formulation of her theory. Drawing on modern thinkers such as Bergson, Durkheim and Nietzsche, and tapping into currents in nineteenth-century mythography leaning away from the rationalist classicism dominating the period, Harrison raises the importance of psychological forces beyond rationality in religion. Her archaeological approach furthermore influences both the substance of her theories and the aesthetic she advocates in her views on art. Harrison's theory on religion and art elevates the role of emotion, the body, performance, participation and connectedness with other ritual participants as well as the non-human environment, and the female role in religious practice. The immediate and concrete, as opposed to the abstract and intellectual, take precedence in her approach. Harrison's enormous contribution to the transformation of the classics reveals a figure both attuned to, and herself a major driver of, changing currents in the intellectual-cultural-aesthetic landscape of her time. Her formulation of the definition and significance of ritual as the forgotten source of artistic creation and religion can in this way be seen as a lens through which to understand certain key concerns of this period.

This chapter will begin with a background sketch of the late nineteenth-century scholarship on myth and ritual leading up to Harrison's formulation of her theory, followed by an overview of the theory itself, weaving in discussions of key influences and the intellectual trends and traditions that Harrison's theory taps into. The main aim here is to show how the theory fits into a wider view of the period. The chapter will then introduce Mirrlees, her relationship with Harrison, and provide a brief sense of Mirrlees's commitment to Harrison's ideas on ritual in her work as well as how she builds on and diverges from Harrison. The aesthetic implications of Harrison's theory, the directions in which it points, will then be

considered. The key formal innovations in Harrison's and Mirrlees's work can be linked to a wider web of experimentation across the arts that share their main thematic and formal concerns. Major examples of this wave of development and their parallels with Harrison and Mirrlees will be briefly sketched, to show how the two women fit into a larger context of attempts to bring ritual back into art.

## **2 Background: early anthropological myth and ritual scholarship:**

Harrison's work on Greek religion builds on early anthropological scholarship on myth and ritual, a young field arising in the second half of the nineteenth century from a culture steeped in Enlightenment ideals of rationality and progress and the concomitant interest in origins, including that of religion.<sup>1</sup> This interest in origins was heavily reinforced in the mid-nineteenth century by the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*,<sup>2</sup> which also brought the comparative method, emphasising the similarities uniting all human beings (as well as all living things), to prominence. This intellectual climate paved the way for comparative studies on the evolution of human culture. While Harrison's forebears and contemporaries in the field of evolutionary anthropology endorsed a rationalist, progressivist perspective, she uses the comparative method and evolutionary paradigm to excavate a 'primitive' religion which is deemed preferable to the incarnations arising with the progress of rationality. Whereas other scholarly figures in this field distanced themselves from the 'primitive' cultures they studied, presuming the superiority of European culture shaped by Enlightenment ideals, Harrison saw in 'primitive' religion, as it was referred to within the evolutionary paradigm and by

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<sup>1</sup> A number of studies offer accounts of the context of ideas and trends from which Harrison's work developed; as such the overview given here will aim to provide a substantial and useful frame for reading and engaging with the argument in this thesis but also remain brief and to the point. For the fullest version of this now fairly established narrative of the place of Harrison and the Cambridge Ritualists in the context of myth-ritual scholarship, see Ackerman (*The Myth and Ritual School*); for a useful summary, see Sterenberg (18-43); Carpentier's chapters sketching out this background and Harrison's theory are useful in a literary context as her project traces themes from Harrison's theory in the works of a trio of well-known modernist authors (13-68).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, as Ackerman points out, Darwin's theory did not arise from a vacuum nor was it the sole influence on the study of the evolution of religion; evolutionary ideas can be seen as being in the air both before and at the same time as Darwin was writing (*Myth and Ritual School* 30-31).

ethnographers, a vitality and depth of feeling that was missing in her day, both in religion and in art.

Harrison and the core ideas in her theory were at the heart of the small group of scholars known as the Cambridge Ritualists, which included Gilbert Murray (although based in Oxford), and Francis Cornford.<sup>3</sup> Despite differences in dispositions and certain intellectual attitudes, Harrison, as Ackerman has shown,<sup>4</sup> ‘led the others towards the irrational roots of religion’, including revealing to them the importance of the Continental thinkers Durkheim, Nietzsche, Bergson and Freud for their work. Both Murray and Cornford contributed sections to *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912),<sup>5</sup> demonstrating the close intellectual affinity that existed between the three; both also acknowledge Harrison as their primary inspiration, as Carpentier points out (43).

A background sketch of the scholarship leading up to the ritualism of the Cambridge School, as they are also known, usefully begins with E.B. Tylor, often known as the father of cultural anthropology.<sup>6</sup> Tylor adopted Darwin’s evolutionary model and his comparative approach to the study of culture, in his *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (1871). Here, ‘the primitive’ is posited as a universal stage of human development. Cultural elements such as customs and superstitions which formerly served a purpose comprise ‘survivals’, proof of a modern culture’s link to an earlier, primitive culture. Significantly, the modern Christian belief in a Creator God was seen by Tylor as such a survival, based as all religions were, in his view, on the primitive ur-religion of animism, the animating of nature by projecting on it the doctrine of souls. In Tylor’s view, this primitive religion, stemming from a ‘primitive mentality’ incapable of abstract thought, amounts to a crude, failed scientific attempt to explain natural phenomena. He also proposed the idea of sacrifice as a gift intended to secure the favour of the gods, a rationalist, individualist notion which Harrison was later to challenge in her theory of mystical communion. Despite this rationalist assumption, his work can be seen as blurring the line

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<sup>3</sup> Critics disagree on whether the group should be considered to include a fourth member, A.B. Cook.

<sup>4</sup> Both in his larger study, *The Myth and Ritual School*, and in a shorter essay, ‘The Cambridge Group: Origins and Composition’.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter cited as *Themis*.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Larsen (13).

between ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’, bringing the two closer together in the minds of Victorian readers, and can also be understood, as Carpentier argues in her study on Harrison, as an attempt to expand the contemporary understanding of what was meant by ‘religion’ (Carpentier 18-21).

Contrasting with Tylor, who saw religion as the outcome of the speculation by a kind of ‘savage philosopher’, William Robertson Smith, nearly two decades later, saw ancient religion as a matter of actions rather than beliefs. In his *Religion of the Semites* (1890), he argued that ritual precedes myth, that myths are simply explanations of rituals that are elaborated once these original meanings have faded. This reversed what Ackerman, in his introduction to Harrison’s *Prolegomena*, describes as ‘the received wisdom [which] had been devised by intellectualist scholars whose own lives consisted of construing texts, and who were therefore inevitably word-centred’ (xviii). Departing from Tylor’s individualistic view of myths emerging from a need to answer questions about the world, for Smith, religion had a fundamentally social character and consisted chiefly of acts performed by groups. This, for him, was represented most clearly in the sacrifice of a totem animal within totemistic tribes. The totem animal, Smith theorised, was understood by the ancient Semites as being infused with the god, and by eating the animal the tribe was able to experience union with the god. As will be shown, this emphasis on the collective and the primacy of ritual is echoed in Harrison’s theory, but the ‘god’ posited by Smith – infusing the totem animal but otherwise separate from both tribe and animal – is got rid of entirely in her formulation of the totem animal not as being infused with a god but rather being itself a mystical predecessor to the later, rationalised, individualistic notion of god.

Scholarship on myth was significantly advanced by the writer, folklorist and classical scholar Andrew Lang, who supported the comparative anthropological study of myth with an extensive critique of the earlier, rivalling, philological approach by Max Müller. Lang’s most original and important contribution, however, was through his popularising of scholarship on myth. His talents as a polemicist and his engaging style, as well as his collections of folklore and fairy tales for children, helped bridge the gap between the scholarly and popular in the study of myth, fuelling the hype in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain for mythological writings identified by Sterenberg, among others.

Tylor, Smith and Lang can be seen as enabling the production and popular reception of the enormous repository of information on primitive myth *The Golden Bough* by James George Frazer, who applied his forebears’ ethnological approach to the classical past. Frazer

drew on the theories of myth and ritual he found in these predecessors, particularly Smith who had emphasised the important link between ritual and myth, to explain the custom of the annual killing of the priest of Diana at Nemi by his successor. His comparison of customs worldwide led to his theory of the ‘dying god’ whose union with a fertility goddess and annual death and resurrection ensure the return of crops in the spring. This cycle comprises what for example Ackerman has referred to as the ‘tragic rhythm’ found in the myths and rituals of the dying gods, and becomes a central aspect of Harrison’s theory. It is facilitated by the practice of ‘sympathetic magic’, a variety of rites that are believed to bring about the reincarnation needed for survival. Magic, for Frazer, comprises the first of the evolutionary stages in human modes of thought. It is an essentially rational albeit erroneous attempt to exercise control over the world. While Frazer changed his mind on the nature of myth and its relationship to ritual, the position for which he is best known, as Ackerman argues, is his early ritualist position, influenced by Smith, who was a close friend. On this view, magical ritual performances are accompanied by words which describe the performance and these words evolve into myths as the performance are forgotten or misunderstood over time. Once magic is deemed ineffective, Frazer argues, it is replaced with religion, which involves a greater degree of abstract thought and thus represents an advance in intellectual development. The pinnacle of this evolutionary development, according to Frazer, is science.

Sterenberg, among others, has noted the irony that while *The Golden Bough* can be read as an ‘ode to the progress of human reason’ (33), its effect was to feed and fuel a desire for primitive myth in late Victorian society by revivifying Greek myths for readers and inspiring an interest in their imaginative power. This trend in late nineteenth-century Britain had already begun to erode Matthew Arnold’s ‘sweetness and light’ model of classicism which placed ‘unclouded clearness of mind, an unimpeded play of thought’ at the heart of Hellenism (Arnold 128). As for example Margot K. Louis has shown, over the course of the nineteenth century, particularly the last few decades, mythography – as practiced by scholars, poets and artists and others – had become increasingly favourable to Mystery religions, challenging the centrality of Olympian mythology in depictions of ancient Greece. This attraction to the Mysteries – particularly the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Dionysian energy connected with it – was arguably bound up with the late Victorian search for alternative forms of spirituality, which accompanied the gradual erosion of Christian belief (Louis 24) as well as the fascination – gaining significant ground from the mid-century onwards – with hidden, unconscious forces within the individual and the society (ix). This trend was epitomised in the

works of Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater, and was fuelled inestimably by the publication of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 (although an English translation was only produced in 1909). The new anthropological approach to myth had however not let go of its grounding in the rationalist, progressivist thinking that had dominated philosophical enquiry since the Enlightenment. Meanwhile, the focus on Olympian serenity, order and reason, despite the increasing popularity of the Mysteries and the Dionysian, remained so central within the study of the classics that Harrison's *Prolegomena* is framed as a challenge to this image of Greece. The book begins with a quotation by Ruskin expressing his vision of an aesthetically tranquil Greece, its 'everlasting calm' and 'beauty at perfect rest' (1), only to launch its exposition of the barbarous, orgiastic rites that underlay this serene surface, laying the foundation for the theory of ritual and art which bring to anthropological mythography the rising frustration with the inadequacy of purely rationalist theories.

### **3 Harrison's theory: primitive ritual and myth as the forgotten origin of art and theology**

We see now why in the history of all ages and every place art is what is called the 'handmaid of religion.' She is not really the 'handmaid' at all. She springs straight out of the rite, and her first outward leap is the image of the god.<sup>7</sup>

In this summarising comment by Harrison on art and ritual, the dynamic tropes of leaping and springing carry with them a sense of lively urgency which reflect the primacy of vital expression found in Harrison's theory of ritual and art. Her theory picks up a number of key threads running through the anthropological research on myth predating hers and contemporaneous with it – the work of Tylor, Smith, Lang and Frazer. Their evolutionary outlook and nineteenth-century passion for origins form the basis for her analysis of the development of Greek religion from its seventh- and sixth-century pre-Olympian phases into its fifth-century Olympian incarnation. However, this evolution, as Harrison describes it, challenges the rationalist, progressivist assumptions found in the work of the anthropological mythographers discussed above. Her theory aims to grasp and articulate what constitutes the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ancient Art and Ritual* (105). Hereafter cited as *AAR*.

religious impulse which both ‘sends a man to church and to the theatre’ (AAR 1). In her view, this impulse found full, vibrant expression in the religious rituals of pre-Olympian Greece, contrasting with the impoverished form it takes in Olympian mythology and art. Ritual, for her, is the essence of religion and the forgotten origin of art and theology, and the development away from this essence, towards more intellectualised, individualistic, representational practices constitutes a loss rather than progress.

As with the rationalist theories of myth contrasting with her theory, Harrison’s view of ancient Greek myth reflects the concerns of her time with which she most identified. Just as Tylor, Smith, Lang and Frazer saw in primitive religion a forensic rationality extolling experimentation and detailed observation, which reflected their own outlooks – representative of much of the scientific, empirical thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – so Harrison found in primitive Greek religion an emotional, ecstatic and vital expression she found lacking in the art and religion of her day – but which she had glimpsed in the work of Swinburne, and the Pre-Raphaelites.<sup>8</sup> The contemporary state of religion and its connection to art was her major concern, her investigation of the religious impulse within the context of ancient Greece being, as she says, ‘incidental to [her] own specialism’ (*Themis* 537). As Mirsky writes in his obituary for Harrison, ‘by the time she had written *Themis*, primitive religion had become for her a starting point for a general study of the human soul’ (*Slavonic and East European Review* 415). Indeed, Mirrlees’s notes for Harrison’s biography suggest that this had been what drove her in her career from very early on; here she observes that in Harrison’s writing on beauty and ideal art in the Preface to her *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (1892) ‘[t]he attitude is obviously a religious one’ and art ‘has become her substitute for a religion’ (Mirrlees, notebook, Harrison Papers 4/3/1). If taken as a broader critique of religion and art at the beginning of the twentieth century, her theory can be seen implicitly to call for a greater sense of emotional expression, embodiment, concreteness and immediacy, performativity, process, and collectivity in these areas of life. As I will show below, in taking this stance, Harrison taps into a number of philosophical and aesthetic currents resisting the

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<sup>8</sup> See Section 3.5.1 below for her interest in Pre-Raphaelitism, and Annabel Robinson (*The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* 50-51) for her early delight in Swinburne.

prevailing authority of individualistic rationality inherited from the philosophers of the Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1 Encounter with Greek ruins: the beginnings of ritualism

Harrison's theory begins to unfold firstly in the guidebook *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* (1890, co-edited with Margaret Merrifield Verrall), which resulted from a visit to Greece the previous year. The preface to this book reveals that she was already developing ideas about ritual as the basis for myth in the same vein as Robertson Smith and Frazer in the first (1890) edition of his *Golden Bough* (while he was under the influence of his good friend Smith). Here she writes that she has in this book

tried everywhere to get at, where possible, the cult as the explanation of the legend. My belief is that in many, even in the large majority of cases, ritual misunderstood explains the elaboration of myth....Some of the loveliest stories the Greeks have left us will be seen to have taken their rise, not in poetic imagination, but in primitive, often savage, and I think, always practical ritual. (Qtd. in Ackerman, Introduction to *Prolegomena*)

This focus on depictions of ritual acts rather than on mythological texts signified a shift away from the text-based classicism that had hitherto defined the field. For Harrison, a major factor leading to this insight into ritual as the starting point for understanding ancient Greek religion can be understood as being bound up with her experience of archaeology.<sup>10</sup> Harrison was part of a wave of classicists reacting to archaeological discoveries of classical ruins in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Hugh Kenner points out, 'Troy after Schliemann was no longer a dream, but a place on the map', bringing a concrete reality to the classics that contrasted with the 'vortex of mere lexicography', the 'din of words' that characterised the nineteenth-century classicism of Samuel Butcher, Andrew Lang and most prominently Matthew Arnold, who had even suggested that neither Homer or Troy ever existed but that (as Kenner summarises) 'it does us good to talk as if he did' (*The Pound Era* 42-43). While in

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<sup>9</sup> This reading accords with Fiske's analysis of Harrison's 'heretical' approach to the conservative field of classicism; Harrison's, she writes, was a 'quest for the redemptive transformation of her field into a body of knowledge with crucial relevance for her own and future ages' (*Heretical Hellenism* 151).

<sup>10</sup> Ackerman notes that reading Robertson Smith, with whom she clearly had an affinity, would also have encouraged her to pursue the study of Greek rituals as a means to illuminating Greek religion, which meant examining the scenes painted on decorated vases ('The Cambridge Group' 7).

Greece in 1888 she accompanied Schliemann's successor, the archaeologist Wilhelm Dörpfeld – who she refers to as 'my most honoured master' (*Reminiscences* 64, 65) – on his excavations.<sup>11</sup> The archaeologist Sir John Meyers commented that 'Few things were as convincing as a piece of Greek landscape...when Dorpfeld explained it to you' (Kenner 43), and this enthusiasm for a tangible history surrounding Greek myth became the core of Harrison's approach.

Harrison's predilection for an archaeological approach to the classics, while finally taking a decisive direction after her trip to Greece, did however have a longer history. She had for nearly two decades studied and lectured on Greek art at the British Museum, the only place to study archaeology in Britain at the time. During this time she was mentored by Charles Newton, who passionately advocated an archaeological investigation into Greek cults and myth (Radford, *The Lost Girls* 28-31), interpreting vases as 'textbooks of ritual culture' (29). Her shift in focus from art to religion occurred, however, only in the late 1880's following a personal crisis and her trips to Greece. In her *Reminiscences* she identifies one particular visit to Crete as providing the impulse for her *Prolegomena*. Here, she says, was a clay ceiling depicting the Great Mother and the 'King-God wearing the mask of a bull. Here was this ancient ritual of the Mother and the Son which long preceded the worship of the Olympians: here were the true Prolegomena' (72).

### **3.2 Re-envisioning Greek Religion: the attack on Olympus and celebration of the primitive**

Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903) is her first study analysing archaeological relics, centring on this image of the cult of the Mother and Son.<sup>12</sup> Drawing on the insight by Johann Bachofen in the 1860s that a matriarchal society must have predated the current patriarchal structure (*Prolegomena* 262), she launches her first attack on the Olympians. Here she unearths what she refers to as a 'lower stratum of thought' which engendered religious practice that was, unlike Homer's account of Olympian gods, truly primitive: chthonic – that is, of the earth and underworld rather than sky – mystical,

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<sup>11</sup> In her *Reminiscences* Harrison claims to have learnt all her archaeology from the Germans (64).

<sup>12</sup> Hereafter cited as *Prolegomena*.

matriarchal, given to extremes of barbarous cruelty and licentiousness. Her classicism builds on nineteenth-century revisionist mythography, providing, as Margot K. Louis argues, ‘the most eloquent and sustained attack on the Olympians in British mythography’ (22). The arguments in the *Prolegomena* deepen and mature in her next book, *Themis* (1912),<sup>13</sup> where she delivers the fullest, most radical exposition of her ritual theory of art – summarised accessibly in its short, popular counterpart *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), and the slimmer follow-up volume *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1921).<sup>14</sup> In *Themis*, she elaborates on her argument regarding the difference between pre-Olympian and Olympian religion, and why she sees the latter as an impoverished version of its past incarnation and in her terms, not religious in its essence at all.

In this she is a disciple of Nietzsche, by her own admission (*Themis* 538), pointing out how he had long ago divined the real significance of the difference between Dionysus and Apollo (476). She draws significantly on Nietzsche’s treatise, set out in his *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in which he associates Dionysus with mystical connection and the unknowable, intoxication, the body, dance and music, and Apollo with representation and appearance, serenity, clarity and order. Nietzsche’s thesis that Dionysian ecstasy is at the root of drama – given form through the image-making power of the Apollonian force – also becomes the core of Harrison’s theory, adding a spiritual dimension to the anthropological view of primitive religion that she inherits from Frazer. Following Frazer, she draws on studies of tribal ritual in the burgeoning field of anthropology, using a comparative approach to apply these findings to her study of ancient Greek. She adopts his argument that primitive religion centres on fertility, and his notion of a tragic rhythm whereby a central fertility figure must die in order to bring about the rebirth of nature in spring. She synthesises Frazer’s rationalist understanding of ritual with Nietzsche’s vitalist vision of the Dionysian principle centring on a celebration of life to formulate her conceptualisation of the processes motivating primitive ritual, weaving in insights from other modern theories of psychology, philosophy and sociology.

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<sup>13</sup> Harrison writes in her *Reminiscences* that the titles of her three major works, *Prolegomena* (1903), *Themis* (1912) and *Epilegomena* (1921) express their relationship to one another, *Themis* being for her the central work (72-23).

<sup>14</sup> Cited hereafter as *Epilegomena*.

### 3.3 Roots of ritual in embodied expression of collective desire

Harrison explains the impulse towards ritual by pointing firstly to the interval between perception and action:

Perception is not immediately transformed into action; there is an interval for choice between several possible actions. Perception is pent up and becomes, helped by emotion, conscious *representation*. Now it is, psychologists tell us, just in this interval, this space between perception and reaction, this momentary halt, that all our mental life, our images, our ideas, our consciousness, and assuredly our religion and our art, is built up.<sup>15</sup>

She argues that ritual begins with the desire for something – an image, an idea – pent up in this space between perception and action, as the action desired has either already taken place or has yet to happen, so there is no immediate practical outlet. She gives the example of a hunt that has been successful or an anticipated hunt (AAR 19-20): there is a desire either to relive the emotion of the hunt if it has already happened, or if it has yet to happen and the cycle of perception-action cannot complete itself at the moment, then the desire for the hunt ‘grows and accumulates by inhibition, till at last the exasperated nerves and muscles can bear it no longer; it breaks out into mimetic action’ (20). Physiological and emotional release are thus, according to Harrison, the focus of the primal impulse towards ritual. As primitive tribes begin to realise the importance of the seasons to their food supply, these rites become increasingly periodic and the desire behind them is the promotion of the agricultural life cycle of the earth (12-37).

This argument, that ‘[s]ympathetic magic is, [as] modern psychology teaches us, in the main and at the outset, not the outcome of intellectual illusion, not even the exercise of a “mimetic instinct,” but simply, in its ultimate analysis, an utterance, a discharge of emotion and longing’ (AAR 14-15), diverges from Frazer’s theory of magical ritual. While adopting his thesis that food and fertility are the aim of primitive ritual, she challenges his rationalist notion that the ‘savage’ is a rationally motivated being and magic is therefore merely a means to an end, a primitive stage of science. Contrasting with Robertson Smith’s view that myths evolve as an explanation of ritual, and with Frazer’s inconsistency on how ritual relates to myth,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jane Harrison (AAR 18).

<sup>16</sup> This inconsistency is noted for example by Sterenberg (31).

myth, for Harrison, is bound up with the expression of desire in ritual. Myth, she argues, originally referred simply to the magical words accompanying a physical ritual; it was the plot of the ritual, expressing the same emotion and desire as the ritual action (*Themis* 331).<sup>17</sup> This focus on expression rather than a scientifically assured outcome is at the heart of Harrison's view of ritual. As she writes, '[t]he savage utters his will to live, his intense desire for food; but it should be noted, it is desire and will and longing, not certainty and satisfaction that he utters' (32). Following the work of the ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, she sees ritual as divided into three stages: pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal (*Themis* 510), and her emphasis is consistently on the liminal stage, the 'midway state when you are neither here nor there' (AAR 58), and nothing is certain. Ritual is thus always a transition into a new state of things (*Themis* 20; *Epilegomena* xxx), whether its focus is agricultural, expressing the desire for the regeneration of the earth, or an initiation performing the transition into a new phase of life, or the focus is 'a complete upset of the old order' in a passing from one age to another (*Themis* 507).

Crucially, this emotion is felt collectively by a whole tribe. 'The individual in a savage tribe has but a thin and meagre personality', Harrison argues, 'If he dances alone he will not dance long ; but if his whole tribe dances together he will dance the live-long night and his emotion will mount to passion, to ecstasy' (*Themis* 43). Here she again contrasts with the individualistic Frazer (and Tylor before him<sup>18</sup>), drawing instead on the sociologist Emile Durkheim (*Themis* 543), to whom her reading of Robertson Smith would have acted as a helpful bridge.<sup>19</sup> She adopts Durkheim's thinking on religious concepts as collective representations in her explanation that the intense emotion felt collectively by the tribe is perceived as something beyond and larger than individual experience and is thus externalised and projected; it becomes 'the raw material of the god-head' (*Themis* 45-46).<sup>20</sup> This primitive emphasis on the collective finds expression in totemism, as the group 'seeks to utter its unity,

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<sup>17</sup> This combination of utterance and physical performance as twin modes of expressing emotion is discussed in Chapter 2, section 3 and is, as well, crucial to the formal analysis of *Paris* in Chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> As noted above, Tylor's individualism is evident in his theory of gift sacrifice, which posits gods as separate from their worshippers, and the emphasis on knowing rather than collective action.

<sup>19</sup> Ackerman makes this point, noting that Durkheim drew heavily on Smith's ideas about the social character of religion ('The Cambridge Group' 7).

<sup>20</sup> For Durkheim's social theory of religion see his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

to emphasize its emotion about that unity by the avowal of a common kinship with animal or plant' (*Themis* 131). Her reading of the French philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist Lucien Lévy Bruhl fleshed out her understanding of totemism, as she incorporated his notion of a 'primitive mentality' into her view of ancient Greek religion. This mentality entailed, Lévy Bruhl argued, a sense of continuity and unity with the natural environment, a sense of common life, or 'participation', which Harrison echoes closely:

Man in the totemistic stage rarely sets himself as individual over against his tribe; he rarely sets himself as man over against the world around him. He has not yet fully captured his individual or his human soul, not yet drawn a circle round his separate self. It is not that he confuses between himself and a kangaroo; it is that he has not yet drawn the clear-cut outline that defines the conception kangaroo from that of man and eternally separates them. His mental life is as yet mainly emotional, one of felt *relations*. (*Themis* 121)

Harrison argues that totemism develops naturally into magic, which is the participation in and manipulation of the continuum of energy, or *mana*, running through nature.<sup>21</sup> It is from this stage of totemistic, magical thinking, she argues, that primitive Greek religion emerged, with primitive 'mystery gods' as she calls them, who pre-date Olympian gods. These older gods – or rather vague undefined spirits, half human, half divine – are for Harrison part of the older matriarchal, chthonic religious system. For these spirits she coins the term 'Eniautos-Daimon', meaning spirit of the year.<sup>22</sup> This spirit is bound up with the earth and all living things and its death and resurrection must be enacted through a mystical ritual performance each spring to bring about the renewal of all life in nature. For Harrison, the Eniautos-Daimon represents a 'tendency in religion towards emotion, union, indivisibility'. By contrast, the Olympian deities, which develop through a process of increasing abstraction and rationalisation, 'represent that tendency in thought which is towards reflections, differentiation, clearness' (*Themis* 551).

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<sup>21</sup> The concept of *mana*, important to Mirrlees as analysis of her work will show, is a feature in the primitivism of other modernists as well. It is a central focus of Mary Butts's fiction which she describes as 'the non-moral, beautiful, subtle energy in man and in everything else, on which the virtue of everything depends' (qtd. in Radford, 'Defending Nature's Holy Shrine: Mary Butts, Englishness, and the Persephone Myth' 129). D.H. Lawrence's poem 'Mana of the Sea', for example, also expresses the vastness and mystical significance of this cosmic energy.

<sup>22</sup> Although the meaning of the word 'year' carries a specialised meaning, which is discussed in Chapter 2, Section 8, and again in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.

### 3.4 The Olympians

They are objects to a subject, they are concepts thrown out of the human mind, looked at from a distance, things *known*, not like the mystery gods *felt* and lived. The more clearly they are envisaged the more reasonable and thinkable they are, the less are they the sources, the expression, of emotion.<sup>23</sup>

The shift to the religion of Olympian Greece, for Harrison, involves a shift away from everything that gave primitive religion its potency. Powerful matriarchal ritual figures, identified with the earth and responsible for all creation and renewal, are demoted to mere nymphs and Zeus the father becomes the cardinal figure amongst a host of deities who detach themselves from earth and reign instead from the distant heavens. As the Olympian gods leave the earth for the sky they renounce any totemistic identification with animals or plants, and the yearly cycle of death and rebirth of the Eniautos-Daimon is replaced with the immortality of the anthropomorphised Olympians. This, for Harrison, signals a profound loss and gives these new gods a ‘chill remoteness’ (*Themis* 476) that cannot inspire the emotional fervour of a mystery god in whose death and rebirth all living things participate. The gods become not only anthropomorphised but also departmentalised, clearly demarcated personifications of abstract qualities, with specific powers. As a result, religious practice becomes marked by an unbridgeable divide between human and divine, worship and sacrifice replacing participation in magical ritual; this for Harrison reflects an increased perception of separation of self from other, human from non-human as rationality gradually overtakes the mystical belief in magic.

This shift from religion as physical, emotional performance and utterance to the intellectual contemplation of art and deities is encapsulated for Harrison in the development of drama from ritual. Harrison points out that the old Greek word *dromenon*, referring to ritual and meaning literally ‘a thing done’ shares the same root with word *drama*, which means ‘a thing also done, but abstracted from your doing’ (*AAR* 68). Participative performance is thus replaced with spectacle – a representation of the act rather than the concrete experience of the act itself. The magical myths bound up with sacred ceremonial become aetiological, mere stories to complement the personalities of the thoroughly intellectualised Olympian gods. While ritual proper, for Harrison, in attempting to represent a practical desire ‘*makes, as it*

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<sup>23</sup> Harrison, *Themis* (476)

were, a bridge between real life and art' (72 [emphasis in the original]), art and theology are cut off from practical action.

### **3.5 Ritual and the modern concern with concreteness and immediacy**

The overview of Harrison's theory outlined above has demonstrated the way in which Harrison's formulation of the transition from ritual to art and theology highlights a loss of concreteness of experience, that is, embodiment and a sense of process, immediacy and material engagement. As discussed in Section 3.1, Harrison's ritualist argument appears to emerge from her encounter with archaeological relics, first at the British Museum but especially at the actual archaeological sites she visited in Greece. This attraction to a tangible approach to the classics appears to have its roots in very strong early influences in her life. The following subsection considers Harrison's early leanings towards High Church ritualism and how this intersected with her enthusiasm for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Predating her anthropological interest in the assumed greater physicality of the life of the 'savage' and her Bergsonian emphasis on immediate experience over the intellect, these life experiences arguably contributed significantly to the focus on the material and embodied in her ritual theory of art. Section 3.5.2 will then consider how Harrison's theory sits within a wider historical-intellectual context marked by an increasing interest in the unconscious and re-evaluation of the immediate flux of concrete experience in relation to purely logical abstractions and intellectual thought. Finally, section 3.5.3 will consider Harrison's application of her theory to the religion of her own time.

#### **3.5.1 The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**

While biographies of Harrison all note how in her college days she became caught up in the pre-Raphaelite fashion of the 1870s, this aesthetic phase, and how it contributed to her later work on ritual, has generally not been explored in depth. Scorned by critics of their time for their emphasis on the body in poetry and painting, dubbed the 'fleshly school of poetry',<sup>24</sup> the passion of the Pre-Raphaelites for craft, illustration, iconic depiction and use of the body in

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<sup>24</sup> This scathing attack on the pre-Raphaelites was waged by the poet Robert Williams Buchanan in a review article in 1871, in which he condemned what he deemed the excessively 'sensual' nature of pre-Raphaelite art (338), and its suggestion that 'that the body is greater than the soul' (335).

creating works of art, can be seen to have fed into Harrison's focus in her study of ancient art and religion on the body and on the illustrations found on ancient vases.

This line of argument has been pursued by two recent writers on Harrison, Rita Wright and Margaret Armstrong, who connect Harrison's enthusiasm for pre-Raphaelitism with her early engagement with late-Victorian High Church ritualism – a phase which Harrison refers to briefly in her collection of essays *Alpha and Omega* in 1915 (184).<sup>25</sup> Wright's study on Harrison and Victorian ritualism describes the way the Oxford Movement, at the centre of this cultural development, saw the Reformation as having robbed Christianity of its materiality '— its icons, liturgical objects, intense color, transcending smells, dramatic performances, and mysticism.' She notes that '[a]lthough some Protestants and Evangelicals had addressed the concept of spiritual "feelings" it was a model that separated feelings from the physical senses' (46). It was this revival of the sacramental – the performative and iconic – by the Oxford Movement that, she writes, appealed to the pre-Raphaelites, who adopted the 'southern Italian liturgical aesthetic of bright color, and dramatic mystical intent promoted by members of the Oxford Movement' (85). The result, Wright argues, was 'a sort of "ritual aesthetic"' composed of 'the imaginative use of traditional symbolism, hard-edged realism, gold leaf, white ground on canvas, and theatrical colors' (85-86). Armstrong's biographical study of Harrison's early development notes her teenage encounter with pre-Raphaelitism at St Martin-on-the-Hill in Scarborough, 'a hotbed of ritualism' decorated by the PRB, where Harrison attended controversially High Church services (89-98). Later, Harrison's pre-Raphaelitism took the form of consistently carrying around Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Stream's Secret* and decorating her room at Newnham in the style of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, eventually becoming a personal friend of Burne-Jones, who, Wright notes, encouraged her to write her book on the Greek vases at the British Museum to provide artists access to 'the narratives and iconography of the pagan ancients' (Wright 86).

Harrison's archaeological approach to the classics arguably consolidated the emphasis on the iconic and material that she took from the pre-Raphaelites. As Wright argues, 'Harrison's attention to iconographic detail and the sacramental implications of religious rites depicted on the vases, were characteristic of perceptions influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites'

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<sup>25</sup> Hereafter referenced as *A&O*.

(Wright 86). The archaeological approach to the past exemplified by Schliemann and Dörpfeld paralleled the craft-based, iconic aesthetic of the pre-Raphaelites, William Morris's Kelmscott Press having been founded roughly a decade after Schliemann had begun the excavation of Troy. Together the two late Victorian projects, sharing a similar basis in their concern with the visual and concrete, arguably contributed to this focus in Harrison's work.<sup>26</sup> The following section suggests that this focus was part of a larger wave of theoretical enquiry which raised the importance of immediacy, flux and a deeper, hidden reality above an overreliance on reason.

### **3.5.2 Harrison among modern thinkers on surface/depth, abstraction/flux of immediate experience: confronting the Old Rat through ritualism**

Our age is in a sense anti-rational. If your writings are rationalist in tone, your youngest reviewer is sure to crush you nowadays with the epithet 'Early Victorian,' and say you are 'out of touch' with vitalism. Our present age is concerned with affirming life as a whole, not Reason as the Lord over Life.<sup>27</sup>

This observation by Harrison hints at her disdain for an imaginary being she referred (at least according to Gilbert Murray who mentions it in an introduction to a talk by Harrison) as the 'Old Rat' – rat standing for 'rationalist' ('Rationalism and Religious Reaction' 6). Her preference for the concrete and material rather than abstract and intellectual, combined with her understanding of ritual as process and transition, associates her with a widespread intellectual phenomenon taking place within the human sciences, philosophy and poetics around the turn of the twentieth century. Sanford Schwartz in his *Matrix of Modernism* (3-49) identifies a nexus of thinkers whose theories depart from the nineteenth-century developmental, evolutionary model of psychology and centre on an opposition between conscious surface and unconscious depth, between 'conceptual abstraction and immediate experience, or [...] between the instrumental conventions that shape ordinary life and the original flux of concrete experience' (5).

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<sup>26</sup> Moreover, just as archaeologists of the period returned the distant, hazily mythologised past to the material present, the pre-Raphaelites, too, can be seen to have resurrected the past physically for their readers with the medieval ornamentation adorning their books (see McGann's *Black Riders* 77).

<sup>27</sup> Harrison, *A&O* (137). In this particular essay, 'Scientiæ Sacra Fames' Harrison is arguing the connection between the increasing emancipation of women and developments in the sciences away from insular intellectualism (116-142).

In addition to Freud and Jung, generally the names associated with the unconscious, Schwartz's consideration of these oppositions includes Bergson's concept of 'real duration'; Nietzsche's 'chaos of sensations', F.H. Bradley 'immediate experience' and William James's 'stream of consciousness' (5). He suggests that all the scientific advances of the third quarter of the nineteenth century in fact served to undermine the certainty of this growing body of knowledge, quoting William James's assertion that

(t)here are so many geometries, so many logics, so many physical and chemical hypotheses, so many classifications, each of them good for so much and yet not good for everything, that the notion that even the truest formula may be a human device and not a literal transcript has dawned upon us. (12-14)

Similarly, Karin Stephen, psychoanalyst, Bloomsbury affiliate and close friend of Mirrlees, writes in 1922 that Bergson's philosophy is popular

because it gives expression to a feeling which is very widespread at the present time, a distrust of systems, theories, logical constructions, the assumption of premises and then the acceptance of everything that follows logically from them. There is a sense of impatience with thought and a thirst for the actual, the concrete. It is because the whole drift of Bergson's writing is an incitement to throw over abstractions and get back to facts that so many people read him. (10-11)

Harrison's ritual theory brings an additional, unique formulation of the opposition between surface/depth, abstraction/experience to this turn-of-the-century discussion. Her popularity as a lecturer and the publication of her accessible, passionately written *Ancient Art and Ritual* (as well as her earlier *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*) shows how she saw her research as a way to engage with widespread cultural concerns. Her theory thus provides a particular lens on the period, one which is arguably less abstract than the above-mentioned philosophical theories, and more concretely focused on art and religion, making it a valuable idiom for understanding some of the key developments in this area of cultural life at the time.

Harrison herself associates her theory with those of the thinkers in Schwartz's grouping. Her acknowledged debt to Nietzsche has already been discussed above, while in her introduction to the second edition of *Themis*, she describes the Olympian gods as 'creations of what Professor William James called "monarchical deism" (*Themis* 542). She also credits James with giving her 'the rudest mental shock' of her life with his theory of experience as a 'stream of consciousness' whereby an individual is not clearly demarcated as separate from her environment (*A&O* 44-45). Of the above-mentioned late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers positing a deeper, non-intellectual level of experience associated with flux and concrete experience, however, Harrison confesses the greatest debt to the French

philosopher Henri Bergson. The way in which Harrison structures and articulates her vision of the experience of primitive ritual and how it contrasts with later, Olympian theology draws substantially on Bergson's dichotomy of durational time and spatialised time. Bergson's vitalist philosophy attempts to conceptualise time as it is experienced, as process, flux and movement, an experience of reality as constantly changing and becoming. He terms this concept of time 'durational time', or *durée*, and proposes intuition as the mode of consciousness for tapping into this flux. *Durée*, or duration, is contrasted with time that is spatialised, no longer purely experienced but rather perceived by the intellect, immobilised and divided into categories, diminishing the richness and creativity of the psychic life as the self is 'refracted, and thereby broken to pieces' (*Time and Free Will*, in *Key Writings*, 73). Intuition, he argues, has the potential to grasp reality as constant change, to see '(n)ot things made, but things in the making' (*An Introduction to Metaphysics* 49), and to grasp all life as indivisible, emanating from a common original vital impulse. The intellect, on the other hand, which 'dislikes what is fluid, and solidifies everything it touches' (*Creative Evolution* 46), has the effect of artificially dividing matter into 'independent bodies with absolutely determined outlines' and maintaining these established categories and boundaries, not grasping the constant change and becoming of the universe and therefore creating the illusion of permanence and individuality. Language is highlighted as a major tool of the spatialising intellect in that 'we instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language'. Thus, 'we confuse the feeling itself, which is in a perpetual state of becoming, with its permanent external object, and especially the word which expresses this object' (73). The usefulness of language to practical and social life, Bergson writes, 'covers over the delicate and fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness.' The ability to articulate experience and feeling is, thus, in the end an illusion according to Bergson, as although 'we believe that we have analysed our feeling [...] we have really replaced it by a juxtaposition of lifeless states which can be translated into words' (74).<sup>28</sup>

Harrison draws on Bergson's formulation of two types of reality, durational and spatial, and the two levels of mental life that experience these realities, intuition and the intellect, to

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<sup>28</sup> For an in-depth look at Bergson's impact on modernism, see S. E. Gontarski and Paul Ardoin's new collection of essays *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* (2013).

conceptualise the difference between pre-Olympian and Olympian religion. ‘I saw in a word’, she writes, ‘that Dionysos, with every other mystery-god, was an instinctive attempt to express what Professor Bergson calls *durée*, that life which is one, indivisible and yet ceaselessly changing’. The Olympians on the other hand are

a late and conscious representation, a work of analysis, of reflection and intelligence. Primitive religion was not [...] a tissue of errors leading to mistaken conduct; rather it was a web of practices emphasizing particular parts of life, issuing necessarily in representations and ultimately dying out into abstract conceptions’ (*Themis* 542).

While art and theology, Olympian products, are thus associated with the static, spatialising, representing intellect, ritual, in Harrison’s Bergsonian schema, is synonymous with the sense of process and immediate experience that defines *durée*.

Harrison also intertwines her distinction between ritual and art, pre-Olympian and Olympian, with emerging ideas about the unconscious versus the conscious mind. In her *Reminiscences*, Harrison admits to having struggled with the ‘sexual mud’ of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory,<sup>29</sup> but upon reading *Totemism and Taboo* (1912-1913) ‘at once the light broke’ and she saw in him a ‘mere doctor laying bare the origins of Greek drama as no classical scholar had ever done’ (81-82). Drawing perhaps at this point on William James (as she does not mention Freud), she states already in her 1911 introduction to *Themis* that ‘[i]t might almost be said that the Olympians stand for articulate consciousness, the Eniautos-Daimon for the sub-conscious’ (551). By the time Harrison writes her *Epilegomena* in 1921 her definition of ritual has grown to incorporate the theories of Freud and Jung. Here she writes that

We recognize now-a-days two types of thinking. The first which Jung calls ‘directed thinking’ is what we normally mean by thinking. It ‘imitates reality and seeks to direct it’. [...] The second kind of thought is what is called ‘dream or phantasy thinking.’ It turns away from reality and sets free subjective wishes.[...] Freud calls this sort of mind-functioning the ‘pleasure and pain principle,’ it is ontologically older than directed thinking, it is typified by the mental operations of children and savages and by those of adults in their dreams, reveries and mental disorders.

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<sup>29</sup> Harrison’s wording here parallels Mirrlees’s line in *Paris*: ‘Freud has dredged the river and, grinning horribly, / waves his garbage in a glare of electricity.’

It is from this early infantile type of dream or phantasy-thinking engendered by the fertility rite that primitive theology and mythology spring. (XLVii-XLViii)

This synthesis of Freud and Jung marks a departure from her previous reliance on Lévy Bruhl's notion of a primitive mentality sharply differentiated from the modern rational brain; the impulse and mentality behind primitive ritual and theology now becomes bound up instead with the notion of a universal human unconscious.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.5.3 Harrison's application of her theory to religion in her time

We have confused theology—a rational thing that can be intellectually defined [...]—with religion, an external reaction towards the unknown, the hidden spring of our physical, spiritual life.<sup>31</sup>

If we are to keep our hold on Religion, theology must go.<sup>32</sup>

In her 1915 collection of essays *Alpha and Omega*, Harrison attacks theology with a view to seeing if 'something that is at least akin to magic and religion may be retained' (183) in the present day. For her, '[i]t is not only that the particular forms of theology are dead, but that the idea of theology—i.e. a science of the unknowable—is, if not dead, at least [...] dying' (*A&O* 204). She bases this conclusion on her analysis of eikonic and aneikonic religion. 'I had often wondered', she says, 'why the Olympians [...]always vaguely irritated me, and why the mystery gods, their shapes and ritual, Demeter, Dionysus, the cosmic Eros, drew and drew me' (*A&O* 204). The reason, she writes, is that Olympian gods are the outcome of eikonism, which 'takes the vague, unknown, fearful thing, and tries to picture it, picture it as known, as distinct, definite—something a man can think about and understand; something that will think about and understand him; something as far rationalized as man himself'; it is thus an 'attempted expression of the unknown in terms of the known' (202). Eikonic ritual praises and sacrifices and prays to the god it has created. Aneikonism, on the other hand, is an older impulse: 'its feet are in the deep sea-wells and in the primeval slime, its head is swathed in mists and mysticism' (203). Aneikonic religion 'does not make its gods, it finds them—finds them in the life of Nature outside man, or in the psychological experience, the hope, the fear, the hate, the

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<sup>30</sup> Although it should be remembered that Jung drew heavily on Lévy-Bruhl for his description of the unconscious mind (see for example Segal, 'Jung and Lévy-Bruhl').

<sup>31</sup> Harrison, *A&O* (200).

<sup>32</sup> Harrison, *A&O* (179).

love, within him' (203). Aneikonic ritual 'at its lowest is magical; it aims at direct control of unknown forces [...] At its highest, [...] [it] aims at union; in a word, it is sacramental, mystical' (204). Here she connects eikonism and aneikonism, respectively, to

those two factors of our being with which modern science is now and rightly, but so tardily, much concerned, the conscious and the subconscious. The subconscious makes for fusion, union, emotion, ecstasy; the conscious for segregation, discrimination, analysis, clarity of vision. On the action and interaction of these two our whole spiritual vitality would seem to depend. (205)

As theology is purely rational and 'is not a thing lived, experienced', Harrison argues that 'it almost must be a spiritual stumbling block to-day', and renouncing it is to her 'almost an essential of religious life' (205).

Here, Bergson's philosophy holds the 'trumpet call to religion', which for her 'is why it has echoed in, and is answered by, so many hearts whose heads have barely grasped it'. For these people,

It has changed our whole outlook, for it has taught us that life *is* change, and cannot in its fullness be permanently formulated. Theology says: 'Here, outside me, is God as Creator.' Religion says: 'Within me I experience l'Évolution Créatrice' (207).

In keeping with this intuitive response to Bergson's theory, which itself highlights intuition over intellect, Harrison does not expound on her vision of religion in transition, and her arguments regarding religion in this collection remain mainly a polemic against theology and a gesture towards something less intellectualised, more sacramental and mystical, emotional and experience-based.

This sense of being on the cusp of a new age, a new way of thinking, is echoed in an essay on individualism and collectivism in the modern age, where Harrison notes how scientific developments 'broke the spell of herd-suggestion', but at the close of the nineteenth century

the glory of scientific individualism that had blazed so brightly, somehow died down and left a strange chill. Man rose up from the banquet of reason and law unfed. He hungered half unconsciously for the herd. It seemed an impasse : on the one side orthodoxy, tradition, authority, practical slavery; on the other science, individual freedom, reason, and an aching loneliness. (*A&O* 35)

Here she taps into the widespread challenge to individualist psychology emerging at this time and giving rise to social theories of psychology and behaviour, notably Durkheim's sociological theories, Marx and Weber's analyses of capitalism and Gustav le Bon's and

Freud's theorising of crowd psychology. Underlining this sense of a cultural fault-line, she reflects that 'we live now just at the transition moment; we have broken with the old, we have not quite adjusted ourselves to the new' (35-36).

In her later, short book *Epilegomena*, Harrison maintains, with Freud and Jung, that the 'older mind' of primitive ritual and theology is 'still buried in all of us' (xlviii): while primitive ritual has been 'driven out inch by inch by science, by "directed" as opposed to phantasy thinking', at the same time 'divinities of the "Olympian" type are losing their hold. They are seen for what they are, *objets d'art*, creations of man's imagination'. Echoing the theme of religion in transition found in *Alpha and Omega* six years earlier, she asks, 'Is this then the end?' (li). She sees hope in the observation that 'the essence of Modernism is Immanence' (claiming, here, to quote the Pope on the subject),<sup>33</sup> a theological concept dating back to Augustine which holds that divinity is not external to the person, but rather, as Harrison sums up, maintains that 'the Kingdom of God is within us' (li-lii). Her brief discussion on immanence is based on a talk given to the Society of Heretics in 1919, entitled 'Rationalism and Religious Reaction',<sup>34</sup> analysing in more detail this development that she sees taking place in religious life around her. In this talk she describes the 'new spirit', interchangeable with 'new Immanence', which she sees as a reaction of the younger generation to an over-emphasis of the previous generation on rationality. Members of this new generation 'disparage all the work of the speculative reason. Concepts, they tell us, are but snapshots of reality. Intellect, that was our invisible king, is for them discrowned' (13). The new spirit, she writes 'resents abstractions': 'the essence of the whole thing is that the so-called supernatural refuses any longer to be torn from, *abstracted* from, the natural. *Subtract* not *abstract* the supernatural, and the natural remains. In a word, the game for the *supernatural* is up, and the franker spirits allow' (20). This development for her marks 'a resurgence of an instinct very, very old', as immanence is necessarily bound up with mysticism (24). She sees this shift manifested clearly among Anglicans, 'who not so long ago boasted themselves Protestants', to whom now 'sacraments are felt to be of more spiritual value than sermons; not,

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<sup>33</sup> The term Modernism arises in this case from a theological context, having only later being applied retrospectively to the aesthetic movement by the same name (see for example Lock).

<sup>34</sup> Henceforth cited as 'Rationalism'.

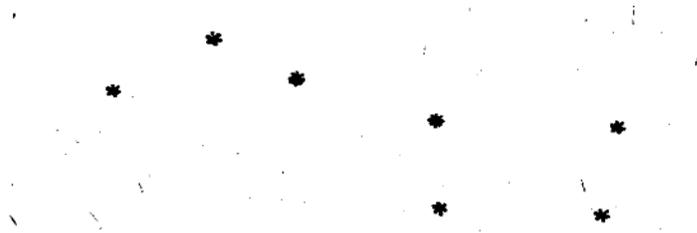
I think, because they embody any savage and obsolete magical efficacy, but because they stand for a mystical communion; they leave the spirit free for *experience*' (23).

The view of mysticism that Harrison expresses here, however, remains a scientific one: 'Mysticism is, to put it very simply, an emotional and intellectual state produced by special focus of attention, often coupled with suggestion. Its milder forms are "reverie," as known to us all; its extreme developments range up to dissociation of personality and even lunacy' (24). Relating her lecture to the namesake of the memorial lecture, she notes that

The guiding principle, the inspiring passion, of Moncure Daniel Conway's life and of his generation was Rationalist; was the desire to know. The inspiration of to-day and to-morrow seems to be religious, towards experience and its attendant values. It is as a Rationalist that I have tried to analyse and understand this inspiration. It was Rationalism that lit the fires of my youth, and at that fire I still warm the hands of advancing age. (42)

Having grown up with a fiercely Evangelical stepmother (*Reminiscences* 19), for this rationalism to have struck a chord early in life is understandable. As John C. Wilson mentions in his Preface to the 1962 edition of *Themis* and *Epilegomena*, Harrison remained a member of the Rationalist Association her whole life. He also notes, however, that while dismissing the validity of psychical research (with which some of her colleagues and closest friends were engaged), and remaining in this sense 'a child of her time', she also related, in letters to fellow Cambridge Ritualist Gilbert Murray, having had three distinctly mystical experiences of her own. Firstly, she writes of a 'very daimonian experience' telling her to stay out of Paris during a zeppelin raid; secondly, she writes about having seen a figure identical to herself seated in a railway carriage, and having left the coach and thus avoided a crash; and finally, she tells Murray about the morning she awoke, after a night of feeling 'full of hate against Frances' (Frances Darwin, who married fellow Cambridge Ritualist F.M. Cornford with whom Harrison was possibly in love, according to a number of biographers) and experienced feeling 'bathed in a most amazing bliss', which she says can best be described as the 'New Birth' [...] what they all try to describe, and [...] what they mean by communion with God' (*Epilegomena and Themis* x-xii). Contrasting with the rationalism she defends in her lecture to the Society of Heretics, which betrays her grounding in the agnostic iconoclasm of the Victorian intellectual climate, these experiences concur with her admission of knowing herself 'by temperament to be deeply, perhaps almost insanely, religious' (*A&O* 206).

## 4 Hope Mirrlees



Hope Mirrlees, *Paris, The Counterplot, Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists*

This constellation, the Ursa Major, or Big Bear, appears at the end of the three works by Hope Mirrlees listed here.<sup>35</sup> It is a symbol loaded with a shared significance for the two women, a signal of the deep bond between them. The Big Bear features as a signature in much of the private correspondence between Harrison and Mirrlees. Bears were furthermore a significant trope shared by the two women; firstly, Harrison and Mirrlees referred to themselves in their correspondence as the elder and younger wives of Herr Bear, Harrison's teddy bear who lived in 'the cave' – her room at Newnham.<sup>36</sup> Bears crop up repeatedly in Harrison's writing: in her discussions of totemism and Greek matriarchal rites to Artemis,<sup>37</sup> and as an affectionate term for Russians, who, as will be discussed in Section 5.6, she and Mirrlees associated with a primitive vitality and spirituality – 'Life', as Mirrlees puts it in her notes.<sup>38</sup> Mirrlees's incorporation of the constellation into her texts in a sense encodes Harrison into her work, almost tangibly associating her with it; the gesture weaves in allusions to key elements of Harrison's theory but most of all symbolises the importance of Harrison to Mirrlees, not only personally but also to her work. Mirrlees's works show an unsurpassed affinity with and sensitivity to the nuances and spirit of Harrison's ritual theory, both thematically and aesthetically. Thus, just as Harrison's feminist anthropological classicism functions as a critical and unique lens on a period of immense change and formal experimentation, Mirrlees's

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<sup>35</sup> Of Mirrlees's major early works, *Lud-in-the-Mist* – dedicated to the memory of her father – is the only one not to feature this signature.

<sup>36</sup> Beard, (*The Invention of Jane Harrison* 135); Robinson (*The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* 238-9).

<sup>37</sup> The Ursa Major refers, as Mary Beard notes, to a she-bear. For Beard on the Ursa Major in Harrison's and Mirrlees's relationship see her *Invention of Jane Harrison* (139-140, 213). The constellation itself has also been associated with Artemis (see for example Vicki Noble's *The Double Goddess: Women Sharing Power* [174]).

<sup>38</sup> Mirrlees. Notebook. Harrison Papers 4/3/1. Newnham College, Cambridge.

oeuvre, in forming the literary component of this lens, likewise constitutes a valuable historical artefact of the period. Together Mirrlees and Harrison express, through theoretical and literary writing, a drive to understand religion and experience the sacred in a new way, outside traditional institutions. In this way, they comprise a pairing of social scientist and writer that adds to the pairings Pericles Lewis makes in his *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*. Lewis's study reads the work of four modernist writers – Henry James, Proust, Kafka, Woolf – through the lens of contemporary social scientists seeking to uncover the essence of religion – William James, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, and Max Weber.<sup>39</sup> Lewis argues that what has often been viewed as evidence of these modernist writers' secularisation, or even an attempt to replace religion, can instead be read as an attempt to 'understand religious experience anew' (19) by engaging with the new methodologies offered by the social scientists of their day. Modernist writers, Lewis argues, are haunted by the 'image of the church as a broken container of a sacred essence' (4). This, as is clear in the above overview of the Harrisonian narrative of ritual to theology, is true for Harrison; Mirrlees, this thesis will argue, shares and works this idea into her writing, while her quest ends differently from Harrison's, who died an atheist, unconvinced by the church's claims to meet religious needs.

While the rest of the chapters in this thesis trace Mirrlees's use of the ritual theory in her various works, the following sections attempt to provide an overview of her main concerns through a consideration of her peripheral writing – newspaper articles from the 1920s, only very recently published essays,<sup>40</sup> and unpublished material – which usefully frame her literary works.

The close relationship between Harrison and Mirrlees, beginning as mentor and student at Newnham College in Cambridge (1910-1913), and continuing as cohabiting companions in Paris (1922-1925) and later London (1925-1928), has been remarked on and debated by a number of writers (Beard 152-155, 134-38; Parmar xv–xix; Robinson [*The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* 235-242, 295]). Mirrlees's deep dedication to Harrison is evident in the

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<sup>39</sup> A final chapter, using a slightly different approach, albeit in keeping with the overall theme of the book, pairs James Joyce with Dante.

<sup>40</sup> See *Hope Mirrlees: Collected Poems* edited by Sandeep Parmar.

frequency of references to Harrison in her work as well as the playful and affectionate correspondence between them,<sup>41</sup> which often includes the distinct signature – mentioned above – of the constellation of Ursa Major, also appearing at the end of *Paris, Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists* and *The Counterplot*.<sup>42</sup> The importance of Harrison to Mirrlees is possibly most clearly indicated by the decades that she spent after Harrison's death trying to assemble a biography. A line standing out from this jumble of notes and essays – which however never developed into a full memoir – distils Mirrlees's debt to Harrison, the driving force behind the years of work spent on the biography: 'I [...] owe my whole picture of the universe to her' (qtd. in Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* 295).

Described by Virginia Woolf as 'her own heroine – capricious, exacting [...] very learned',<sup>43</sup> and by renowned Germanist E.M. Butler as 'a cross between a pixy and a genius',<sup>44</sup> Mirrlees, however, is not constrained in her own thinking by the limits informing Harrison's theory and views. On the aspect of embracing the aneikonic and mystical, Mirrlees goes further than Harrison, perhaps owing to the fact that she belonged to another generation, one without the primary aims driving Victorian agnostic iconoclasm. Harrison remarks of her generation: 'we old Rationalists had heavy, sad work to do shattering idols; we had not time or strength left us to join in the ritual dance of the new creative God' ('Rationalism' 33). While nostalgic for the mysticism that she saw as inherent to primitive religion and frustrated by the eikonic, rationalised Olympians, Harrison, it seems, cannot herself fully embrace the aneikonic and unknowable and needs to rationalise mysticism by reducing it to its psychological components. Despite her own mystical experiences, in her published works she stops short of engaging with the possible existence of something beyond the rational or psychologically explicable.

Born 37 years later than Harrison, Mirrlees in many ways fits Harrison's description of adherents of the 'new spirit', the new Immanence which is, as Harrison argues, necessarily mystical in its refusal to separate God from self and nature. She can be seen to embody what

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<sup>41</sup> See for example Beard (134-135).

<sup>42</sup> As Harrison burnt all her letters before leaving Newnham, the signature can only be seen in her letters to Mirrlees; that the use of this signature was mutual is only an inference, albeit a reasonable one.

<sup>43</sup> See Briggs (*Reading Virginia Woolf* 82).

<sup>44</sup> See Jesse Stewart's *Jane Ellen Harrison: A Portrait from Letters* (174).

Harrison refers to as one of the new, ‘franker spirits’ who allow for the supernatural (‘Rationalism’ 20) – the aneikonic, the unrepresentable. Also being a writer, however, Mirrlees is concerned with textual representation, and her approach to literature goes hand in hand with the mystical immanence Harrison describes, leading to a highly performative aesthetic and themes that centre on the essence of ritual and mysticism. Ritual as Harrison describes it – the bridge to representation, through a mystical engagement with the unknown – forms a constant trope and theme in her work. Her writing is a continuous exploration of how the intangible, ineffable aspects of human experience – the unconscious or mystical – can be represented, as well as the problems or sheer impossibility of this. There is a pervasive focus on the tension between life and art, echoing Harrison’s Bergsonian dichotomy between the two; this tension also appears in her distinction between antiquarianism and history – the former a disorderly collection of antiquities, the latter a logical, coherent narrative. While often foregrounding the nature of these opposites, Mirrlees’s writing also focuses intensely on the bridge that connects them, the liminal, middle space of ritual; it is this process of representation rather than its product that is highlighted. Her aesthetic can thus be described as highly performative, centring on the material process of performing the unsayable – the pinnacle of this tendency being *Paris*, which will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

#### **4.1 Mirrlees’s neo-Romanticism: a language of dreams for the modern day**

This approach and focus in her work draws on and retools a strand of Romanticism that she traces historically and carries on in her own work – an aspect which will be considered in more depth in Chapter 4 on her fantasy novel *Lud-in-the-Mist*. For Mirrlees, Romanticism is a mode of writing that attempts to translate the unconscious and mystical elements of life into literature. It begins with medieval supernatural ballads which, through a ritual process, create a secondary world – Elfland – once religion begins to ‘shut the shutters on the shadowy vistas’ (‘Ballad and the Ritual Dance’ [Mirrlees papers 6/3/6]). This strand is revived in German Romanticism and the Gothic revival in the eighteenth-century literary fixation on dreams and the ‘hunger for the “sublime”’ (‘Gothic Dreams’ 810), and reaches its pinnacle in the mystical poetry of Keats which continuously seeks a symbolic outlet for the ineffable – ‘ethereal things [...] greater things than our creator himself made’ (‘Art’, Mirrlees papers 6/4/1). A parallel can readily be drawn between the insistence on process, longing and lack of closure in Harrison’s ritual theory of art and Keats’s ‘negative capability’, which he describes as ‘when a man is

capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats 277). In the narrative of Romanticism that Mirrlees traces, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, in their medievalism, are a continuation of this strand and Aestheticism is its last flowering.

Mirrlees's formulation of Romanticism, as Chapter 4 will show, is strongly resonant of Harrison's ritual theory of art. As discussed above, Harrison associates ritual with the workings of the unconscious mind. While in her writing before *Epilegomena* this mentality is linked to 'savages' and then becomes linked to a universal 'older mind', this mode of thinking and feeling associated with ritual remains consistent. In *Themis* it is referred to as 'that other world of dream, of ecstasy, of trance, with its secondary reality, the world in which emotions, hope and fear, and imaginations, are blended with what we should call subjective hallucinations' (512). In *Epilegomena* the source of ritual becomes located in the unconscious mind 'buried in all of us'; this is the source of what Jung calls 'dream or phantasy thinking' (xlvii-xlviii), which is manifested in primitive myth. The language Harrison uses to describe this ritual mentality echoes her promotion of art that has a 'trance-like quality' about it – 'real, but with the reality of a dream' – and her notion that 'the artist is always a sleep-walker' in *Alpha and Omega* six years earlier (215-216). Her wish that 'there will one day come a Futurist [...] who will cast the spell, and set the motors and aeroplanes sleep-walking' (*A&O* 218) further indicates her wish for modern art to return to this mentality which she associates with ritual. In light of the strong focus on the unconscious and fantasy in Mirrlees's work, it is interesting to note that Harrison's *Epilegomena* is dedicated to Mirrlees. This may indicate the particular affinity of the two women for the ideas expressed in this book about the origins of primitive ritual and myth in the unconscious. It may even suggest the influence of Mirrlees on Harrison's thinking on this topic.

Positing Romanticism as a mode that most effectively mines the hidden realm of the unconscious challenges the dismissive attitude of some modernists – notably Hulme, Lawrence, Pound and the later Yeats – to Romanticism.<sup>45</sup> While these writers made a distinction between 'the real world' and 'fairyland' and wrote dismissively about what they considered escapist literature, Mirrlees's version of Romanticism blurs the boundary between

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<sup>45</sup> See for example Louise Blakeney's introduction to her *Modernism and the Ideology of History*.

‘fairyland’ and the ‘real world’. She is suspicious of the power of language to enable what the creators of Imagism termed ‘direct treatment of the “thing”’ (Flint, F.S. ‘Imagisme’ [199], which Pound elaborates on in ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’), referring to the written word at the end of *Lud-in-the-Mist* as a ‘fairy’; like fairies in the story it is ‘mocking and elusive [...] speaking lying words to us in a feigned voice’ (273). Fantasy writing is not depicted as an escape, but as a vital expression of hidden emotion and unrepresentable experience; this reflects the way ritual exercises a mentality rooted in the irrational unconscious and produces primitive myth. Thus, in Mirrlees’s hands, Romanticism – particularly fantasy writing – becomes intricately bound up with ritual. This also manifests itself in the way that Romanticism for Mirrlees is a symbolic, mythical mode of expression. Just as ritual is not motivated by rational ends (as in Frazer’s theory) but is rather an expression of deep emotion, rooted in the unconscious, a literary mode based on ritual cannot directly represent in a realist fashion. Just as dreams are symbolic, so Romanticism based on dreams can only speak in the symbolic language of myth and fantasy. As mentioned above, this is an idea that will be explored in Chapter 4 on *Lud-in-the-Mist*.

The concreteness of the aesthetic in Mirrlees’s greatest work, *Paris*, however, belies a wish for external artistic form that expresses the unsayable that surpasses – or perhaps rather complements – the symbolic expression of this brand of Romanticism. This wish and gesture, as Sections 5.2-2.2 below on modernism in the arts will show, shares in an urge felt by many artists of the period to move beyond representation and emphasise process and materiality. Just as ritual is a concrete, embodied, sacramental participation in vital forces, or *mana*, Mirrlees is concerned with how literature can enact an embodiment of the aneikonic and unrepresentable. The following sections consider this question of representation. Without extensive reference to Mirrlees’s main texts – which are the subject of the rest of the thesis – the aim is to explore the problems, hopes and longings that inform her main works.

## 4.2 Concrete expression and the unrepresentable

Mirrlees’s quest as a writer centres on how to represent what Romanticism had long engaged with – the unknown, mystical experience, the unconscious, dreams, the sublime. In tune, as

Harrison is,<sup>46</sup> with the aesthetic, psychological and epistemological concerns in focus in her day, however, she problematises the expression of these themes in literature.<sup>47</sup> She participates in the modern problematisation of straightforward representation, the need to bring more visibility to the medium of representation and question and record its process, a need felt across the art forms and leading to innovative experimentation with form.<sup>48</sup> As one critic has put it, referring to both visual and literary art, ‘representing modernity resulted in interrogating what it meant to represent, and to do so by looking at the building blocks of one’s art’ (Diepeveen 36). And following Harrison’s model of art arising from ritual, literature must for Mirrlees approach the condition of a ‘dromenon’, an active ‘doing’, an emphasis on process rather than product. In ritual this involves a concrete, embodied sacrament; it is performative, not statically representational. A number of Mirrlees’s intellectual explorations relate to this issue of representation, including her engagement with antiquarianism, her writing on the nature of time, and her writing on Catholicism after her conversion.

The sense in Mirrlees’s distinctive retooling of Romanticism that words cannot directly convey reality and mystical, rationally unexplainable experience is also a major theme in her particular brand of antiquarianism. Indeed, here she takes this stance a step further and imagines antiquarianism as a means of accessing the shadowy, intangible past tangibly – an impossible feat in the verbal activity of historians. After three careful decades of research, she published her biography of Sir Robert Cotton, the Elizabethan antiquary known especially for his collection of medieval manuscripts. She is clearly sympathetic to Cotton’s passion for preserving the illuminated manuscripts as beautiful artefacts, rather than as repositories of semantic meaning, arguing that antiquarians alone are able to perform the magic of restoring the past tangibly. This aspect of her thinking and aesthetic is especially relevant to *Paris*, and will be explored in depth in Chapter 3 which locates Mirrlees in a bibliographical tradition which reaches back to Blake and centres on the material invocation of the past through the typographical and other tangible features of a text. The tangible connection to the past, the

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<sup>46</sup> See above in Section 3.5.2 and below in 5.2.

<sup>47</sup> See for example Lewis (*The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* 3-10) for an overview of the modernist crisis of representation and experimentation with different strategies of addressing this problem.

<sup>48</sup> This dimension of modernism will be considered below in Sections 5.2-5.5.

palpable materiality of memory, that Mirrlees finds in antiquarianism has for her a mystical character. As she writes in 'Listening in to the Past' (1926):

A swift, fleeting sense of the past is as near as I have ever got to a mystical experience . . . a sudden *physical* conviction (like fingering for the first time the antiquity one had so often gazed at through the glass case in the museum), that Horace and Virgil did *really once* travel together to Brundisium, and that Horace was kept awake by mosquitos and the love-songs of tipsy boatmen [...] or, that at a definite point of time the larks were singing and there were milestones on the Dover road, as Chaucer jogged on his way to Canterbury. (670)

Rhetorically, this passage itself demonstrates, in its use of evocative concrete detail, the almost physical sense of the past that Mirrlees is attempting to describe. This emphasis on concreteness in Mirrlees's antiquarianism, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, relates closely to a similar emphasis in Harrison's ritual theory. It is also of a piece with the anti-realism in Mirrlees's work in that concrete artefacts do not attempt a mimetically represented verbal account of the past. Rather they have the potential to impart a sense of the past beyond semantic meaning – possibly even the 'swift, fleeting' sense of it that Mirrlees describes which, because tangible and un-intellectualised, may impart a mystical sense of communion with the past.

This mystical sense of the past, or rather the intangible substance of time, surfaces as well in her article 'The Religion of Women' (1927), as does the idea that this mystical sense is an embodied experience, tangible rather than verbally processed and conveyed. Here she argues that the religion of all women is time. Just as women were the chief mourners of Thammuz and Adonais, time becomes a daimon for whom women mourn. She notes how the daimon of Time has 'branded their bodies with his mark—the periodicity of the moon' (260), which is why, more than men (except for poets), women are haunted by tragic conceptions of the past: '[i]t is as if their bodies divined something that their minds ignored. Perhaps this is the mysterious "*phronema sarkos*, which some do expound the wisdom of the flesh" mentioned in the ninth Article of Religion' (259). Tracing this relationship to time back to the way in which 'primitive man' observed the seasons, she writes that 'from this model—the cycle of the seasons—he draws the wavering stippled outline of his first picture of life as a whole, and of his own fate' (259-260). Time, here, is thus seen as a symbol arising from a mystical process, just as a daimon, and later a god, arise from ritual through an increasing process of abstraction. Indeed, she writes here that what draws women to church is that 'they find in the hymns and liturgy an oblique expression of the wisdom of their bodies and the sensibility of their minds' (259). As it is not the theological content of the service that attracts

them but rather something felt and experienced through the ritual on a physical and emotional level, she writes that '[i]n fact, they have no right to be in church at all; unless Christ and Time are one. Perhaps they are' (259). The article conveys a sense of resentment towards the servitude of women to this unseen, intangible, unspeakable force. Time, she argues, using Harrison's logic is an 'impersonation of the actual process to which the *daimon* is subject' and is actually a substitute for Mother Earth and the natural cycle of life and death (259). This resentment may indeed indicate a nostalgic yearning for the concreteness of cyclical earth-bound ritual which preceded disembodied conceptions like Time.

Time appears as a symbol for something intangible and ungraspable again in her unpublished, undated essay 'Time and Gold' (Mirrlees papers 6/3/9). Opening the essay with a newspaper story about a debt of interest, she considers the way in which interest is a 'legal fiction' which embodies the saying 'time is money'. She regards this fiction as 'necessary to the peace of mind of homo sapiens' because it fuses the tangible and material, for which money is the accepted symbol, and 'something else for which we need a symbol'. She describes this 'something else' as

the fruit of no earthly tree, the treasure of no geological deposit, the tertium quid that mocks philosophers and scientists as much as us and which, try as we will, we cannot subsume under the established laws of nature and experience. According to these laws solid walls are impenetrable and we can walk through shadows; but the fourth wall of our prison is both impenetrable and shadowy, and for this wall I cannot think of a better symbol than Time.

Thus, she argues, the saying 'there are things that money cannot buy' is really

a cry of anguish, because it expresses our fundamental most bitter grievance, namely that the Word can never never be made flesh, that there are things money cannot buy; or, perhaps, it is just one thing—Time, then, & the shadowy things it stands for, cannot be bought with gold.

She writes that although sometimes we are honest and admit that '[i]f wishes were horses then beggars would ride' – in other words that the tangible and intangible are irreconcilable – 'we cannot always be so honest', and have to take comfort in 'hocus-pocus and legal fictions and conceits'. She then proceeds to enact this kind of 'hocus-pocus' herself in the essay, turning

time into gold, by imagining that a fortune could be retrospectively bestowed on the nineteenth-century Romantic essayist and poet Charles Lamb.<sup>49</sup>

The imaginative, magical fusion of the intangible with the tangible through writing that this essay performs crystallises the problem and desire evident in Mirrlees's writing regarding how to represent the unrepresentable. It is the same central idea expressed in 'The Religion of Women' as the 'phronema sarkos', the 'wisdom of the flesh': women's bodies are branded with the mark of their 'daimon', Time. They thus corporeally commemorate and in a sense embody and perform this unseen master, a poor substitute for 'Mother Earth—the bountiful, the benign' (259). The mystical experience of the 'swift fleeting sense of the past' felt tangibly again expresses this same idea. It is indicated in 'Time and Gold' that 'time' functions for Mirrlees as a symbol for the 'fourth wall',<sup>50</sup> a 'shadowy' and 'impenetrable' thing. Time thus stands for the unknowable, the ineffable, and her wish is to give this intangible thing tangible form, while knowing that it cannot be directly represented. This reflects her writing on Romanticism, which, as discussed above, considers Romanticism's engagement with the ineffable and sublime, the unconscious and unknowable, through symbols, implying that expression of such things is beyond the reach of direct realist representation.<sup>51</sup> The longing for the union of the intangible and a tangible form appears to haunt Mirrlees's writing. It is a union at the heart of Harrison's view of ritual, where a corporeal and verbal performance enacting a desire bring mind and body together in a mystical experience connecting the ritual participant to fellow participants as well as all of nature through the figure of the daimon. This is mirrored in the 'magic' of antiquarianism for Mirrlees, fusing the intangibility of the past with a tangible artefact. It is the magic that fantasy writing longs for and can provide a momentary glimpse of. As will be explored, it is the magic performed in her masterpiece *Paris*.

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<sup>49</sup> Her reason for choosing Lamb is his nature as a mixture of a 'miser and a spendthrift'; 'with admirable economy [he] fashion[s] his comfort, as he does his essays, out of simple home-grown materials'. This produces a 'strangeness' in his essays, which resonates with the sudden shifts between the mundane and the strange incurred by the influence of fairies in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, as Chapter 4 will show.

<sup>50</sup> Next to one mention of the 'fourth wall' she has inserted the handwritten addition 'one of the many names of which is Time' in the margin. This indicates, as she says earlier in the essay, that Time is a symbol for something that is the opposite of the material, giving the term a broader, more mystical definition than it is generally considered to have.

<sup>51</sup> This aspect of Mirrlees's writing is embodied most fully in her fantasy novel *Lud-in-the-Mist*, on one hand a highly entertaining, clever story, on the other a sophisticated self-referential treatise on fantasy and Romanticism.

### 4.3 Magical Catholicism?

Speaking generally, the Roman church lays more stress on magic, we on prayer and its correlative theology. I say this not to disparage the Roman Church. She is nearer Alpha, and will have therefore, perhaps, less difficulty in abolishing Omega.<sup>52</sup>

The magic Mirrlees attempted to give expression in her writing is arguably also what brought her to Catholicism, in 1929, the year after Harrison's death. In an unpublished essay on Catholicism,<sup>53</sup> she expounds on the implications of the doctrine of the Incarnation, that is, the idea of Christ as both divine and human, which ties together the major threads running through her poems, articles and novels: fantasy, the vision of a magical fusion of the tangible and embodied with the intangible, and the performative aesthetic inherent in this vision. Here what she refers to in 'Time and Gold' as 'our fundamental and most bitter grievance, namely that the Word can never never be made flesh' is resolved for her. She finds this magic in Catholicism. The doctrine of the Incarnation, 'realised, meditated, remembered and adored' in Catholicism more than anywhere else, she writes, is what accounts for the 'many Catholic customs and devotions and habits of speech that appear to Protestants childish, over concrete, fantastic, even idolatrous'. The corollaries of this doctrine 'form the substance of Catholic mystical theology' and are the reason for 'that seeming eclipse of the Godhead – Emmanuel' which scandalises Protestants. She sums up this doctrine in her assertion that '[i]n the Catholic Church there is no distinction between exoteric and esoteric' and claims that this understanding of the Incarnation cannot readily be gained from the Catechism and this is her reason for writing this essay, 'to hasten this process for some of its readers'. She finds that the Hypostatic Union results in the creation of the supernatural, and that through baptism, human beings become supernatural creatures 'and are given the right of entry to this new world, where earthly values are reversed, where the hills are valleys and the valleys hills'. This description directly recalls her writing on Elfland, or Fairyland, in 'The Ballad and the Ritual Dance' and *Lud-in-the-Mist*. This 'new world' is 'a land where the abstract becomes concrete, where "hard sayings" are found to be literally true, and where the imagination can expatriate not only in realms of fancy, but in realms of fact. Such is "Emmanuel's Land" – the supernatural

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<sup>52</sup> Harrison, *A & O* (183).

<sup>53</sup> Mirrlees papers 6/3/14.

Marches between Heaven and Earth, the Church'. The unrepresentable and spiritual thus becomes embodied and concrete; the supernatural is performed.

'Heaven and Earth' have, with her conversion, come to replace 'life and art', and the opposition between them is resolved through the collective, embodied medium of the Church. This resort to a traditional institution, after the bold experimentation seen especially in *Paris*, could be viewed as a failure of Mirrlees's quest. At the same time it highlights the utopian nature of her project: the impossibility of discovering a satisfactory literary aesthetic of ritual divorced from the dogma of theology. In this, her experimental work – *Paris, Lud-in-the-Mist* and to a lesser extent her two realist novels – can themselves be seen as standing unsurely poised, in the spirit of 'desire and longing rather than certainty and satisfaction' on the ritual bridge between the hidden, internal thing desired and external, representative form. A further interpretation of Mirrlees's conversion to Catholicism could be that she indeed succeeded in her quest, but that this meant reinventing an existing dogma to suit her needs.<sup>54</sup> The way in which she expounds on the doctrine of the Incarnation in Catholicism brings it very close to Harrison's formal description of ritual; perhaps in her mystical interpretation of the Catholic creed and practice – inevitably influenced by her deep understanding of Harrison's ritual theory – she found a highly personalised, if incommunicable, fulfilment of her utopian aims.

#### 4.4 Biographical background to Mirrlees's literary quest

From a biographical perspective, Mirrlees's intense concern with issues of representation could in part be seen to grow out of and reflect her highly varied cultural and linguistic background. Mirrlees was born in 1887 in Kent to Scottish parents: her father a wealthy

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<sup>54</sup> The many conversions to High Church religions, particularly Catholicism, at this time among original thinkers and artists imply that Mirrlees was not the only one. This surge in conversions, which Harrison mentions in her essay 'Rationalism and Religious Reaction' (quoted from above), included a number of figures who could be seen to possess an affinity with Mirrlees and Harrison. They included: the writer G.K. Chesterton who, like Mirrlees, was drawn to the fantasy mode; the mystic Sergei Solovyov who Harrison incorporates into her thinking in *Epilegomena*, Eric Gill; whose typographical experiments parallel Mirrlees's; the painter Maria Blanchard whose attitude to language and aesthetics Mirrlees admired (see Chapter 3), Mary Butts who incorporated many of Harrison's ideas into her writing; Edith Sitwell who, like Mirrlees, attempted to bring a performative aesthetic into poetry and also stressed its religious nature, and the literary critic Charles Du Bos, discussed in Chapter 4, who shared Mirrlees's enthusiasm for Keats's mystical Romanticism and, having lapsed from Catholicism, converted back not long before Mirrlees's own conversion. Even Bergson, in his will, admits, 'my reflections have brought me closer and closer to Catholicism', stating that his only reason for not converting is to support Jews at a time when they are being persecuted (Barnard xxi).

Glaswegian industrialist and her mother from a family of cultured Edinburgh lawyers descendent from Scottish royalty.<sup>55</sup> She grew up in England, Scotland and South Africa, where her father co-founded a sugar company, and after attending Newnham made prolonged visits to Paris. She learnt Zulu from her nanny in South Africa and French from her governesses before starting school at age 11 in St Andrews, Scotland. Over her life she also learnt Greek, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Persian, Arabic, Italian and Old Norse. Considered in the light of influential theories on language and translation, it is feasible that this exposure to a range of cultures and languages could have had a major impact on her literary concerns regarding representation. George Steiner's seminal treatise on translation, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), argues that all acts of communication and meaning-making involve translation, owing to the elusive and social-constructed nature of language:

Any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance. No two historical epochs, no two social classes, no two localities use words and syntax to signify exactly the same things, to send identical signals of valuation and inference. Neither do two human beings. (47)

Thus translation only highlights the problem of communication already inherent in language. Perhaps Mirrlees's multilingual experience served to highlight for her this issue with language and hence literary representation, leading to a concern with untranslatability – the inadequacy of language – found in her work. Notions of linguistic-cultural relativity, first famously propounded in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and further developed in translation and bilingual studies by such theorists as Juliane House and William Frawley, suggest the impossibility of translating from one language and cultural context to another. The theorist Tzvetan Todorov takes this a step further; describing the alienation from both one's languages caused by immigrant bilingualism, he writes that 'silence and madness appeared to me at the horizon of mad polyphony and I found them oppressive' (Todorov 25). Madness and silence are, as Chapter 4 will explore, a major theme in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, which, of all Mirrlees's works, most fully engages with the idea of the unrepresentable – even self-reflexively, as Fairyland, the focal point of the whole plot of the novel, is never represented. Perhaps what drew Mirrlees to

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<sup>55</sup> This fact is noted by Michael Swanwick in his biography *Hope-in-the-Mist* (3), the source for the biographical information in this paragraph.

Harrison's theory had in part something to do with its focus on ritual as an embodied, concrete performance containing meaning which cannot adequately be intellectualised and verbalised – not without becoming a sterile abstraction.

Mirrlees's brief foray into the world of the theatre, studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art under the renowned actress Mrs Patrick Campbell, before defecting to Newnham to study Greek, may indeed have been precipitated by the same concerns with representation. As theatre is the direct descendent of ritual it retains the potential to unite actors and audience through the immediacy of an experience that communicates its meaning not only on a verbal but also embodied level. Indeed, Mirrlees's early interest in drama points to the performative aesthetic later appearing in *Paris*, as well as the thematic exploration of the process and psychology of representation in her other works.

Whatever brought Mirrlees to Harrison, it is clear that the two women shared a fundamental concern. As Harrison explains in her memoirs, after giving an account of magical ritual processions she witnessed in Seville and in Echternach, and a Russian celebration of Mass which she likens to a ritual drama: 'I mention these ritual dances, this ritual drama, this bridge between art and life, because it is things like these that I was all my life blindly seeking' (84-86). As she writes, 'On that bridge, emotionally, I halt'. This seems to have been Mirrlees's touchstone as well, and Harrison's theory, as the rest of this thesis aims to show, provides an idiom through which to pursue her quest.

Together, Mirrlees and Harrison participate in a larger modernist preoccupation with the primitive, as well as with aesthetics that can be linked to Harrison's formulation of ritual. The following section considers this context, with a few key examples of trailblazing work in different art forms with which Harrison and Mirrlees's approaches to aesthetic form could be seen to resonate.

## 5 'Recrossing the ritual bridge back to life': Harrison's theory and modernism in the arts

Art in these latter days goes back as it were on her own steps, recrossing the ritual bridge back to life.<sup>56</sup>

This observation by Harrison in 1913 evokes images of a quest backwards in time in order to develop forwards, recapturing life through an excavation of something lost over time. It could firstly and readily be associated with the widely used trope of the primitive in modernist painting, literature and performance. This trend reflected the way primitivist discourse, growing with the nascent field of ethnographic study in non-Western cultures and the popularisation of anthropology,<sup>57</sup> posited 'savages' as childlike, 'our untamed selves, our id forces – libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous' but also mystically inclined and in harmony with nature (Torgovnick 8).<sup>58</sup> In search of a purer, more vital artistic expression, artists of the period such as Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin and Miro thus turned to non-Western aesthetic modes and culture for inspiration and an alternative model in their own work. Primitivism pervaded the art of the early twentieth century, the most iconic examples being the infamous *Rite of Spring* by the Ballet Russes which brought a depiction of pagan Russian ritual to Europe's most respected theatres, and the paintings by post-impressionists and cubists that drew on archaic and non-Western art as a model, marking the change in human character that Woolf claims occurred in 1910 at their first showing in England. In literature the primitive often appears as a motif. Along with T.S. Eliot's well-documented engagement with the idea of the primitive in his early poetry up to and including *The Waste Land*,<sup>59</sup> the work of Mary Butts (who claimed that Eliot always anticipated her titles [Radford 305-306]) explores the possibility of a mystical, pagan relationship to place in order to counteract the rootlessness imposed by modernity and the trauma caused by war.<sup>60</sup> The work of D.H. Lawrence is filled

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<sup>56</sup> Harrison, *AAR* (113).

<sup>57</sup> See above in Section 2, on the background to anthropological studies of myth.

<sup>58</sup> While Torgovnick and other theorists on primitivism have shown that the concept of the primitive is a Western invention, the term is used throughout this thesis as this term was in use in anthropological work at the time that Harrison and Mirrlees were writing and is therefore indispensable to conveying both Harrison's theoretical position and Mirrlees's use of it.

<sup>59</sup> See Crawford for an in-depth study of Eliot's engagement with anthropology, including Harrison's.

<sup>60</sup> See for example Radford's 'Excavating a Secret History: Mary Butts and the Return of the Nativist'.

with the sense of a quest to recover the purity and vitality of primitive – whether archaic and past, or non-Western – rituals, myths and ways of life.<sup>61</sup> His letters show that he read Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* and that its invitation to 'see art coming out of religious yearning' made a strong impression on him.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.1 'Emotion towards life': ritual and the modern everyday

The emotion to be expressed is the emotion of to-day, or still better to-morrow. The mimetic dance arose not only nor chiefly out of reflection on the past; but out of either immediate joy or imminent fear or insistent hope for the future.

[...] We may not cast reluctant eyes backwards; the world goes forward to new forms of life, and the Churches of to-day must and should become the Museums of to-morrow.<sup>63</sup>

Beyond themes of primitive Greece which connect Harrison to modernism in the arts,<sup>64</sup> Harrison's theory has other formal, aesthetic and subject-related implications that resonate strongly with modern art forms. Indeed, despite Harrison's passion for primitive ritual, her primitivism is not backward-looking; 'Life', she writes, 'is doomed to make for itself moulds, break them, remake them' (*A&O* 218). When reflecting on how her ritual theory relates to art in the modern day, she stresses that art must, like ritual, be relevant to its time; it must arise 'by way of ritual out of keen emotion towards life' (*AAR* 118). In this she sees the Italian Futurists as leading the way in their engagement with 'that living tangle' of modern life in their work (127), although she stops short of supporting their call to burn down museums – agreeing however, that the nude could usefully be banished for ten years (129). 'The new field they open up is priceless as material', she writes in *Alpha & Omega* (218), and in *Ancient Art and Ritual* argues that

[i]f there is to be any true living art, it must arise, not from the contemplation of Greek statues, not from the revival of folk-songs, not even from the re-enacting of Greek plays, but from a keen emotion felt towards things and people living to-day, in modern conditions, including, among other and deeper forms of life, the haste and hurry of the modern street, the whirr of motor cars and aeroplanes. (129)

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<sup>61</sup> See Torgovnick (159-174).

<sup>62</sup> Radford, Andrew (*Lost Girls: Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination*, 1850-1930 225).

<sup>63</sup> Harrison, *AAR* (129-130).

<sup>64</sup> See the Introduction to this thesis for sources.

Here Harrison points to a need to capture the sense of the pace of modern life, the dynamic, even disorienting, fragmenting experience it creates. In this insistence on modern art arising from modern life Harrison's passion for the primitive shows an affinity with the Futurists' self-identification as 'the primitives of a new sensibility'.<sup>65</sup> As John White in his study on Futurism has argued, the Futurists can be understood as attempting to rediscover a lost 'quasi-Dionysian vitality' but not through already used prehistoric art forms, rather through a 'counter-primitivism' which used war and the city and machines in the way Gauguin used Tahiti (White 302-303). As discussed above, (Section 3.4.2) particularly after Harrison incorporates Freud's and Jung's theories of the unconscious into her views, her concept of a mentality linked to ritual broadens to take in the idea of a universal unconscious, the 'older mind [...] still buried in all of us' (*Epilegomena* xlvi).

The following sections will consider some of the key ways in which this modern return to ritual manifests itself across a number of different art forms. Recurring themes include an increased emphasis on materiality, embodiment, performative 'doing' rather than representing, emotional expression and connection. The expression of some of these themes in Harrison's and Mirrlees's passion for Russian will then be explored, and the role of dreams and the unconscious.

## 5.2 Ritual aesthetics in visual art: 'Expressionists' vs Imitationists

Harrison groups the Futurists together with post-Impressionists (although '[t]hey will not gladly be classed together' [AAR 127]) as Expressionists. These artists, she notes, 'no matter by what name they call themselves, have one criterion. They believe that art is not the copying or idealizing of Nature, or of any aspect of Nature, but the expression and communication of the artist's emotion' (127). In this, according to Harrison, they rediscover the true origins of art. As she explains when putting forward her theory,

[a]t the bottom of art, as its motive power and its mainspring, lies, not the wish to copy Nature or even improve on her [...] but rather an impulse shared by art with ritual, the desire, that is, to utter, to give out a strongly felt emotion or desire by representing, by making or doing or enriching the object or act desired. (10)

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<sup>65</sup> See Umberto Boccioni's 'What divides us from Cubism' (1914).

She finds this expressiveness in the literary theory of Tolstoy as well, noting his affinity with the post-Impressionists (130), and argues that it answers a need that has been neglected by art:

the life of the imagination, and even of the emotions, has been perhaps too long lived at second hand, received from the artist ready made and felt. To-day, owing largely to the progress of science, and a host of other causes social and economic, life grows daily fuller and freer [...]. With this fresh outpouring of the spirit, this fuller consciousness of life, there comes a need for *first-hand* emotion and expression [...]. (113)

This rejection of a ‘second-hand’ reception of the emotions and imagination that motivate the artist, the wish for more immediate expression, has led not only to the anti-mimetic experiments of post-Impressionists and Futurists but also to the ‘strenuous, exciting, self-expressive dances of to-day’ which ‘are of the soil and [...] based [...] on very primitive ritual’ (130). The phrase ‘of the soil’ here invokes a sense of something powerfully primal, earthy and sensual, and recalls the earth-goddesses in Harrison’s theory, and her opposition of these to the airy Olympians who are mere ‘objets d-art’ (*Themis* 478-479). Juxtaposing this image of the earth with the speed of technological modernity in her vision of the direction of modern art, Harrison suggests that art can maintain its roots in this ‘soil’ of primitive ritual while capturing the essence of modern life (which, as Chapters 2 and 3 will show, is what *Paris* does).

This expressiveness in art returns to ritual in that an artwork becomes again something done, an emotion is expressed in a concrete way, through making or doing. Thus it involves a heightened emphasis on the materiality of the artistic gesture – whether in painting, literature or performance. In their bold, subjectively expressive use of colour and perspective, modern artists highlighted the materiality of the artwork.<sup>66</sup> Rather than using materials to pictorially refer to, or represent, something other than itself, such artworks drew attention to their own material existence and to the process of their construction. This aesthetic focus echoes the prominence of embodied, concrete action and sacraments in Harrison’s theory, which, as Section 3 has shown, relates to her tactile, archaeological approach to the classics, her early experiences with High Church ritualism, and her enthusiasm for the Pre-Raphaelite ‘fleshly

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<sup>66</sup> See for example Craig G. Staff’s *Modernist Painting and Materiality* for an overview of this development in the visual arts.

school of poetry' and its passion for bright colours, the iconic and crafted. This return to the embodiment and performative materiality of ritual in visual art also parallels the shift she sees in modern religion from the belief in a separate transcendental god in favour of a mystically immanent one, embodied in the church and sacraments.

### 5.3 The ritual aesthetic in dance: the case of Isadora Duncan and Vaslav Nijinsky

It is far back, deep down the centuries, that one's spirit passes when Isadora Duncan dances; back to the very morning of the world, when the greatness of the soul found free expression in the beauty of the body [...] when men and women danced before their hearthstones and their gods in religious ecstasy, or out in the forests and by the sea because of the joy of life that was in them.<sup>67</sup>

It may well be that Messieures Roerich and Nijinsky have truly rediscovered the appearance and the movement of one age of humanity. It may also be that the emotions of certain spectators arose from contact with this primitive sensibility, expressed and re-created before their eye. Humanity certainly needs, at certain moments, to recover the sensations of its childhood. That moment may perhaps be coming for us, since the most refined of our contemporaries, the subtlest, the most cultivated, are agitated at the *Sacre du Printemps*.<sup>68</sup>

A return to ritual principles in dance emerges around the same time as these innovations in visual art, considered in the previous section.<sup>69</sup> The aesthetic of embodiment and expression of emotion comes to the fore in the work of Isadora Duncan, with whom Harrison once performed, reading from Theocritus while Duncan danced (Duncan, Pratl and Splatt 36). The revolutionary articulations of Hellenism of both women was linked by the influential classicist Paul Shorey, who perceived 'the corybantic Hellenism of Miss Harrison and Isadora Duncan' as major contributors to the new 'irrational, semi-sentimental, Polynesian, free-verse and sex-freedom Hellenism of all the gushful geysers of "rapturous rubbish" about the Greek spirit' (qtd. in Edmunds 41). Mirroring Harrison's quest for the origin of art and religion, Duncan's quest is for the primitive, 'natural' origin of dance. Like Harrison, she finds the origin she seeks in the ancient Greek, ecstatic Dionysian ritual dance which, also like Harrison at the

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<sup>67</sup> Mary Fanton Roberts, quoted in Duncan (*My Life* 160).

<sup>68</sup> Blum (315).

<sup>69</sup> Susan Jones's *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (2013) provides an analysis of the interaction between modern developments in dance and literature.

start of her career, she studied from artefacts at the British Museum (Duncan, *My Life* 44). Duncan's theory further parallels Harrison's in her Nietzschean belief in the connection between the body and spirituality.<sup>70</sup> For her, rediscovering the true origins of dance would 'bring about a great renaissance of religion' (*My Life* 65), as '[t]he dance is not a diversion but a religion, an expression of life' (qtd. in LaMothe 107).

The formal, aesthetic implications of Harrison's theory are also visible in Duncan's art. Just as Harrison's classicism brings the essence of ancient Greek religion from immortal, intellectualised Olympian heights down to earth-bound, embodied ritual, Duncan rejects what she sees as the gravity-defying, contrived and unnatural movement of conventional ballet. Her technique aims at movement in harmony with nature and the natural inclinations of the body, free of the 'false restrictions' of civilisation (Duncan, 'The Dance of the Future' 262). Duncan embraced the natural weight and rhythms of the body, now established tenets of modern dance; together they also paved the way for other explorations of ritual in dance.<sup>71</sup> Harrison's description of art – which for her contrasts with the vitality of ritual – as 'a very dead face' (*A&O* 217) echoes Duncan's description of ballet:

A deformed skeleton is dancing before you. This deformation through incorrect dress and incorrect movement is the result of the training necessary to the ballet. ('The Dance of the Future' 263)

Harrison's theorisation of ritual as living expression fuelled by emotion further parallels the way Duncan denounces the ready-made, established poses of ballet and proposes a dance that begins with an impulse within the dancer:

Before I go out on the stage, I must place a motor in my soul. When that begins to work my legs and arms and my whole body will move independently of my will. (*My Life* 123)

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<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, in her essay 'Dancing Modernism: Ritual, Ecstasy and the Female Body', which also argues a connection between Harrison and Duncan, refers to Duncan's 'embodied and spiritual aesthetic' (359) which she claims unites Harrison, Duncan and the poet H.D. Chapter 3 will argue the presence of a similar aesthetic in Mirrlees's *Paris*.

<sup>71</sup> Examples of this can be seen to include the work of Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, Anna Halprin as well as the dance theatre of Pina Bausch.

This insistence of an internal source of movement (for Duncan physically located in the solar plexus [*My Life* 58]) stems from her quest for naturalness in dance,<sup>72</sup> which enables her dance technique in which one movement logically succeeds another and which gave the impression of her dances being improvised. This internal source reached as far inward as the unconscious. As Duncan is often reported to have said, ‘if I could tell you what it meant there would be no point in dancing it’ (Bateson 137).

Vaslav Nijinsky of the Ballet Russes paralleled Duncan in his rejection of the traditional balletic style.<sup>73</sup> While not engaging with the movements seen in nature, but also looking to the figures found on primitive Greek vases for a model (Bellow 54), he invents a different type of movement to convey ‘the primitive’: the heavy, jagged, stomping movement that expressed Igor Stravinsky’s dissonant, unmelodious, arrhythmic musical composition for *Rite of Spring*. Nijinsky’s primitivism, unlike Duncan’s, also informed his themes, which often revolve around sex and violence, expressing an animal-like, atavistic savagery.<sup>74</sup>

Harrison, Duncan and Nijinsky can thus be seen as playing major parts in the same zeitgeist that Harrison calls a return to ritual. Harrison’s articulation of ritual thus historically expresses similar concerns to those that gave birth to modern dance, and provides an illuminating perspective on its development, particularly the increasing attention to the play of gravity, sense-based movement, the mind-body connection and embodied expression of subconscious impulses over the last century.

#### 5.4 Ritual participation in theatre: Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty

An idea of the theatre has been lost.

[...] At the point of deterioration which our sensibility has reached, it is certain that we need above all a theatre that wakes us up: nerves and heart.

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<sup>72</sup> This ‘naturalness’ also included her costume. While Duncan never danced in the nude, her near transparent tunic often shocked audiences, and suggested nudity (Sparshott [307-308]). Harrison may indeed be referring to Duncan when she writes, regarding art and morality, that ‘[i]n the censor’s world the spectacle of the nude leads straight to desire, so the dancer must be draped’ (AAR 119).

<sup>73</sup> Duncan had performed in St Petersburg a number of times a few years before Nijinsky became principal choreographer and thus may well have inspired the new direction of the company.

<sup>74</sup> See Eksteins for an in-depth contextualisation of *The Rite of Spring* within modernism.

[T]o link the theatre to the expressive possibilities of forms, to everything in the domain of gestures, noises, colors, movements, etc. is to restore it to its original direction, to reinstate it in its religious and metaphysical aspect, is to reconcile it with the universe.<sup>75</sup>

A key instance of a return to ritualistic origins in the arts in the period, displaying important affinities with Harrison's theory, was Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty. Artaud, conscious of the 'old ceremonial magic' at the root of theatre (Artaud 39), attempted to forcefully break down the barrier between actors and the audience, demanding that the latter take an active part in the experience.<sup>76</sup> This vision of theatre (whether or not it was realised by Artaud) restores the dromenon behind the drama; the theatre experience becomes not something watched but something participated in and shared as the spectator is placed at the centre of the spectacle, 'engulfed and physically affected by it' (96). Echoing Harrison's writing on ritual, there is a heightened focus in Artaud's theatre on embodiment as Artaud intuits that '[o]ne does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence' (86); thus, he insists that 'it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought' (89). This entails finding an expression in theatre which is 'unafraid of going as far as necessary in the exploration of our nervous sensibility'; space, rhythm, sound, 'the visual language of things', and movement must act directly on the audience's sensibility (87-90). Provoking an audience into action recalls the agon, or contest, that Harrison explains is part of many primitive rituals, for example enacting the struggle between winter and spring through the figures of a Queen of the May and Queen of Winter (AAR 30). The contest is driven by an intense desire for the triumph of life over death, which resonates with Artaud's wish to revitalise the theatre, to 'break through language in order to touch life' (Artaud 13).

Artaud's innovations anticipate the problematisation of the performer/spectator boundary notably found in Samuel Beckett, Peter Brook and much contemporary performance art. With his emphasis on the physicality of theatre, he is also a forerunner of physical theatre. The strong resonance of these themes with Harrison's description of ritual links her to the

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<sup>75</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double* (84, 70).

<sup>76</sup> See for example Bettina Knapp's essay 'Antonin Artaud's Revolutionary Theatre of Cruelty' for a useful overview.

early theoretical elaboration of modern trends of audience inclusiveness and increased physicality and multimodality in theatre and the performing arts.<sup>77</sup>

## 5.5 Approaching a ritual aesthetic in literature: materiality and performativity

I let the vowels fool around. I let the vowels quite simply occur, as a cat meows . . .  
Words emerge, shoulders of words, legs, arms, hands of words.  
[...] Each thing has its word, but the word has become a thing by itself. Why  
shouldn't I find it?<sup>78</sup>

The aesthetic implications of Harrison's theory link her to a wave of experimentation in early twentieth-century literature involving an intensified engagement with the materiality of texts. These experiments highlighted the medium of literary expression rather than abiding by a conventional representational aesthetic which rendered the medium invisible. A now well-known strand of this literary trend was epitomised by European authors whose works celebrated the physicality of the written word – its visual properties or sound – the most prominent examples including Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrammes, the Surrealist *livre d'artiste*, Dadaist sound poetry and typographical experiments by the Futurists and poets published in magazines such as *Nord-Sud*.<sup>79</sup> A different sub-strand of this trend, however, recently uncovered by book historians and textual theorists such as D.F. McKenzie and Jerome McGann, involves a British tradition reaching back to William Blake's illuminated manuscripts and continuing with the work of William Morris and the pre-Raphaelites through to W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. The main thrust of this tradition, it has been argued, lay in its attempt to harness the materiality of texts to signify a historical context, but its effects are visible as well in the modern interest in the self-referentiality of language, notably in Gertrude Stein's work and in later experiments in concrete poetry. Chapter 3 will discuss how Mirrlees's *Paris*, aside from drawing on Continental trends (explored already by Julia Briggs who

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<sup>77</sup> Julie Stone Peters's essay 'Jane Harrison and the Savage Dionysus: Archaeological Voyages, Ritual Origins, Anthropology and the Modern Theatre' considers the link between Harrison's theory and the turn towards anti-theatricality in the theatre in the early twentieth century (although she does not consider any concrete example of modern theatre).

<sup>78</sup> Hugo Ball, 'Dada Manifesto' (1916) in Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (219-221).

<sup>79</sup> For leading research on the trend of visual poetry see for example Marjorie Perloff, William Bohn and Johanna Drucker. For an exploration into the kinship between visual and sound poetry see Bruns.

provided extensive annotation for *Paris* in 2007), makes an important contribution to this other tradition concerned with highlighting the performative materiality of texts.

In addition to an emphasis on materiality, a sense of performativity in literature is also linked to the idea of a text as a process rather than product, an idea and technique historically emerging alongside Harrison's writing on ritual. This idea is at the core of what Marjorie Perloff calls the 'poetics of indeterminacy', which for her emerges in a strand of modernist writing beginning with Rimbaud, continuing through Apollinaire, various cubist, dada and surrealist works as well as Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, and is later found in for example the musical compositions of John Cage. Perloff describes the work of these artists as 'compositional rather than referential' (*The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* 23); that is, their meaning lies in the process through which the work is composed and experienced. Harrison and Mirrlees can also be read as part of this tradition. The indeterminacy Perloff describes resonates clearly with the sense of openness and process in Harrison's formulation of ritual, for which she draws on Van Gennep's concept of liminality and from Bergson's notion of *durée*. This, as Chapters 2 and 3 will argue, becomes the formal aesthetic, as well as theme, around which Mirrlees's *Paris* is structured.

## 5.6 Russia and *durée*

This liminal in-betweenness, central to Harrison's idea of ritual and relating to the 'compositional' aesthetic that Perloff describes and the burgeoning early twentieth-century focus on lived process and 'doing' in the arts more widely, crystallises in Harrison's passionate theorising on the Russian language. Harrison and Mirrlees, participating in a wider wave of Russophilia in Britain,<sup>80</sup> shared a passion for Russian, learning the language together at the *École des Langues Orientales* while living in Paris and translating two books from Russian.<sup>81</sup> One was *The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum by Himself*, on the seventeenth-century Russian Old Believer who strove against reforms to the medieval rituals of the Orthodox Church, and the other *The Book of The Bear*, a collection of Russian folktales compiled by the fantasy writer Alexej Remizov, on whom more will be said in Chapter 4 on *Lud-in-the-Mist* regarding

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<sup>80</sup> See Beasley and Bullock. Also see Alexandra Smiths 'Jane Harrison as an Interpreter of Russian Culture in the 1910s-1920s' for insights into Harrison's role in disseminating her own mythologised image of Russia.

<sup>81</sup> See M.S. Smith and Mills.

his silence regarding the unspeakable. In an essay on Remizov, Mirrlees refers to Russians as 'the most spiritual-minded of all people', a 'race of pilgrims' who seek 'a house not made with hands, a land of ghosts and shadows', and praises Remizov's genius for 'how much he leaves unsaid'.<sup>82</sup> Later in her unpublished notes she speaks of how she and Harrison and others of the time had sought 'Life' in the Russians, the same way that Winckelmann had looked to Greece as an ideal golden age.<sup>83</sup> This sense of vitalism felt about Russia is also expressed by Harrison, who in 1919 writes that she has found in the Russian language 'a new birth and a new life' (*Aspects, Aorists and the Classical Tripos* 7). She writes that Greek had appealed to her in her youth, as youth is 'the time when Rational Thought dominates and allures' (6), and 'the Greek felt most keenly the values of distinction, of analysis, of clear-eyed reason and 'intellectual beauty'—whether in art or science (35). Later in life, however, it was the 'intimate emotional appeal' of Russian that drew her (7). In contrast to Greek, 'the Russian stands for the complexity and concreteness felt whole, unanalysed, unjudged, lived into' (35). Here she adds that 'in literature as in language he is more holophrastic', referring to the linguistic theory of the holophrase, a primitive utterance encompassing a situation as a whole which will be considered in the next chapter in relation to Mirrlees's *Paris*, which begins with the line 'I want a holophrase'. This connection of Russian to holophrastic language underlines the way Russian, for Harrison, is bound up with the primitive.

She elaborates on this vitalistic quality of the Russian language in *Russia and the Russian Verb: A Contribution to the Psychology of the Russian People*. Here she considers the aspects found in Russian grammar, particularly the imperfective, which denotes 'the act being done, going on, not yet accomplished; the aspect that, as it were, catches the speaker entangled in the net of the action' (7). She argues that this is 'the aspect of what M. Bergson would call *durée*, of process, of actuality, of the thing lived' (8), and this aspect in the language reflects the way 'the Russian hungers for *durée*' (10).<sup>84</sup> She observes (drawing on another reviewer) the way this imperfectiveness is found in Dostoyevsky's novels, where

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<sup>82</sup> Mirrlees, 'Some aspects of the art of Mikhailovich Remizov' (Mirrlees papers 6/3/5).

<sup>83</sup> Mirrlees. Notebook. Harrison Papers 4/3/1. Newnham College, Cambridge.

<sup>84</sup> Harrison's papers in her archive includes a letter from Bergson that indicates she had written him to request his opinion on the connection between *durée* and the Russian language (Harrison papers 1/5/5).

the action is never complete; we have no statement of results, no moral judgement; all the people are still alive and may do anything any time. That is what is so exciting. Hence our sense of *aventure*—not “adventure,” but “what is to come,” what is in-process-of-going-to-be. (11)

The perfective, on the other hand, 'because it is the end of the action, is the beginning of the intellectual act of abstraction or the moral, quasi-intellectual act of judgement' (9). Reason, she writes, 'has little use for the imperfective, but emotion, sympathy, hungers after it' (9). She admits that she shares this hunger: 'I want to use these aspects, I long to be able to, I need them, they feed me spiritually' (11).<sup>85</sup>

### 5.7 The artist as sleep-walker: a return to the 'ritual mentality' in art

As observed in Section 4.1 above, Mirrlees's brand of Romanticism aligns itself with Harrison's vision of the art of the future, which would capture the dynamic energy and speed of modern life but in a mode that invokes dreams, trance, casting a spell. The artist, as noted, is for Harrison 'always a sleep-walker' (*A&O* 215-216), and thus part of the realm of ritual, the 'fairyland of heaven and hell', a secondary, 'supersensuous' reality of imagination, dreams and emotion. Mirrlees is in this, too, part of the widespread urge in modern art, in all its forms, to mine the depths of the unconscious. Ranging from Dada and Surrealism to the fixation on myth and dreams in writers like Butts and H.D., Lawrences's wrangle with psychoanalysis, Arnold Schoenberg's attempt to channel the unconscious in his music, Duncan and Nijinsky's similar quest in dance, this fascination with the unconscious is a well-known aspect of both early twentieth-century art and much that has followed in its wake across different artistic disciplines. In Harrison's ritual theory this highlighted role of the unconscious in art is seamlessly tied into her overall thesis, which again highlights the theory as an idiom or narrative which weaves in a number of the key innovations and concerns associated with modernism.

In their focus on the irrational, on dreams and alternative states of consciousness, Harrison and Mirrlees hark back to German Romanticism and look forward to Surrealism,

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<sup>85</sup> While Harrison admits that her conclusions in this essay are 'a little reckless'(3), she finishes with a quotation from a grammar book, André Mazon's *Emplois des Aspects du Verbe Russe*, to indicate that her theory does have 'a solid basis of linguistic fact': 'The imperfective stands for the tendency "to see and to call up [...], and consequently to represent the action itself rather than to indicate its abstract result"' (13-14).

recalling, moreover, as mentioned above, Keats's concept of 'negative capability'. The work of the two women can thus potentially be read into a literary-historical narrative which acknowledges the continuity of some strands of Romanticism with major twentieth-century trends.

## 6 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a contextual framework through which to approach the arguments of the remaining chapters. The starting point for this was an overview of how Harrison's theory radically disrupts the anthropological scholarship on myth both preceding and contemporaneous with her own. She fits into a context of thinkers concerned with immediacy and process over abstraction, and her experiences of High Church ritualism, her enthusiasm for Pre-Raphaelite art, and her archaeological approach to the classics are echoed in her emphasis on concreteness, embodiment and performativity in her understanding of ancient Greek religion. Following from her theory, the hope she sees for the religion of the future lies in a return to a pre-theological, mystical and aneikonic as well as sacramental form of religious practice. While Harrison herself stops short of embracing this projected future for religion, Mirrlees seems in her early work to be drawn to these same principles while, like Harrison, rejecting the closure of theology. Her eventual conversion highlights the way her pre-conversion work is itself poised on a bridge to theology (synonymous for Harrison with art), struggling with the concrete representation of something unrepresentable. The union of mind and body, word and act, flesh and spirit, which Harrison finds in ancient ritual Mirrlees finds in a personal reinvention of Catholicism, whether or not this twist in direction can be seen as a successful or failed conclusion of her quest. Her early work thus realises the return to ritual that Harrison observes and wishes for in modern art.

This chapter included summaries of other key practitioners of different art forms who I have argued take part in this project. The purpose of this has been to show that Mirrlees's work is one gesture among others in a broad wave of experimentation across the different art forms attempting to return to the themes or formal characteristics that are associated by Harrison with ritual. A key theme to emerge in this consideration of the return to ritual in modern art is the move towards an aesthetic of materiality and performativity rather than representation, concrete process rather than static product – what Perloff refers to as 'compositional'. The other major theme of this development in the arts is the attempt to

engage with modes of thinking, writing, moving, painting and theatre-making that tap into the subconscious. Dreams, trance, unconscious desires and fears become the well-spring for creativity in the arts, harking back to the Romantic tradition but with a renewed urgency to experiment with different forms in order to express this dimension of experience. Harrison and Mirrlees thus sit within this larger context and in using a consistent idiom of ritual, with its specific thematic and aesthetic implications, provide a unique lens on a major intellectual and aesthetic trend of the early twentieth century – which in many ways has intensified ever since.

The gem of Mirrlees's oeuvre is undoubtedly her masterpiece *Paris*, and this is where her work most vividly reflects the background sketch presented in this chapter, as Chapters 2 and 3 will show. Her fantasy novel *Lud-in-the-Mist* – the subject of Chapter 4 – also strongly enacts the themes of Romanticism discussed here in the way it presents fantasy writing as the literary mode that most closely approaches the act of creation taking place in ritual.

## Chapter 2: *Paris: A rite of spring*

### 1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the way the modern-day French descendant of classical myth, Catholicism, is scrutinised in *Paris* against the powerful matriarchal antecedents that Harrison posits for it. The failures of Catholicism, I argue, are shown to be bound up with the precarious outcome of the regenerative spring ritual which is hoped for in the wake of the War. The operation within the poem of the basic narrative arch of a primitive ritual according to Harrison – that is, the enactment of death followed by rebirth – is traced, and the ambivalence regarding the outcome of this ritual is discussed. Bound up with these elements of ritual, the chapter examines the mood of liminality created in the poem, in the sense of transition and in-betweenness, anticipation of a new state of things, the middle-space of ritual which includes as well an atmosphere of mental states that also exist in a middle ground between rationality and a dreamworld of intoxication and trance. A plurality of voices join that of a main speaker, as the poem marks, desires and enacts a moment of collective transition into an unknown future, celebrating this historical moment and the city of Paris where it is taking place, transforming the city into a site of ritual and its features into a modernised version of the themes and gestures that characterise a ritual performance.

### 2 ‘The central *rite de passage* – the death and the new birth’:<sup>1</sup> overview of ritual as thematic structure in *Paris*

The thematic structure of *Paris* is based on the fundamental pattern of primitive ritual, in Harrison’s words ‘a mimetic Death and Resurrection’, or ‘the death and the new birth’ (*Themis* 513, 511). The poem begins with images of death, firstly ‘Black-figured vases in Etruscan

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<sup>1</sup> See *Themis*, p.513.

tombs', followed by an allusion to Aristophanes' *The Frogs* in the lines 'brekekekek coax coax', the latter image invoking the classical underworld into which Dionysus in Aristophanes' play passes as the chorus of frogs sings.

Images of death continue to pervade the text as the speaker observes Christ and the Saints 'shrouded in mauve veils', 'little widows moaning / le pauvre grand / le pauvre grand' and declares that 'The unities are smashed / The stage is thick with corpses'. Invoking a central element from Harrison's writing on ritual, death appears in the image of 'the lovely Spirit of the Year' which lies '[...] stiff and stark / Laid out in acres of brown fields'. This line refers to Harrison's theorised archetype of mystical pre-Olympian gods, the 'Eniautos-Daimon', a spirit bound up with the earth whose death and resurrection are enacted in primitive spring ritual.

By the end of the poem death has been replaced by life as 'babies are being born' and 'the white violets of the moon' – are 'manured', that is, made fertile. This image invokes the anthropological idea of the moon's effect on vegetation lying at the centre of primitive ritual (see for example AAR 66-67). The potent combination of filth and fertility implied here recalls the twin concepts of *taboo* and *mana*, which refer to the two attitudes that Harrison explains are held in primitive religion towards elements in nature which possess magical potency (76, 90-94). The animal, thing or substance possesses life-giving power and energy, *mana*, but there is an accompanying negative attitude to it; it is also forbidden, illicit, to be avoided, *taboo*. The regeneration brought about at the end of the poem follows a scene resembling the kind that according to Harrison characterises festivals that signify a rite of passage from age to age, which contain this rejuvenating combination of the illicit and vital. Such rites of passage involve a 'complete upset of the old order, a period of licence and mutual hilarity' (*Themis* 507). Mirrlees creates a quintessentially modern version of this, as Freud dredges the river and 'waves his garbage in a glare of electricity', and the night life of Montparnasse is depicted, with allusions to open homosexuality, night clubs, the 'obscene syncopation' of jazz music and screeching late night taxis.

The need for a rite of passage is indicated early on in two of the speaker's first lines, during the ride on the metro: the line 'CONCORDE' refers to a station at which the speaker is asked if she will alight – 'Vous descendez Madame?' – in response to which she declares 'I

can't / I must go slowly'. As Julia Briggs notes, the line 'CONCORDE' may refer not only to the station name, but also to 'agreement', considering the Paris Peace Conference underway at the time the poem was written ('Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism' 288).<sup>2</sup> The inability of the speaker to alight at the stop implies that the end of the war cannot, with the abruptness of a metro coming to a halt, simply be replaced with peace; she cannot simply step into this new official state of affairs as easily as stepping onto a platform. Instead, as she says, she must 'go slowly'. This implies that a transition is needed to pass from war to peace – transition being, as discussed in the previous chapter (Section 3.3), a central function of ritual as described by Harrison and involving Arnold van Gennep's three stages of pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal, of which the middle stage, the liminal stage, is the key transitional no-man's-land of ritual, the space between before and after.

Reflecting this central purpose of ritual, transition, the enactment of the basic transition rite of death and resurrection in the poem can be read as emerging from the desire for a transition, or initiation, into the new world awaiting the city as it emerges from four years of death and destruction. Four years earlier, in 1915, Harrison made the observation that 'we live now just at the transition moment; we have broken with the old, we have not quite adjusted ourselves to the new' (*Alpha and Omega*, 35-36). Here she gives voice to the anxiety felt in the late Victorian age, particularly, as Andrew Radford notes, among 'a restless and nervously self-questioning generation of intellectuals' (*The Lost Girls* 26), expressed by Tennyson in 1897 in his complaint that 'All ages are ages of transition, but this is an awful moment of transition' (qtd. in Radford 27). If this was the case already during the *fin de siècle*, and for Harrison just following the outbreak of the War, this break with the past, after the bloodiest conflict the western world had ever seen, would arguably have been felt even more strongly, and the adjustment to the new would have posed an even greater challenge, necessitating a rite of passage literally from one age to another entirely. Faced with this need for a transition into an unknown future, this chapter argues, the poem embarks on a ritual that is in a sense self-reflexive, as it can be read as an attempt to regenerate myth and ritual itself, the tools of spiritual practice and beliefs, at a time when it is needed in order to bring about a vital cultural and spiritual regeneration after the devastation brought by the War.

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<sup>2</sup> This essay by Briggs will henceforth be cited as 'HMCM'.

## 2.1 Modernism, myth and Hellenism

The imaginative excavation of myth, as has been noted,<sup>3</sup> is a pervasive feature of the modernist literary period. Myth, it has been argued, represented for a number of modernists a means of providing a unifying pattern for works of art, potentially bringing coherence to the fragmented experience of modernity, even enabling religious transcendence in an increasingly secular, materialistic world through grounding the self in a non-rational, emotive, mythopoeic mode (Bevan 149-152). In an era of increasing awareness of the contingency of one's worldview in relation to many others, the myth-making impulse, as Michael Bell has argued, became of heightened interest to writers (Bell 9-38) – especially following the suggestion in Frazer's *Golden Bough* that the mythopoeic impulse formed a universal part of the human mental structure, and Harrison's more direct celebration of this idea in her work, as noted for example by Matthew Sterenberg (32-34). Joyce's mythopoeia in *Ulysses* has for example been read as a playful, ironic and demystifying exposition of this contingency of worldviews and the world-creating power of myths (Bell 67-92; Bevan 171-177).

Modern Hellenism has also been characterised as an encounter with a 'haunting force' (Kolocotroni 12). It often involves 'a staged animation of still lifes' (2), an attempt to 'conjure up a genie' (1), the genie being a past that is now invisible but not necessarily lost. It is thus a site of an imaginative archaeological excavation intended to energise the present through the visionary experience of the artist. Kolocotroni applies this understanding of modern Hellenism to, among other things, Pound's hesitant but hopeful invocation of the old gods in 'The Return' (1912) and the decent into the Hellenic underworld at the beginning of the *Cantos*; Eliot's ambivalent attitude towards a threatening primitive past 'returning to haunt the already confused and emasculated present', and Woolf's 'elegiac Hellenism' (10) which expresses the impossibility of looking to the past for comfort in the present.

Alternatively, Sterenberg's study of modernism and myth highlights W.H. Auden's identification of the central problem of modernity: an absence of meaning-making structures, which, as Sterenberg writes in his study on myth in the modernist period, was perceived to have produced specifically modern problems: 'science's epistemological pretensions, the

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Bevan (*Modern Myths*), and Fiske ('From Ritual to the Archaic in Modernism: Frazer, Harrison, Freud, and the Persistence of Myth').

spiritual barrenness of modern life, a lack of shared values and traditions, the excesses of consumerism, the banality of mass culture, the alienating effect of contemporary urban existence, and the emotional estrangement produced by the mass media' (1-3). In response to these problems, a large number of writers were drawn to myth in that they constituted – as Sterenberg phrases it – 'vital sources of meaning, indispensable frameworks for interpreting experience, and essential tools for coping with modernity' (2). Such writers were in Sterenberg's terms 'mythic thinkers', who held the belief that mythical thinking had not died out, and that ancient, sacred myths existed that were timeless and could communicate truths that were both inexpressible by science and crucially relevant to modern life (4-8).

Sterenberg focuses on largely neglected authors of the period who he argues wielded pre-Christian myth in their works in a way that drew on what they saw as the real power these myths inherently possessed to bring about spiritual renewal. He targets specifically the work of Mary Butts, John Cowper Powys, David Jones and Charles Williams, omitting from his study writers who he would class as such 'mythic thinkers' but who have already received sustained attention elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> While, for Sterenberg, mythic thinkers apart from his selected quartet of authors employed myth merely as aesthetic and symbolic frames meant to supply order and gravitas to modern experience, other critics have put forward contending readings of such authors. Pound is a case in point; Leon Surette has considered the *Cantos* in light of Pound engagement with occultism and sees it as an esoteric text, centring on a secret history of societies passing down esoteric knowledge dating from the ancient Greek Mysteries and heralding the dawn of a new age which will see the efflorescence of this knowledge (Surette

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<sup>4</sup> Sterenberg views Lawrence, Yeats and Robert Graves as belonging to the same class of 'mythic thinkers' as the four authors he focuses on (17), seeing them as authors for whom ancient myths held inherent redemptive power. Lawrence's engagement with myth, especially his vision of a frightening but cathartic and vitalising underworld, a vision which celebrates physicality and feeling, has been considered for example by Andrew Radford in *The Lost Girls* (7, 224-274) and Margot K. Louis (*Persephone Rises 1860-1927: Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality*, 116-120). Yeats's research into Celtic folklore and his longstanding involvement with the occult are well documented and their resonance in his poetry and plays is traced for example by Kathleen Raine (*Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W.B. Yeats*) and Susan Johnston Graf (*W.B. Yeats Twentieth Century Magus: An In-Depth Study of Yeats's Esoteric Practices & Beliefs, Including Excerpts from His Magical Diaries*). Graves's poetry, historical fiction and research also reflect the significance – not only intellectual but also religious – that Greek mythology had for him, especially ideas of ancient matriarchal religion and the connection between myth and ritual and magic (here his debt to Harrison is acknowledged). This aspect of his work has been considered for example in *Graves and the Goddess: Essays on Robert Graves's The White Goddess*, edited by Ian Firla and Grevel Lindop.

96-156).<sup>5</sup> Eliot's definition of the 'mythical method' in his 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' (1923) typifies what Sterenberg describes as the merely symbolic aesthetic use of myth, whereby the artist uses ancient myths as raw material to order and create meaning out of chaos in the absence of religious belief. Meanwhile, Eliot's engagement with myth and ritual in his early work as an earnest, albeit pessimistic, quest for meaning in primitive myth and ritual has also been considered, notably by Robert Crawford; Eliot's altered attitude to myth following his conversion to Anglicanism has furthermore been considered by for example John Margolis;<sup>6</sup> the influence of the Cambridge Ritualists, especially Harrison, on his attempts to re-introduce the religious function of drama in his post-conversion plays has been discussed in Carpentier's *Ritual, Myth and the Modernist Text: The Influence of Jane Ellen Harrison on Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf*.

Sterenberg's study, despite its occasionally reductive focus, is useful for a consideration of Mirrlees's *Paris* as it homes in on the way his selected authors used myth to reveal an already existing order and truth and saw their works as offering readers (and themselves as authors) potential existential solace through the representation of primal myth and ritual and their regenerative power. These writers, he argues, variously construed the myth of the Holy Grail as a genuine source of spiritual power able to regenerate the spiritual wasteland of post-war Britain and attempted to use it as content and structure for their writing to convey the redemptive truths they believed were embodied in this myth (44-70). Mirrlees, I will argue, shares this hope for spiritual redemption through a rediscovery of forgotten myth. While Butts, Powys, David Jones and Charles Williams, writing in Britain, focused on the legend of the grail, with its Celtic origins and associations with actual places within the British Isles, and Yeats drew on Irish mythology, Mirrlees, writing in France, harnesses the classical mythology from which the dominant national religion, Catholicism, descended. Following, as well, Kolocotroni's reading of modernist Hellenism, the poem can be seen as attempting to animate, or conjure up, ghosts of a dormant Greek past still present – albeit dormant and forgotten – as part of the archaeology of the city's spiritual life. The ritual

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<sup>5</sup> This contrasts with for example Lillian Feder's reading in her *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry*, which, similarly to Sterenberg's, sees the structure of paligenetic initiation ritual as purely symbolic and aesthetic

<sup>6</sup> See his *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual Development: 1922-1939*.

performed in *Paris* attempts revitalisation through the recuperation of forgotten pagan potencies associated with the city as a former Roman settlement, imaginatively reconstructing the city as a site of sacred ritual practice.<sup>7</sup> Harrison's thesis of the origins of classical mythology in older matriarchal religious rites, and her understanding of the psychology of primitive ritual infuse the poem as it enacts its ritual aimed – with both hope and profound ambivalence – at regeneration in the immediate wake of the War. Mirrlees's return to ritual in poetry is marked by its dynamic performative character and the central role of the modern city as the setting for this performance, both of which furthermore show the unique influence of Harrison's theory of the operation of ritual.

### **3 'I want a holophrase': desire for the magical word of primitive ritual**

The poem's attempt at a ritual performance begins the way Harrison claims all rituals do: with desire. Sympathetic magic, she writes, is 'in its ultimate analysis, an utterance, a discharge of emotion and longing' (AAR 34). The desire for ritual is conveyed in the speaker's first line, 'I want a holophrase', referring to what Harrison describes as an utterance which encompasses an entire situation without separating subject from object, a characteristic of 'primitive' language.<sup>8</sup> The desire for a primitive word resonates with a number of literary attempts in the period to regenerate language. For example, on one level, it speaks to Pound's injunction to poets to 'make it new', which has been read, among other things, in the context of literary primitivism as a starting over, imploring artists 'to start fresh in a new, uncharted environment and unburden themselves of history' (Rossetti 117). While, as this chapter will show, *Paris* is haunted by and seeks to connect to rather than reject the past, the desire for a holophrase and other elements of ritual (which will be discussed throughout this chapter) indicate a transition

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<sup>7</sup> This concern with the significance of myths to certain locales, seen in Sterenberg's quartet of authors as well as, notably, in Lawrence (see for example Stefania Michelucci's *Space and Place in the Works of D.H. Lawrence*, Trans. Jill Franks), can be seen to draw on popular late-Victorian fantasy writing and ghost stories by such authors as Arthur Machen, M.R. James, Algernon Blackwood and William Sharp (Fiona MacLeod), whose treatment of the supernatural in their fiction often involves a focus on sacred sites.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison credits the historian E.J. Payne (referring specifically to his influential *History of the New World Called America* in 1899) for her definition of the holophrase (*Themis* 473).

into a new state of things, which connects with the idea of starting over by ‘making it new’. Pound’s fascination with ideograms arguably conveys, as well, the impulse to start afresh in poetic language, as the ideogram’s ‘naturalness’ is contrasted by Pound with the cluttering layers of arbitrary convention shaping Western languages.<sup>9</sup> Pound compares the sensuous immediacy of the ideogram to the abstractions abounding in a language like English, echoing Harrison’s Bergsonian distinction between ritual and art, and the evolutionary process by which, she writes, the holophrase ‘disintegrates, and, bit by bit, object, subject and verb, and the other ‘Parts of Speech’ are abstracted from the stream of warm conscious human activity in which they were once submerged’ (*Themis* 474).

Starting over in language by reverting to primitive expression also shows affinities with Dada, which, as the name of the movement implies, aimed for a fresh start in language by emptying it of meaning. As the post-Freudian understanding of the ‘primitive’ expanded the concept to include the subconscious,<sup>10</sup> the wish for a holophrastic utterance also implies expression of what lies hidden in the subconscious; it thus also anticipates the idea of automatism in Surrealism, that is, the attempt to express the subconscious through writing or drawing unchecked by conscious control.

The desire for the holophrase also parallels Eliot’s primitivism in his early work leading up to and including *The Waste Land* which, as Robert Crawford has argued, similarly involves a fixation on problems with language, how ‘intellectualization’ and ‘overinterpretation’ (Crawford 96) have taken the place of ritual action. The primitive, unintellectualised holophrase could be seen as the theoretical antidote to this problem. Eliot’s early anxiety about language appears to later give way to his more confident statement in *Little Gidding* that ‘last year’s words belong to last year’s language / And next year’s words await another voice’. The desire for the holophrase as an all-encompassing word, a way to make sense of and articulate the situation at hand, thus also anticipates the use of the prophetic voice employed but simultaneously undercut in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.<sup>11</sup> Eliot’s speaker, a modern-day Ezekiel ‘cannot say, or guess, for (he) know(s) only / A heap of broken images’.

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Perelman (50-51) and Ferrall (45-46).

<sup>10</sup> Section 3.5.2 of the previous chapter discusses Harrison’s integration of Freud and Jung into her ritual theory.

<sup>11</sup> See Martz for an analysis of the prophetic voice in *The Waste Land*.

As David Ward notes, Eliot's speaker's only possible prophetic statement expresses terror and his failure to pronounce on the situation and offer any form of guidance or consolation: 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust' (Ward, 79). However, *Paris*, unlike *The Waste Land*, does not show the failure of the all-compassing word; echoing Harrison's formulation of ritual, it does not provide such closure but rather simply expresses its desire for such an utterance.

In the context of the ritualistic pattern of the poem, that is, death to resurrection (and other elements of ritual which will be discussed in this chapter), the wish for a primitive word takes on a special significance: it becomes a wish for magic. Both Harrison's and Mirrlees's writings consider the magical function performed by language in primitive ritual. In *Themis*, Harrison points out that the sacred words spoken at a ritual in conjunction with the dromenon, the action performed, was what was originally meant by 'myths', or *mythos*, which did not yet refer to aetiological explanations of ritual. According to Harrison, in primitive ritual speech and action were 'but two different ways of expressing emotion', the former being 'the action recounted' and the latter being 'the action actually done' (*Themis* 16, 327-331). Describing the potency of the word spoken as part of a ritual, Harrison writes that '[i]n the religious sense a myth is not merely a word spoken; it is a re-utterance or pre-utterance, it is a focus of emotion, and uttered as we have seen collectively or at least with collective sanction.' Through this 'collective sanction and solemn purpose', she writes, 'a myth becomes practically a story of magical intent and potency' (*Themis* 330). In *Paris*, as the context of the end of the War and beginning of peacetime is gradually revealed, the 'solemn purpose and collective sanction' motivating the poem becomes apparent. The ritual playing out throughout the poem also makes it clear that the word desired is not 'merely a word spoken' but constitutes a 'myth' in the religious sense Harrison describes: speech 'with magical intent and potency', the spoken component of ritual. It is the performative magical language belonging to ritual that the poem seeks, from the very beginning, to utter. The next chapter considers the way the spoken 'pre-utterance' of the poem, the ritual it depicts verbally, goes hand in hand with the performative use of typography and bibliographical materials, which I argue comprises, in Harrison's phrase, 'the action actually done' that complements 'the action recounted'.

The desire for the holophrase points to a desire for ritual also in that 'a holophrase', as Harrison writes, 'utters a holopsychosis', that is, the 'savage's' perception of the indivisible connectedness of all things, which for Harrison, is a defining aspect of the primitive mentality belonging to magic and primitive ritual. She uses this evolutionary theory of linguistics to shed light on the change that occurs from primitive pre-Olympian mystery-gods, primarily

Dionysus, to the more individualised and intellectualised Olympian gods such as Apollo and Zeus (*Themis* 473-5). She argues that language undergoes a shift reflecting this change from religion centred on the mystery gods which are ‘lived and *felt*’ to the Olympians who ‘are objects to a subject, [...] concepts thrown out of the human mind, looked at from a distance, things *known*’ (476). The holopsychosis, then, is the ‘primitive’ state from which ritual, as Harrison understands it, springs, and the speaker’s desire is to enter into this ‘primitive’ state of mind and speak from this state.

Mirrlees’s writing on the connection between ritual and poetry also suggests that *Paris* is indeed an attempt to return to ritual in poetry. As discussed in the previous chapter in Section 4.1 and in Chapter 4, Mirrlees’s unpublished 1913 essay ‘The Ballad and the Ritual Dance’, argues for the emergence of medieval ballads (in Scotland and the Borders) out of ritual. Moreover, in an unpublished essay on mythology (the first half of which is missing from the archive) throughout which Harrison’s influence is evident,<sup>12</sup> Mirrlees reveals her interest in the ‘attitude of the Ancients to speech’ (Untitled essay, Mirrlees papers 6/3/4). This includes, she writes, the belief in words as magical and speech as a sacrament wielding ‘winged’ words, ‘tiny living creatures, quivering with power, & such of them as were malicious, own cousins to the Keres’.<sup>13</sup> She adds in a footnote here that ‘[p]erhaps Plato had in his mind some such connection between the popular conception of words and their wielder, when he called poets “light winged things”’. Poetry is seen in the essay as an arena in which words could be wielded with magical intent, as Mirrlees conveys that she ‘always feel[s] that behind the delicate, complex system of Particles in Homer there lies this carefulness of the manipulator of Mana – of someone to whom it is of vital importance to say exactly what he means, to neither under-state nor overstate’. The desire for the holophrase, an all-encompassing word, echoes this idea of the careful manipulation of *mana*, an elemental, vital energy running through nature – what Harrison describes as ‘the medium in which as it were magic acts and its vehicle’ (*Themis* 84).

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<sup>12</sup> The text includes a number of references to *Themis*, and echoes Harrison in both its vocabulary and the ideas it expresses. Comments in the margins appear, as well, to be written in Harrison’s handwriting.

<sup>13</sup> That is, animistic spirits behind almost anything, for instance death, disease, the wind, love, their nature and development is discussed in *Prolegomena* in Chapter 5, ‘The Denomology of Ghosts, Sprites and Bogeys’ (163-256).

The conscious highlighting of the desire for a primitive word, in the context of ritual, brings to the fore the fact that the speakers of *mythos* in classical texts are, as Mary Beard points out,<sup>14</sup> invariably men; meanwhile the gender of the speaker in *Paris* is suggested by for example the line of dialogue presumably directed at her: ‘Vous descendez Madame?’, and by autobiographical details including Mirrlees’s address at the Rue de Beaune. The poem thus establishes a woman as the ritual initiate or high priest speaking profoundly in the public sphere of religious ritual, elevating the female presence in this most solemn area of public life to above what it was in Olympian Greece or even the Catholic Church at the time Mirrlees was writing. As will be argued below, this elevation of the role of women in religious practice reflects the poem’s imaginative excavation of forgotten religious female potencies and its criticism of the treatment of women in Catholicism. This resistance to traditional, patriarchal limitations on female roles in the public sphere is reinforced and situated in an emphatically modern context by the speaker boldly assuming her role as ritual initiate/priest through a predominantly male, modern mode: that of the *flâneur*.

The modern context of the poem’s ritual and the use of the figure of the *flâneur* enact a vital aspect of Harrison’s theory: the insistence that ritual must spring from life as it is lived. Introducing this key element of *Paris*’s ritual (which is traced in the remainder of this chapter), the following section considers how Mirrlees’s adoption of this central feature of Harrison’s theory entails an engagement, in *Paris*, with the sights and sounds of the present day, and, crucially, the religion of the present day. Simultaneously, echoing Harrison’s own archaeology of Greek religion which revealed its primitive roots, *Paris* also reveals the past within the present, creating a hybrid of the modern urban, Catholic city and its ancient pagan ghosts, of the *flâneur* and the high priest or initiate of a solemn, primitive ritual.

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<sup>14</sup> In a London Review of Books lecture Beard retells the anecdote from the *Odyssey* of Telemachus ordering his mother Penelope to be quiet, as *muthos*, ‘authoritative public speech’, is the business of men (lrb.co.uk).

## 4 Ritual for Paris of 1919: consecrating the modern urban everyday

As noted in Chapter 1, despite Harrison's passion for 'primitive' ritual, she does not see the future of art as lying in a revival of folk-songs, a medieval inseparability of art and religion, re-enactments of Greek plays or what she calls the 'cult of savagery'. 'Life,' she writes, 'is doomed to make for itself moulds, break them, remake them' (A&O 218). For Harrison, the return to ritual depends on art arising 'from a keen emotion felt towards things and people living to-day, in modern conditions, including, among other and deeper forms of life, the haste and hurry of the modern street, the whirr of motor cars and aeroplanes' (232-240). In this, she sees the Futurists as pointing in the right direction, and shares in the broader modernist and avant-garde debate on the relationship of art to life. Mirrlees *Paris*, too, demonstrates this commitment to creating art from the substance of everyday life. As Julia Briggs observes, *Paris* independently takes up a challenge set by Mina Loy a few years later, who argued, in celebration of Gertrude Stein's poetry, that it is time it were recognised that '[t]he flux of life is pouring its aesthetic aspect into your eyes, your ears—and you ignore it because you are looking for your canons of beauty in some sort of frame or glass case or tradition. Modernism says. Why not each of us, [...] realize all that is impressing itself upon our subconscious, the thousand odds and ends which make up your sensory every day life?' (qtd. in Briggs, 'HMCM' 261). This injunction to break down the distinction between high and low culture is famously summarised in these lines of Apollinaire's 'Zone':

You read leaflets catalogue posters that sing aloud  
Here's your poetry this morning and for prose there's  
the newspapers

Briggs notes the way that Mirrlees, Loy and Stein all align themselves in this sense with the iconoclastic literary avant-garde which these lines by Apollinaire represent.

But unlike Apollinaire, and unlike the Anglophone writers concerned with using myth as a tool for imaginative revitalisation in their writing, Mirrlees uses the everyday setting of the modern metropolis to explore the possibility of spiritual and cultural recuperation through engagement with primitive myth and ritual. The figure of the female *flâneur*, the *flâneuse*, the idling urban wanderer, becomes the high priest of this ritual, creating a hybrid of these two tropes, as the speaker's gaze absorbs the sensory stimuli that a walk through the city offers into the poem's (uncertain) journey towards ritual regeneration, consecrating the ground of the city as holy through this action and her final words: 'JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE

GRACE'. Modern day Paris becomes a site of magical initiation, recalling Harrison's description of the 'temenos', a 'precinct, a place "cut off" from the common land and dedicated to a god' (AAR 10), as the poem, driven by the desire for rebirth, conjures images of ancient mythical, magical figures connected with the city's past. Literary flânerie, as Anke Gleber notes, embodies a perspective that links key facets of modernity, suggesting the processes of such hallmarks of modernity as photography and film (129-170), and tourism (131-135).<sup>15</sup> The use of flânerie as a mode furthermore helps to suggest the collective character and loss of individuality associated with ritual; as Baudelaire writes of the *flâneur* in *The Painter of Modern Life*, '[t]he crowd is his element [...]. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd' (9). Thus flânerie and the poem's continuous blurring of high and low culture – the archaic and traditionally religious and the modern, urban and secular – become the tools with which the poem can enact a ritual that truly arises from life as it is lived, providing the bridge from life to art which Harrison envisions. In this, Harrison and Mirrlees – theory and poetic craft combined – participate in a significant way in the zeitgeist of which Stein, Loy, Apollinaire, Dadaists and other Continental writers were also a part: the quest for renewal in art and a redefinition of its place in society and its relationship to life more broadly.

The poem's use of daily life as the material for a ritual also brings to mind, and may be drawing on, techniques found in Pound's Imagist experiments (drawing on the haiku tradition and Ernst Fenollosa's studies on Chinese ideograms) as well as Pierre Reverdy's doctrine of the image. Both these innovations advocated a juxtaposition of images which would invite the reader, without the use of metaphor or allegory, to fuse the two images, see one in the other, or both simultaneously. In this way, *Paris* invites readers to fuse everyday modern life with elements of primitive ritual in such a way that a ritual performance for a critical moment in modern life arises, as Harrison insists it must, out of life as it is lived.

Thus, in *Paris*, classical and pre-classical Greek myth as well as the modern religious practices which descend from it are woven into the everyday modern setting of 1919 Paris. The poem presents a return to pre-Olympian matriarchal ritual, both in its chthonic and

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15 Despite qualitative differences in how the tourist and the *flâneur* view the city, they are linked in their collection of images of modern public space, as Gleber points out.

agriculture-oriented, as well as later mystical Dionysian incarnations. Following E.B. Tylor, Robertson Smith and J.G. Frazer's arguments that these early myths and rituals were absorbed into Christianity, the poem participates in the spring ritual of this current descendent of primitive Greek religion, but also scrutinises it sharply, in what can be read as an attempt to revive more vitalised, potent elements of its earlier form.<sup>16</sup> This reflects the way that Harrison, in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, focuses on spring ritual as centring on purification, getting rid of evil, but later, in *Themis*, recants this position to some extent, arguing that purification is but an aspect of regeneration, which is the real intention behind ancient spring ritual. In this light, as will be explored here, the harshness towards Catholicism can in fact be read as an attempt to recuperate it through a baptism of fire – or a ritual descent into the chthonic underworld.

## 5 Going under: chthonic ritual in twentieth-century Paris

At the very beginning of the poem we are plunged into the dark, liminal world of chthonic religion, relocated however, into the modern Parisian context. Advertisement posters along the walls of station platforms in metro tunnels, 'ZIG ZAG', 'LION NOIR', 'CACAO BLOOKER' are paralleled with 'black figured vases in Etruscan tombs', taking us underground, where Etruscan tombs are found, and to a time pre-dating the Olympian period, as according to Harrison, black-figured vases date from the sixth century BC or earlier (*Prolegomena* 382), the century during which the dromenon was slowly replaced by the drama, peopled with Homer's Olympian characters (*AAR* 145). The underground vision intensifies with the line 'brekekekek coax coax we are passing under the Seine', alluding, as mentioned above, to the chorus of frogs in Aristophanes' *The Frogs* whose singing accompanies Dionysus on his passage into the underworld; again the scene transposes ancient elements onto a modern setting as the line puns on the English pejorative slang term 'frogs' denoting the French and replaces the Styx with the Seine.

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<sup>16</sup> Tylor's *Primitive Cultures: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* makes a case for the continuity between primitive animistic religion and all existing religions, exploring survivals of this earlier religion in Christianity and other religions, noting, for example, how Christian saints replaced Roman deities of various crafts etc. Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* later express the same idea.

The reference sets the scene for a primitive ritual engaging with chthonic, or underground, potencies, as the frogs' song in Aristophanes recalls how they used to sing in honour of Dionysus in the Marshes, at the site of his sanctuary during the Anthesteria, 'a festival of ghosts' (*Prolegomena* 76), where 'the spirits of the dead rose up' (*Themis* 289, italics in original), which was then 'overlaid by a festival of Dionysos' (*Prolegomena* 76; *Themis* 275). Harrison relates that on the specific day of the festival to which the frogs refer in their song, the day of the *Chytroi*, or Pots, a pot full of seeds and grain, a *panspermia*, would be offered to the dead. It is offered specifically in honour of Hermes Chthonios, the 'Psychopompos, god of ghosts and the underworld' who is at the same time a chthonic fertility spirit (or Agathos Daimon [*Themis* 288, 294]), indeed 'the very *daimon* of reincarnation' (but who then becomes a mere messenger under the influence of the epic [295]). Harrison explains that the *panspermia* is not a mere sacrifice to placate the spirits of the dead; instead the seeds are taken below the earth by these ghosts and are brought back in autumn as a '*pankarpia*', or the fruits of the seeds. The dead, she writes, are '*Chthonioi*, "earth people", *Demetreioi*, "Demeter's people," and they do Demeter's work, her work and that of Kore the Maiden' (*Themis* 292), referring to the myth in which Persephone, the Kore or maiden aspect of Demeter, must go below the earth for a part of the year in order to return again in spring as the new corn (*Prolegomena* 274-277, 519; *Themis* 418-419, 523). This cycle of reincarnation makes spring 'the dead man's time': the dead and the living, Harrison argues, share claims to the fruits of the earth, and in spring 'the dead man wants them as seed that he may take it with him down below and tend it and give it a "body" and send it back as fruit' (*Themis* 292). Harrison explains that in matriarchal religion, the Great Mother is mother of the dead as well as the living, and with this came the belief that the earth is both where the dead dwelled and where life came from (*Prolegomena* 266-7).<sup>17</sup> Demonstrating the tenacity of this belief in Greek religion, Harrison quotes Cicero:

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<sup>17</sup> Harrison explains that over time, as Demeter and Kore develop more specialised functions, the Mother becomes more associated with the upper air and the Daughter becomes more associated with the underworld (*Prolegomena* 275-276). For this reason, and as spring is the time of subterranean stirrings promoting fertility, the Lesser Eleusinian Mysteries, held in the same month as the Anthesteria, Anthesterion, was sacred to Kore as well as Dionysus, rather than to Demeter (560-561, 598) – Dionysus being essentially a male form of Kore, 'an anthropomorphic presentation of the new-born fruits of the earth' (519), but adding the elements of mysticism and intoxication to the Mysteries (364-365, 437).

All things go back to earth and rise out of the earth

and Aeschylus:

Yea, summon Earth, who brings all things to life  
And rears and takes again into her womb. (266-7)

She also notes the survival of this belief in the Bible, pointing out that ‘an Athenian at the Anthesteria would never have needed S. Paul’s angry adjuration:

Thou fool that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it  
die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that  
shall be, but bare grain, in may chance of wheat, or of some  
other grain. (292)

This cycle of periodic reincarnation at the heart of primitive religion, the older order of *palingenesia*, is contrasted by Harrison with the *athanasia*, the ‘dead and barren immortality’ of the Olympians (*Themis* 467-8). The ‘elder potencies of Mother Earth’ she writes, ‘are forced by their own cyclic nature to die, to go to the bosom of the earth, that they may rise again’ (*Themis* 528-9). In this light, the journey underground at the beginning of *Paris* signals the beginning of a primitive ritual of regeneration, the descent before the resurrection. The atmosphere is further saturated with the ghostly aspect of the chthonic underworld in that, as Mark Griffith points out, the frogs in the play are remembering singing at the Anthesteria, and must therefore themselves be ghosts (Griffith 158), but, from the perspective of Harrison’s writing on chthonic ritual, this atmosphere is at once one of hope, as ‘to totemistic thinkers, the fear [of ghosts] is always mixed with a sure and certain hope, the hope of reincarnation’ (*Themis* 290). Indeed, ‘the focus of attention at the anthesteria’, she writes, ‘was not on death [...] but on life through death, on reincarnation, on the life-*daimon*’ (291). It should also be noted that the purpose of Dionysus’s journey to Hades in *The Frogs* is to retrieve Euripedes – who Harrison and Murray see as the foremost classical Greek playwright to incorporate older pre-Olympian ritual forms (*Themis* 47; Murray, ‘Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy’ in *Themis* 354) – in a time of artistic and cultural decline. The poem thus immediately puts us at the midway point between death and life, making it clear from this moment that what happens from this moment onward is taking place in the liminal space of ritual which moves between these two poles of existence, that is, the space of transition, ‘neither here nor there’, as Harrison puts it (AAR 112). The frogs can also be seen to contribute to this atmosphere of liminality, as Radcliffe Guest Edmond points out in his observation that ‘frogs themselves, as creatures that live in the two worlds of water and land, are appropriate

creatures to facilitate the transition of Dionysos across the border between the worlds of living and dead' (134).<sup>18</sup>

## 6 Liminal atmosphere: throwing the modern world into a trance

There is no greater bar to that realizing of mythology which is the first condition of its being understood, than our modern habit of clear analytic thought'.<sup>19</sup>

The sense of liminality introduced in this opening passage, taking us underground, pervades the poem as the atmosphere is imbued with suggestions of altered states of consciousness: trance and intoxication, a dreamlike state producing a half-fantasy, mystical vision of the city. This state of mind is central to Harrison's conception of ancient Greek ritual, and is modelled on the mentality of the 'savage' posited by various ethnological theories of the day.<sup>20</sup> Harrison writes in *Themis* and *Alpha and Omega* of the way in which primitive religion creates and lends a secondary reality to a 'supersensuous' world made up of one's dreams, and of ecstasy, trance, visions, ghosts of dead ancestors and omens for the future. It is this world into which the ritual participant must pass, leaving behind the 'actual, sensible, "objective" world' (*Themis* 512; see also *A&O* 155-156). This description is then echoed in Harrison's vision of art as trance-like and of the artist as a sleep-walker (*Alpha and Omega* 215-216). As discussed in the previous chapter (Section 3.5.2) Harrison later aligns this 'savage' mentality with the unconscious in her *Epilegomena* (xlvii-xlix)

Harrison argues that it is this element of a trance-like spell with the reality of a dream that is missing from the art of the Futurists, which she otherwise praises for its engagement with modern, everyday life, and for thus approaching a form of art that recrosses the ritual bridge to life. Here, she hopes that

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<sup>18</sup> Also see Moorton (313) on this point about the liminality of the frogs.

<sup>19</sup> *Prolegomena* (164).

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as critics such as Torgovnick have highlighted, the projection of a greater spirituality and sense of connectedness to the natural world emerges as a major feature of modernist primitivism, functioning as an imaginary means of escaping the constrictions of Western rationality (*Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* 94, 148, 162).

there will one day come a Futurist [...] who will cast the spell, and set the motors and aeroplanes sleep-walking. It is, perhaps, a not very hard thing to give form and silence to a rough-hewn figure. To throw the modern world into a trance is another matter, and needs, perhaps, a bigger man. (*A&O* 215-218)

In the dreamlike vision she presents of the modern city, Mirrlees take on this challenge and realises Harrison's wish. *Paris* is steeped in an atmosphere that recalls the 'supersensuous world' of primitive religion the Harrison posits. Firstly, as mentioned in Section 3, the desire for a holophrase is a desire for primitive expression and as such, following Harrison's Freudian and Jungian expanded definition of the concept 'primitive', points to a desire to express the subconscious level of human existence, the realm of dreams, of irrational and even mystical visions. Soon after this, a trance is introduced, with the (literally) spaced out line

The Tuilleries are in a trance

and rising as the sleep-walking speaker wades 'knee-deep in dreams', the dreams eventually reaching her waist, and as she sits 'tranced' in her hotel room watching the crowds below.

Wading through dreams as if through water anticipates the metaphor of the psyche as water often employed by the Surrealists, following Freud's use, in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, of words such as 'surface' and 'depth', 'submersion' and 'emersion' (see for example Aurora 1). Similarly, ghostly dreams emerge from the 'sluggish watery sleep' of the Seine. This imagery of water as containing the unconscious in its depths is intensified at the end of the poem where the river is 'dredged' by Freud himself, alluding to his 'dredging' of dreams from the hidden realm of the unconscious, exposing them to the demystifying light of rational analysis and interpretation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mirrlees's wording here, 'Freud has dredged the river and, grinning horribly, / waves his garbage in a glare of electricity', recalls Harrison's admission of having struggled with the 'sexual mud' of Freud's psychoanalytic theory (*Reminiscences* 82). This may indicate a similar ambivalence towards his theories, although, given Mirrlees's Romanticism (discussed in the previous chapter and in Chapter 4), the ambivalence could have less to do with sexuality in Freud's theories and more to do with the inherent rationalism of psychoanalysis, its insistence on an autonomous faculty of reason. Mirrlees challenges the reader to 'Scorn the laws of solid geometry' in defiance of Julius Cæsar, whose statue stands in the Tuilleries and who scorns dreams in Shakespeare's

play,<sup>21</sup> and ‘Step boldly into the wall of the Salle Caillebotte’. Rationality and the laws of physics are further defied in the vision of the Louvre melting into mist, becoming transparent, and the Eiffel Tower becoming two dimensional. Finally, in its enactment of the Anthesteria, signalled at the beginning of the poem with the descent under the Seine (see the previous section), the poem is filled with ghosts, evoking the ‘supersensuous world’ of primitive religion which

grows big with the invisible present and big also with the past and the future,  
crowded with the ghosts of the dead and shadowed with oracles and portents of the  
future. (*Themis* 512)

Ghosts emerge not only as the dreams of king-fishers from the unconscious depths of the Seine, but also walk the streets.<sup>22</sup>

The poem’s staging of liminal states of consciousness is strongly fuelled by the pervasive presence of alcohol, which is central to the enactment of a modern-day Anthesteria. As Harrison notes, the spring festival, sacred to Dionysus, god of wine, centred in practice largely on the drinking of new wine (*Themis* 275-6; *Prolegomena* 425). Intoxication fills the atmosphere of the poem, firstly with three appearances of the word ‘DUBONNET’, a fortified wine, on the first page of the poem, and later mentions of aperitifs (page 9), vermouth and ‘bocks’ (page 10 – ‘bocks’ referring to glasses of beer [Briggs, ‘HMCM’ 296]), and absinthe (page 22). Mentions of haschich (page 5) and Algerian tobacco (pages 12 and 22) also add to this general atmosphere. The prevalence of intoxicants, in the context of the poem’s ritual, raises the question of their relevance to ritual.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on ethnological studies, Harrison notes the importance of intoxicants to producing the condition of ecstasy associated with much primitive ritual (*A&O* 164-165), and argues that this is so because the experience of intoxication is interpreted by the primitive subject as divine possession (*Prolegomena* 426). The ancient Greeks, she argues, valued the link between physical and spiritual intoxication and saw as natural and beautiful ‘the constant shift from physical to spiritual that is of the essence of the religion of Dionysos’ which is heightened by intoxication (*Prolegomena* 450, 454). She

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<sup>21</sup> In the entry for this line in her annotation of the poem, Briggs notes Cæsar’s ill-fated dismissal of dreams in *Julius Cæsar* (Briggs, ‘HMCM’ 289).

<sup>22</sup> Section 8 will consider the appearance of ghosts in the poem in more detail.

<sup>23</sup> The poem may also be invoking the the restrictions on alcohol during the War in the English-speaking world, which contrasted with the more liberal French policies at the time.

contrasts this with the way that '[i]ntoxication to us now-a-days means not inspiration but excess and consequent degradation' (447), and considers the way that for people of a certain temperament, who 'dread all stimulus that comes from without' Dionysus will always be a stumbling block (453). In this discussion she reminds the reader that the drama sprang from the religion of Dionysus (450), suggesting that a fearful suppression of stimulants implies a denial of physical, spiritual and creative emancipation. The presence of intoxicants can thus be read as part of the creation of an atmosphere of ritual in the poem.

An atmosphere of liminality in the sense of in-betweenness, in the process of a transition or transformation, is created in *Paris* by a pervasive sense of anticipation. A sense of something about to happen builds up over the pages in lines such as 'The Ballet of green Butterflies / Will soon begin', and 'soon / dog-roses will stare at gypsies, wanes and pilgrimages'. Another hint is in the lines

What time  
Subaqueous  
Cell on cell  
Experience  
Very slowly  
Is forming up  
Into something beautiful—awful—huge  
The coming to . . . . .

which signal some imminent, important change (the stacking of the lines one atop the other adding to the sense of waiting). As Briggs points out, the line 'Cell on cell' recalls Mirrlees's wording in her Preface to *Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists*, in which she writes

Life is like a blind and limitless expanse of sky, for ever dividing into tiny drops of circumstances that rain down, thick and fast, on the just and unjust alike. Art is like the dauntless, plastic force that builds up stubborn, amorphous substance cell by cell, into the frail geometry of a shell. (Vii)

The anticipation expressed in the poem of something being about to happen gives it a sense of being an event in process, echoing Harrison's emphasis on the nature of ritual being that of transition and longing – Harrison herself drawing substantially on the Bergsonian description of durational time as continuous becoming and change (as discussed in Chapter 1, Sections 3.5.2 and 5.6). This structural aspect of ritual is thus integrated into the structure of the poem. This effect is heightened by the fact that the present tense is used almost without exception throughout the poem. The poem itself is thus resisting the category of art, attempting instead

to take on the structure of ritual. These lines hint at the way the present is already crystallising into a work of art:

Poilus in wedgwood blue with bundles Terre De Sienne  
are camping round the gray sphinx of the Tuileries.  
They look as if a war artist were making a sketch of  
them in chalks, to be 'edited' in the Rue Des Pyram-  
ides at 10 francs a copy.

A similar effect is created in the lines

Whatever happens, some day it will look beautiful:  
Clio is a great French painter,  
She walks upon the waters and they are still.  
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stand motionless  
and plastic mid the flames.

'Whatever happens' gives an air of unpredictability, of the here-and-now, of something unfolding, which contrasts with how whatever happens can later be fixed and frozen and made to 'look beautiful' as a piece of art, a historical narrative or even a religious myth. Clio, the muse of history, is here also a painter, and also the source of religious myths; her walking on the waters, stilling them, invokes the biblical myth of Jesus walking on the water, and the image of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego surviving the flames are crystallised in myth by this same power, the power of art to fix, freeze and transform into a representation. This passage shows Mirrlees weaving together art, history and mythology, reflecting Harrison's thesis that both art and mythology arise from ritual – the dromenon, the thing done now, without necessarily knowing the outcome.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego standing motionless and plastic mid the flame furthermore recall Apollinaire's image, in his essay 'Aesthetic Meditations on Painting: The Cubist Painters', of 'the three plastic virtues [that] radiate in burning' (8). Here, Apollinaire is advocating 'the plastic virtues: purity, unity, and truth' which, he writes, 'hold nature downed beneath their feet' (7). He attacks the 'accursed discipline' of painting from nature (8), complaining that

The rainbow is bent, the seasons quiver, the crowds push on to death, science undoes and remakes what already exists, whole worlds disappear forever from our understanding, our mobile images repeat themselves, or revive their vagueness, and the colors, the odors, and the sounds to which we are sensitive astonish us, then disappear from nature all to no purpose.

This monster beauty is not eternal. (8)

This flux of life is overcome, he suggests, in the purity of Cubist painting, which he repeatedly associates with fire. Mirrlees can thus be seen as juxtaposing Apollinaire's 'three plastic virtues radiat[ing] in burning' with the three biblical figures, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who stand plastic in the flames. 'A great French Painter' may thus be a reference to the Cubist painters who Apollinaire praises in his essay, and Mirrlees may once again be seen as filling old religious vessels with modern, Parisian content, juxtaposing the old and sacred with the modern and secular, initiating a new religious and artistic age for the city of Paris.

This sense of process and immediacy in the poem is heightened through its sense of movement, which gives the poem the character of a *dromenon*, the 'thing done' that Harrison opposes to a drama which is a spectacle, something to be watched and contemplated (AAR 127). The movement and action central to ritual becomes, in *Paris*, a journey first on the metro and then, it is implied, on foot. This sense of embodied movement is heightened by references to the speaker 'wad(ing) knee-deep in dreams', and the dreams later reaching her waist. The lines referring to the smells of the Grand Boulevards ('Cloacæ / Hot indiarubber / Poudre de riz / Algerian tobacco) further help to convey a sensuous, embodied experience. The experience of movement and engagement with the senses that this creates for the reader echoes the experience of art that Harrison calls for when she writes that

for those of us who are not artists or original thinkers the life of the imagination, and even of the emotions, has been perhaps too long lived at second hand, received from the artist ready made and felt. [...] With this fresh outpouring of the spirit, this fuller consciousness of life, there comes a need for *first-hand* emotion and expression. (AAR 206-207)

The main way, however, in which 'first-hand' expression is employed in the poem is in the imagistic, snapshot-style manner used to convey the sights encountered along the journey to the reader. The way in which places and objects are presented, with no introduction or explanation, gives the journey a cinematic and concrete immediacy, and gives the reader a sense of experiencing the journey first hand rather than second hand as a finished, polished narrative – as Harrison puts it, 'ready made and felt'. As Briggs points out, the advertising slogans, street signs and metro names and so forth that appear in the poem, while obscure now, would have been familiar to anyone acquainted with Paris in 1919. Thus, they could be readily

conjured in the mind's eye of the reader. The line 'Nord-Sud', for example, might conjure an image of the sign for the metro station by this name:<sup>24</sup>



Simultaneously, the line could also be a reference to the painting by this name by the Futurist painter Gino Severini:

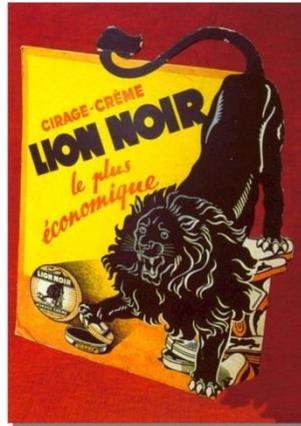


Futurism, as noted above, is praised by Harrison for its ability to capture the speed and chaos of modern life; alluding to this painting, with the simultaneous reference to the metro line,

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<sup>24</sup> The following pictures (apart from the Severini image) were taken from a powerpoint presentation by Julia Briggs. Following her death they have been in the care of Hans Walter Gabler by whom I was given permission to use the pictures in my research, thanks to the kind help of Dr Jurate Levina who brought the images to my attention.

could be establishing this link and offering the reader to make this association.<sup>25</sup> There is also a good chance that the lines ‘ZIG-ZAG’, referring to a brand of cigarette paper ‘LION NOIR’, a brand of shoe polish, and ‘CACAO BLOOKER’, a brand of drinking chocolate (Briggs, ‘HMCM’ 287-288) would evoke familiar images for readers acquainted with Paris in 1919:<sup>26</sup>



The three sets of lines alluding to plaques on the walls on the houses where Molière, Voltaire and Chateaubriand died might well also conjure an instant visual image to anyone familiar with these houses:

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<sup>25</sup> Similarly, a number of posters exist for the aperitif Dubonnet, which appears three times on the first page of the poem, which could also be a reference to Sonia Delaunay’s abstract painting by the same name, adding another layer to the reader’s mental journey through Paris by including avant-garde paintings of the period.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs notes that the first three of these lines work to ‘introduce themes of empire and *négritude* (blackness), further linked with “black-figured vases”’, as the first features the head of an Algerian soldier, the second translates as ‘black lion’ and the third is an advertisement for drinking chocolate (287-288). Indeed, linking ‘empire and blackness’ with primitive vases fuses an image of the ancient ‘primitive’ with images of modern consumption of the ‘primitive’ non-Western other. It is debatable whether Mirrlees is perpetuating Western primitivist notions of blackness, or whether she is simply holding up a mirror to the vogue for ‘the primitive’ and the way in which blackness is consumed through advertising.



This sense of immediacy, of transition, of being an event in progress is heightened by the poem's adoption of the mode of the *flâneuse*, a figure always in motion, with no fixed destination. This emphasis on transition and movement gives the poem a performative element that Harrison highlights as being central to ritual. The next chapter will analyse how this performativity is highlighted through the use of typography, which among other things reproduces the capital letters in the original posters and placards, and renders the wandering movement of the speaker typographically as words wander across and down the page. The emphasis on the physical process of producing the book, and on the use of bibliographic materials, I will argue, mirrors the ritualistic emphasis on movement, concreteness and immediacy.

The pervasive sense of transition and immediacy in the poem also points to a precariousness regarding the outcome of the ritual, which recalls the way Harrison notes of the 'savage' ritual participant that 'it is desire and will and longing, not certainty and satisfaction that he utters' (AAR 65). The next section will consider what is at the heart of this precariousness, and ultimately ambivalence, about the success of the ritual, looking at how the poem scrutinises the current state of religion.

## 7 Problems of ritual rebirth and regeneration: interrogating the state of ritual itself

A key image expressing the uncertainty and anticipation about the outcome of the poem's ritual is the poignant image of the 'lovely Spirit of the Year' who lies 'stiff and stark / Laid out in acres of brown fields, / The crisp, straight lines of his archaic drapery / Well chiselled by the plough . . .' This line refers to Harrison's theorised archetype of mystical pre-Olympian gods, the 'Eniautos-Daimon', whose death and resurrection are enacted in primitive spring ritual. The identification of the Spirit's drapery with the actual soil underlines its identity as the mystery god that Harrison argues is at the heart of primitive religion, a spirit bound up with the earth and in which all living things participate. These lines show the Eniautos-Daimon in a state of winter barrenness, and the preceding lines cast doubt on its resurrection: here, the cock, a well-known fertility symbol, crying '*do do do miii*', is shown to be without any purpose here as 'he cannot sing of towns'. The 'he' of this line is shown in the next line also to refer to Hesiod, who 'yearns for "Works and Days"', which for Harrison is a text that shows Hesiod's connection to primitive magic by being effectively a guideline for promoting fertility (*Themis* 94-97). The lines show that this ancient guideline is desired but also that it is problematic if not irrelevant in the contemporary urban context of the poem.

The spring ritual is also shown to be problematic in the lines 'The unities are smashed, / The stage is thick with corpses. . . .' On one level the line presents an image reflecting the post-war situation – the highest death toll the world had ever seen, and disillusionment with all the hitherto held ideas of the progress of civilisation. On another level it invokes the idea of the poem as a Dithyramb, a song, accompanied by a ritual dance, which according to Harrison enacts the rebirth of Dionysus as Eniautos-Daimon, along with all of nature in the spring, and which is thought to be the origin of Greek tragedy (*Themis* 203, 334, 545). The close connection between the Dithyramb and drama implies that, here, the unities and stage of ritual, as well as the dramatic art that could develop out of it, have been destroyed and ritual and art are both bereft of their old certainties.

Lying at the heart of the poem's interrogation of the state of ritual are the lines

There was a ritual fight for her sweet body  
Between two virgins—Mary and the moon  
The wicked April moon.

A fight or contest, Harrison argues, is typically a part of many primitive rituals, based on the need for seasonal change, and therefore in these ritual fights ‘Summer contends with Winter, Life with Death, the New Year with the Old’ (AAR 138, 61-63; *Themis* 546).<sup>27</sup> Sometimes the fight signifies the conflict between an old and new social order and belief paradigm (*Themis* 385-6). Here Mary contends with the April moon, or ‘la lune rousse’, as Mirrlees explains in the notes. La lune rousse, the lunar month after Easter, has been linked to the Roman festival Robigalia, celebrated in late April in honour of the deity Robigus/Robigo, god/goddess of rust, with the intention of dissuading this power from destroying the budding crops (Magnúsdóttir 219-221). Approached from a Harrisonian perspective, the festival can arguably be traced further back to a matriarchal order, as April was the month in which the agricultural festival Cerealia was held in honour of Ceres, the Roman adaptation of Demeter (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 387). As for example Wasson et al. note, Demeter/Ceres existed in two forms, a kindly benevolent form and ‘Demeter the blighter’,<sup>28</sup> and one of the epithets applied to her was ‘erisybe’, meaning rust (Wasson 115-116). As the Great Mother of primitive Greek religion becomes increasingly diversified into separate goddesses with individual roles (as usefully summarised by Radford, *Lost Girls* 89-90), it can be deduced that Robigo, god/goddess of rust, evolved from the epithet of rust applied to Demeter/Ceres and that the Robigalia thus evolved from the Cerealia. La lune rousse ends in mid-May (the month of May being, as Briggs notes, sacred to Mary [‘HMCM’ 296]) with Saints de glace, or ‘the ice saints’, Catholic feast days set up to counteract the ill effects of la lune rousse. The ritual fight here can thus be thought of as existing between Mary, the central female figure of Catholicism, and an older female potency that is now termed ‘wicked’, a typically religious epithet which I would argue Mirrlees is using ironically to underline the opposition between the two sides of the ritual fight.

Mary’s ‘wicked’ opponent points not only to Demeter/Ceres, who is invoked by the allusion to la lune rousse, but also to a later incarnation of the matriarchal goddess, the Roman

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<sup>27</sup> Harrison’s friend and fellow Cambridge Ritualist, Gilbert Murray, then shows the survival of this agonistic element in numerous classical plays in the form of fights between different Olympian deities, in a chapter included in *Themis*, entitled ‘Excursus on the ritual forms preserved in Greek tragedy’ (*Themis* 354-59).

<sup>28</sup> This blighting, as Margot Louis notes, being Demeter’s punishment inflicted on the Olympians for the rape and abduction of her daughter Persephone (16-17).

goddess Diana, associated with both virginity and the moon, and whose Greek counterpart, Artemis, Harrison sees as the last survival of the Great Mother in Greek religion (*Themis* 502-505). Following in the footsteps of E.B. Tylor who traced the survival of animism in later religions including Catholicism, J.G. Frazer, in considering the ancient ritual origins of the myth of Diana Nemorensis and the King of the wood, makes a strong connection between rituals belonging to older goddesses such as Diana and those centring on Mary in Catholicism. The development of Mary from pagan goddesses has since received ample scholarly attention. Stephen Benko argues the continuity between a generalised ‘Great Mother’ figure – taking a multiplicity of forms in the ancient world – and Mary, while some critics focus on the link specifically between Diana and Mary. It has for example been argued that Mary filled a religious void following the repression of specifically the cult of Diana in 380 AD (Baring and Cashford 550), and also that in doing so Christianity fastened onto Diana, considering her an exception among goddesses in that she imposed chastity on her nymphs, but in moulding Diana into Mary changed the meaning of virginity itself, from meaning simply independent of men (whether or not they were taken as lovers) to adopting connotations of shame and modesty (Warner 49). As Jane Caputi states, ‘to combat Diana’s sovereignty, the church distorted her cult while assimilating her least threatening aspects to the Virgin Mary’. Through this development of the figure of Mary, the independent, adventurous figure of Diana is lost (Caputi 348).

The ritual fight can thus be seen as being between Mary and her pagan predecessors, all diversified forms of the Great Mother of primitive Greek religion. The fight recalls the race between female virgins which F.M. Cornford (a member of the circle of Cambridge Ritualists, see Chapter 1), in a chapter in *Themis*, argues preceded the Olympic Games. The winner became, Cornford says, associated with the moon, as the festival dates from the days of the lunar calendar, unlike the Olympic Games which followed (*Themis* 229-231). Harrison argues that during this period before the introduction of the solar year, the year god would have been a matriarchal moon-goddess (*Themis* 188-200; *AAR* 66). This focus on the moon then dies out as in Greek mythology ‘[t]he Moon was married to the Sun and in patriarchal fashion sank into wifely subjection’ (*Themis* 200), and was replaced with male gods who, as Harrison notes,

almost always took on aspects of the sun (199).<sup>29</sup> The poem's opposition of Catholicism's virgin with the virgin figure of the primitive moon goddess can in this light be seen as an opposition between the reigning patriarchal theology and an older matriarchal religion. The fight thus reflects Cornford's argument that the contest from which the Olympic Games evolved was a combat between old and new fertility spirit of the year, or Eniautos-Daimon (*Themis* 222-223,225, 235-7), as the conflict is between competing religious potencies. Cornford bases his argument on J.G. Frazer's thesis of Rex Nemorensis, the Priest of Diana at the sacred grove of Nemi, who obtains the priesthood of the Grove and Diana herself, by defeating the priest of the previous year in mortal combat (Frazer 1-8), which sheds light on the way the 'sweet body' of Paris is the goal of the poem's ritual fight.

The reference to la lune rousse takes on a heightened relevance in light of the fact that 1 May 1919 was an especially cold, rainy day.<sup>30</sup> This would on the one hand underline the 'wickedness' of the April moon for harming crops, or its cruelty, anticipating Eliot's 'April is the cruellest month', which has been read from a Harrisonian perspective as invoking ancient Greek springtime as the season of purification in Eliot's poem as well. On the other hand it recalls J.G. Frazer's discussion of how the perishing of crops in Greece in the past was attributed to the removal of Demeter's image from her temples (Frazer 397). This indicates rather than abandoning the potency behind the April moon, branding it as 'wicked',<sup>31</sup> has meant an impoverishment of religious life, which may account for the 'Spirit of the Year' lying 'stiff and stark' in the still wintery fields.

Such an impoverishment of religious life, a lack of vitality in its rituals, is suggested in the passage describing the speaker's experience of a Catholic church ritual:

We went to Benediction in Notre-Dame-des-Champs,  
Droning. . .droning. . .droning.

This snippet of narrative, suggesting the tedious monotony of a lifeless sermon, is followed by lines which scrutinise the status and role of Mary in Catholic ritual:

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<sup>29</sup> An exception to this rule is Dionysus who is associated with the moon (*Themis* 443) – as well as with his mother, Semele, the earth, and is therefore earth-born (*Prolegomena* 405-406) – and whose presence is felt in *Paris* in its reconstruction of the Anthesteria.

<sup>30</sup> See the archival entry for 1919 at *meteo-paris.com*, which states that '1er mai 1919 très froid, gris et très humide'.

<sup>31</sup> This branding echoes the historical implication of Diana as a focal point in medieval witch trials.

The Virgin sits in her garden ;  
She wears the blue habit and the winged linen head-  
dress of the nuns of Saint Vincent de Paul.  
The Holy Ghost coos in his dove cot.

The lines evoke a twee, cosy, safe, image which only adds to the boredom of the ‘droning’ in the preceding lines. The lines following soon after, ‘an angelic troubadour / Sings her songs / Of little venial sins’, also suggests a lack of vitality and power of Mary as a deity, as only ‘venial sins’, sung by angelic troubadours fall under her domain. The lines ‘Upon the wall of sunset-sky wasps never fret / The plums of Paradise’ suggest a controlled, artificial, even prelapsarian perfection which contrasts, as Briggs notes, with the lines which follow soon after:

The sky is apricot ;  
Against it there pass  
Across the Pont Solférino  
Fiacres and little people all black,  
Flies nibbling the celestial apricot—  
That one with broad-brimmed hat and tippeted pelisse  
must be a priest.

The stasis of the previous image, in which wasps never fret the plums of Paradise on the sunset sky, contrasts with the lively movement against the ‘apricot’ sunset in this scenes where flies, unlike the wasps in the previous scene, ‘nibbl[e] the celestial apricot’. That one of the flies is a priest also points to the narrowness and possibly hypocrisy of the previous image, which sets the church serenely apart from the bustle of real life. The contrast here readily invokes Harrison’s dichotomy of ritual on the one hand, as an embodied process rooted in emotion felt towards real life, and art on the other hand, as a static representation. Occurring earlier in this passage, the line ‘The Seven Stages of the Cross are cut in box’ also points to a representation, one which depicts the process of Christ’s execution – a later incarnation of Frazer’s dying god, or Harrison’s Eniautos-Daimon who must die in order to rise again – in static relief. The line ‘She wears the blue habit and the winged head- / dress of the nuns of Saint Vincent de Paul’ also suggests a deity made in the image of the humans who worship it – a projected reflection like the Olympians, given a backstory and totally human attributes.

This dialogue with Catholicism begins on the very first page with the bordered lines

A  
 NOTRE DAME DE PARIS  
 EN RECONNAISSANCE  
 DES GRACES ACCORDEES

Like a votive plaque at the entrance to a church (as Briggs suggests [‘HMCM’ 287]), or to an ancient tomb (of the sort Harrison frequently describes [*Themis* 148, 298, 304-6]), the bordered lines signify an entrance to a site of ritual. These first lines to the poem are echoed in its last: ‘JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE’, again alluding to the sacrament of the Hail Mary, but, again, removing Mary herself from the sacrament and replacing her simply with ‘Paris’. The bordered lines introduce a mystery that haunts the poem throughout: who is this Lady of Paris who is being placed at the centre of a religious sacrament? From a Harrisonian perspective, drawing heavily on Durkheim, as well as Frazer, both the beginning and ending lines of the poem invoke the idea of totemism. In *Themis*, Harrison explains that a totem is an animal, plant or sometimes an object which constitutes a focus of *mana*, an elemental energy and force in which the tribe participates and which it can manipulate (*Themis* 124, 126), and through which a group expresses a common kinship, in order to emphasise its feeling of group unity (*Themis* 119-131). The totem thus expresses the identity of the group and is continuous with this identity, rather than constituting an object of worship that is separate from its worshippers – worship, for Harrison (following Frazer), constituting a later phase in the evolution of religion (*Themis* 127). ‘Paris’, to whom the first and last lines are addressed, can, in this sense, be read simply as a projection of the city and its people. This suggests from the start of the poem a quest for a new totem and thus a renewal of religion itself, anticipating as well the palimpsestic layering of old ritual moulds with new content that will pervade the poem and that places the religious crisis in the present moment, insisting on its relevance to life now. In naming this new totem ‘Paris’, all that is implied is that it be a projection of the city, whatever that may be, which, following Harrison, is how religious practice begins. The fact that Paris is a lady, however, presents one clue, which is that the new religion sought after is matriarchal, and therefore, following Harrison’s chronology of religion, primitive.

The next confrontation with Catholicism occurs soon after this in the lines ‘The Scarlet Woman shouting BYRRH and deafening / St. John at Patmos’, referring to this advertisement poster for an alcoholic drink displayed on the wall of a metro station.



The ‘Scarlet Woman’ in these lines refers, as Briggs points out, to the figure envisioned by St. John in the Book of Revelations in the Bible (‘HMCM’ 288). In St. John’s vision of the Apocalypse, the Babylon of the Old Testament, depicted as blasphemous, lustful and hedonistic (see for example Richards 923), returns as a woman in scarlet on whose forehead is written ‘MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH’ (KJV, Book of Revelations 17:5). This mysterious figure has largely –both in Mirrlees’s time and now – been identified as symbolising the Roman Empire (see for example Chriswell 86-67; Wordsworth), which, as has often been pointed out, is condemned by John for its paganism (Cowan; Chriswell 49, 90, 95-98 67). With this image of an advertising poster, the poem presents a silencing of Catholic dogma through a figure which gives a loud, contemporary, flamboyant voice to the pre-Christian, pagan matriarchal religion that St. John attacks. Firstly, Babylon, John’s metaphor for the heresies of the Roman Empire, was home to a religion that was strongly matriarchal (Smith 56-58, 517-521),<sup>32</sup> as well as mystical (345). Secondly, as Edith Hall points out, the island of

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<sup>32</sup> An example of Christian rituals taking over Babylonian ones is provided by Cowan, who points out, in his devoutly Protestant tract, that one of the ways in which Rome blasphemously merged Christianity with Babylonian religion was by adopting a feast day belonging to Cybele as the occasion for the Virgin Mary’s Annunciation (Cowan 13), Cybele being, as Harrison notes, the Great Mother in her Asiatic form (*Prolegomena* 536, 158).

Patmos, where the Book of Revelations is said to have been written, is known to have been sacred to Artemis/Diana, and the goddess's cult was singled out in the New Testament as epitomising the old pagan religion (Hall 142-143). The absolute conquest by Christianity over this older matriarchal religion can be seen as having been symbolically cemented in the erection, on the island of Patmos, of the Monastery of St John the Theologian directly over an ancient temple to Artemis (see for example Boxall [10]). The deafening of St. John on Patmos in this line of the poem thus rejects the patriarchal theology of Catholicism,<sup>33</sup> and attempts to reach back and connect to forgotten pre-Christian, matriarchal religious potencies.

Soon after this, after the poem has made it clear that it is embarking on a ritual – with its figurative descent into the underworld, its admission of the need for a transition and the introduction of a trance state ('The Tuilleries are in a trance...') – another image is invoked to suggest a return to the primitive and matriarchal, in the line 'Le Depart pour Cythere'. The reference is to a painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau depicting an aristocratic fête gallant embarking for Cythera, the mythologised birthplace of Aphrodite, or Kythereia in her earlier Greek incarnation (for example Roberts 441). Through this image, invoking the birthplace of a goddess, the poem signals a journey back to matriarchal myth and ritual. Harrison notes that Aphrodite, a latecomer to Olympus, belonging rather to the older matriarchal order (*Prolegomena* 309), is part of a trinity emerging from the Kore aspect of the Demeter-Persephone/Kore figure who in agricultural matriarchal ritual is reborn in the spring as the new corn.<sup>34</sup> The embarkation alluded to can thus be seen to hint at a ritual journey with regeneration as its goal.

The following lines 'These nymphs are harmless, / Fear not their soft mouths-- / Some Pasteur made the Gauls immune / Against the bite of nymphs' extend the trope used in the previous line, if read against Harrison's discussion of the birth of Aphrodite. Harrison notes that Aphrodite is a nymph (*Prolegomena* 309), pointing out as well that nymphs were also mother figures in primitive matriarchal religion (264). Pascal's scientific rendering of Gauls, or the French, as immune to nymphs might in this context be read as representing the advance

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<sup>33</sup> Given the French context, and the reference to John as a Saint, the confrontation here can be read as specifically with Catholicism.

<sup>34</sup> As noted above in section 5.

of rationalism which killed off not only Aphrodite but the whole religious system she metonymically stands in for: one centring on the magical ritual practices of primitive matriarchal cults.

The poem's image of 'waxen Pandoras' in the windows of the high street shops highlights this loss of powerful female religious figures, and can be read against Harrison's discussion of how the myth of Pandora shows the debasement of female deities as patriarchy takes hold in Olympian Greece. Harrison writes that before Pandora was refashioned in Olympian mythology as the first woman, she was in matriarchal religion the earth, the 'giver of all gifts' (*Prolegomena* 281). In patriarchal Olympian religion she becomes reduced to 'the handiwork of Zeus' as she is moulded 'in the form of a maiden fair' on Zeus's command and decked with various trinkets and flowers (284). She is diminished in this manner, Harrison writes, as 'Zeus the father will have no great Earth-goddess, Mother and Maid in one, in his man-fashioned Olympus'. So he remakes her: 'woman, who was the inspirer, becomes the temptress; she who made all things, gods and mortals alike, is become their plaything, their slave, dowered only with physical beauty, and with a slave's tricks and blandishments'; she is but a 'beautiful evil' and 'crafty snare' (284). In this passage, Harrison also refers to Zeus as the archpatriarchal *bourgeois*' (emphasis original), pointing to the way in which the objectification of women becomes enshrined in this myth of the creation of the first woman.

In this passage of the poem, Catholicism is intertwined with the Pandora story and is implicated in the debasement and objectification of women and the religious figures that represent them:

All this time the Virgin has not been idle ;  
The windows of le Galeries Lafayette, le Bon Marché,  
la Samaritaine,  
Hold holy bait,  
Waxen Pandoras in white veils and ties of her own  
decking;  
Catéchisme de Persévérance,  
The decrees of the Seven Æcumenical Councils re-  
duced to the *format* of the *Bibliothèque Rose*  
Première Communion  
(Promethues has swallowed the bait)  
Petits Lycéens,  
Por-no-gra-phia,  
Charming pygmy brides,

The pun on idle/idol foreshadows the wax figures, implying that profound religious figures have become mere objects. The ‘bait’ alludes to Pandora’s role in her myth, in which she is offered by Zeus as a ruse to the titan Prometheus, revealing her status in mythology as not really a trickster, but as Marilyn Jurich points out, as the trick itself, ‘*someone else’s* idea of the trick’ as Pandora herself is without volition (Jurich 197). The Catholic tradition of first communion for little girls is seen as similarly debasing and exploiting women, as little girls taking their first communion become ‘Charming pygmy brides’ in their white gowns. They are ‘holy bait’ for the Church, educated from infancy on their status in religious life, as the word ‘Por-no-gra-phie’ is spelt out as if for children.<sup>35</sup> Contrasting with the myth of Pandora, and showing the depressing success of the Church’s use of this ‘bait’, Prometheus, the maker of man, here lacks the shrewdness to know he is being tricked and ‘swallow[s] the bait’. As with the image discussed above, of the Virgin sitting in her garden, useless and defunct, the Catholic faith itself is seen in this passage as devoid of religious vitality, not only in the trivialised reduction of the ‘Seven Æcumenical Councils [...] to the *format* of the *Bibliothèque Rose*’ for young girls, but also in its commercialisation as it attracts customers through the windows of high street shops. As Briggs points out, ‘pornography’ refers in Greek to any writings about prostitution (‘HMCM’ 298), which hints at the way this passage attacks the Church for its prostitution of children and consequently itself.

Contrasting with and resisting this objectification and exploitation of girls in religious practice – which only perpetuates the narrative of the creation of woman as a plaything and slave of the male gods in Olympian mythology – is the role the female voice of the poem assumes as initiate/high priest and *flâneuse*. In the context of the poem’s criticism of the passive, denigrated role of women in Catholicism, the figure of the *flâneuse* at the centre of the poem emerges as particularly significant. The perils facing women attempting to occupy the role of the *flâneur* and experience the city unaccompanied, at a leisurely, meditative pace, escaping the role of mere object and passionately observing and reflecting on the sights of the city have been discussed by a number of critics.<sup>36</sup> The poem nonetheless presents a self-

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<sup>35</sup> Briggs also notes this childlike spelling (‘HMCM’ 298).

<sup>36</sup> See for example Gleber’s ‘Women on the Screens and Streets of Modernity: In Search of the Female Flâneur’, Ruth E. Iskin’s ‘The *Flâneuse* in French Fin-de-siècle Posters: Advertising Images of Modern Women in Paris’, and Deborah Parsons’ *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*.

conscious appropriation of *flânerie* as a mode by a female poetic voice, claiming the streets as an autonomous, active, viewing subject rather than an object of the shocked, sneering or lecherous male gaze, and enacting its spring ritual through this mode. It thus performatively enacts the empowerment of women in religious practice that the poem suggests is needed for the success of a regenerative ritual.

The spring ritual the poem sets out to perform, a modern-day Anthesteria, is seriously problematised by the treatment of women in Catholicism. The ‘waxen Pandoras’ of modern Catholicism hardly possess the energy, or *mana*, of the original Pandora who was ‘the earth because she bestows all things necessary for life’ (*Prolegomena* 283), and whose grave jars (later wine jars) were solemnly opened on the first day of the Anthesteria, the Pithoigia (42-44, 170). Along with Hermes Chthonios, she was thus vital to the spring ritual of regeneration, as out of her jar Keres, or ghosts, terrifying but also promoting fertility, would fly out (42-44, 54). As Harrison says, she was in particular – like Aphrodite, alluded to earlier in the poem – the earth-goddess in the Kore form (281, 284), the embodiment of the fruit of the earth in spring, whose absence in the poem, or rather perversion in the ‘waxen’, lifeless form in which she is presented, corresponds to the ‘spirit of the year’ lying ‘stiff and stark’ in the fields.

The stasis associated with Catholicism through the image of ‘waxen Pandoras’, and previously in the image of the Virgin sitting in her garden and the holy ghost cooing in its dove cot, can be seen at other points in the poem as well. The lines ‘Soon / Dog-roses will stare at gypsies, wanes, and pilgrimages’ suggests a reversal of the relationship between the painters and the Tuilleries, and that the scene of pilgrimage to Mary in the spring will soon develop from a real event into a painting representing the scene. The reference to the ‘goldsmith’s chef d’œuvre—lily of the valley’ in the preceding line hints at the bourgeois commercialisation of Catholicism in that this flower is known to be sacred to Mary (Foley 79-80), to whom the month of May is sacred (15), which might be the reason for Mirrlees mentioning the French name for it, ‘mois de Marie’ in her notes.

The stasis of Catholicism is also set in opposition to political change; the ritual fight is thus also a matter of class struggle. This is indicated in the way that the ‘The wicked April moon’ is associated typographically and rhythmically with ‘The silence of *la grève*’, that is, the general strike of 1919:

There was a ritual fight for her sweet body  
Between two virgins—Mary and the moon  
The wicked April moon.  
The silence of *la grève*

The shared first word – ‘The’ – and iambic tetrameter of these lines and the visual similarity in their layout on the page work to set Catholicism in opposition to political rebellion and change, which are therefore ‘wicked’ – an ironic use of the word, as mentioned earlier. This opposition between Catholicism and political revolt is echoed on the following page:

Vronsky and Anna  
Starting up in separate beds in a cold sweat  
Reading calamity in the same dream  
Of a gigantic sinister mujik. . . .  
Whatever happens, some day it will look beautiful  
Clio is a great French painter,  
She walks upon the waters and they are still.  
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stand motionless  
and plastic mid the flames.  
Manet’s *Massacre des Jours de Juin*,  
David’s *Prise de la Bastille*,  
Poussin’s *Fronde*,  
Hang in a quiet gallery.

The reference here to Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1877, translated into French in 1885) in which Anna and Vronsky have the same dream about a frightening ‘mujik’, or a peasant under the feudal reign of the tsar, alludes to the Bolshevik Revolution which ended this feudal system two years before the poem was written. The line ‘Whatever happens, some day it will look beautiful’ indicates that the threat of the ‘mujik’ anticipated, whether consciously or not, in Tolstoy is relevant now, with the event of the strike. Despite the poem’s relentless scrutiny of Catholicism, it seems rather pessimistic, at least at this point, that anything will change. While the absence of the lily of the valley, a flower sacred to Mary, on the day of the strike – the first day of the month most sacred to Mary – can be read as disrupting Catholic ritual, the bilingual

pun on gréve/grave, casts a pessimistic hue on the reference to the strike. Instead a prediction of the triumph of artistic stasis – strongly associated in the poem with Catholicism<sup>37</sup> – is implied: firstly, the rebellion of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego against King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel (Chapters 1-3) becomes ‘motionless’, ‘plastic’ like a piece of art in the hands of Clio. The lines may also allude to the triumph of the Christian god – both the god of Daniel in the Old Testament and Christ who walks on the waters in the New Testament – over Nebuchadnezzar’s older Babylonian religion, recalling the encounter between St John and the Scarlet Woman at the beginning of the poem. Secondly, three paintings are listed which, as Briggs points out, represent key moments of French political resistance (‘HMCM’), and which now hang in a quiet gallery as proof that whatever happens, one day it will indeed look beautiful, still, motionless, as objects of art. This list of paintings mirrors this one earlier in the poem:

In the Louvre  
The Pietà of Avignon,  
L’Olympe,  
Giles,  
Mantegna’s Seven Deadly Sins,  
The Chardins ;

They arise, serene, unetiolated, one by one from  
their subterranean sleep of five long years.

Like Duncan they slept well.

Briggs notes the allusion to Macbeth’s murder of Duncan who is referred to by Macbeth as sleeping well, and the way the paintings thus contrast with murdered soldiers who also may not ‘sleep well’ (‘HMCM’ 291-292). Again invoking Harrison’s art-ritual dichotomy, art is associated in these lines with a resistance to change – the paintings are unetiolated, a word usually referring to plants, which would not be unetiolated after four years underground – recalling the ‘dead and barren immortality’ of the Olympians in Harrison (*Themis* 467-8)<sup>38</sup> and contrasting with the vital ritual needed for regeneration after the War.

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<sup>37</sup> While not explored in this thesis, it is interesting to note that this association is also found in *Madeleine: One of Love’s Jansenists*,

<sup>38</sup> The reference to the eighteenth-century painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin intensifies this sense of stasis, as

If the poem is to be read as a modernised primitive spring ritual informed by Harrison's theory, it has to be remembered that spring ritual, particularly the Anthesteria, with which it has been argued in this chapter the poem shows many parallels, centred on regeneration. In her *Prolegomena*, Harrison emphasises the aspect of purification in this ritual, but in *Themis* she argues that this was only part of the picture, that the true focus of this ritual was on life, rebirth. Thus, it is worth exploring how the poem may be attempting to recuperate Catholicism. This section has aimed to point out the various problems the poem finds with Catholicism, but it should be considered as well how it does nonetheless participate in a number of Catholic ritual elements and remain ambivalent, neither entirely pessimistic or optimistic, about the outcome of its ritual.

## 8 Signs of life: hope for the church?

Rather than seeming to wish to obliterate Catholicism, the poem appears in places to suggest continuity, remaining on the same trajectory but going back and undoing damage and reviving important lost elements in the religion. Hints can be found in the poem of a starting over in Catholicism. This can be sensed in for example the lines

Hatless women in black shawls  
Carry long loaves – Triptolemos in swaddling clothes.

Here swaddling clothes recall the baby Jesus, the beginnings of the New-Testament-based Christian faith; however, the image is bound up with the older Greek myth of Demeter caring for the child Triptolemos who later, having learnt the secrets of agriculture from Demeter, goes on to found the Eleusinian Mysteries. The springtime purification ritual that the poem performs, already identified as the Anthesteria, is also inextricably connected with the 'Lesser Mysteries' – sacred to Dionysus and Kore – performed in the spring in preparation for the Greater Mysteries in the autumn which were sacred to Demeter (*Prolegomena* 559-560). The women carrying loaves recall Harrison's description of the Haloa, 'festivals of *carrying something*' (30), which were sacred to Demeter and Dionysus. The 'sacra' carried, Harrison writes, were cereal cakes, which are echoed in the long loaves in these line of the poem. The

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Chardin is chiefly renowned for his still lifes.

intertwined image of the beginnings of both the Eleusinian Mysteries and the myths underlying Christianity hints at hope for a rebirth of religion in an imagined reunion of the two.

A similar idea can be glimpsed in the lines

Lilac  
SPRING IS SOLOMON'S LITTLE SISTER; SHE HAS NO  
BREASTS.

LAIT SUPERIEUR  
DE LA  
FERME DE RAMBOUILLET

The first three lines allude to the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament of the Bible.<sup>39</sup> The Book describes the coming of spring, including the line 'Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed' (Song of Sol. 2:13), and the line 'We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts' (Song of Sol. 8:8) which is traditionally taken to refer to a new church arising, the Bride of Christ, who, being younger, cannot yet provide the 'sincere milk of the word' for her people.<sup>40</sup>

The lines thus suggest the forming of a new Church, one that is still young, not yet mature but forming. The next few lines of the poem, a street sign advertising milk from the nearby town of Rambouillet, replace the 'milk of the word' of the Bible with something the poem regards as better ('SUPERIEUR') than the Church that arises in the New Testament. The lines allude to the Hotel de Rambouillet, a renowned seventeenth-century literary salon which, plays a central role in Mirrlees's novel *Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists*. It was at this salon that educated women writers, later referred to as précieuses, known for writing in the fairy tale genre, gathered. This juxtaposition, echoing the fusion of ancient and modern at the beginning of the poem, produces a sudden image fusing the idea of a new church drawing on the empowering example of the précieuses and the fairy tale genre (which is linked in the chapter on *Lud-in-the-Mist* with ritual and the unconscious) with its Biblical predecessor.

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<sup>39</sup> They anticipate, as well, Eliot's lines 'April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain.'

<sup>40</sup> See for example Ainsworth (743).

Another indication that the poem is not rejecting Catholicism outright is the way elements of Catholic ritual mingle with the speaker's observations of everyday life. This occurs for example in the lines,

At marble tables sit ouvriers in blue linen suits discuss  
ing:

La journée de huit heures,  
Whether Landru is a Sadist,  
The learned seal at the Nouveau Cirque  
Cottin. . . .

Echoes of Bossuet chanting dead queens

*méticuleux*  
*belligerants*  
*hebdomadaire*  
*immonde*

Here the speaker juxtaposes the quotidian – the first five lines, which comprise conversation on topical issues (Briggs 'HMCM' 293) – with a liturgical context – that of the bishop Jacques Benigne Bossuet who, was famous for his funeral sermons (as Briggs notes), merging the two contexts: the last four of these lines, centrally aligned like the first five, probably refer, as Briggs points out, to the first five ('HMCM' 293). As such they are made up of the secular substance of everyday life, but take on the more sombre tone of liturgical funeral orations and chants. The italics and list-form used imply emphasis and uniformity, lending the words the weightiness and monotony of a chant, enhanced as well by the chant-like fluidity created through the lack of end-stopping.

A similar juxtaposition of the everyday and Catholic ritual occurs as the passage discussed above which describes a Benediction mass is followed by the shouts:

La Liberté La Presse !  
La Liberté La Presse !

The 'Droning. . .droning. . .droning' in the Benediction passage contrasts strongly with the vigorous shouts of newspaper vendors,<sup>41</sup> and also with the shouts mentioned two lines after

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<sup>41</sup> Briggs notes that the lines refer to newspapers ('HMCM' 301).

this: ‘In the Algerian desert they are shouting the Koran’, which is followed again by ‘*La Liberté La Presse !*’ While on one hand the contrast shows up the lifeless boredom of the Catholic scene at the Benediction mass, on the other hand the aim could be to purposefully place Catholicism in direct contact with real everyday life, producing a sudden image of a fusion between the two. With the juxtaposition here, as well as the juxtaposition of Bossuet’s chants and everyday conversation, the aim might be to rejuvenate Catholicism through this contact.

This idea of rejuvenation may also be implied in what are probably the most uncomfortably inscrutable lines of the poem:

During the cyclic Grand Guignol of Catholicism  
Shrieks,  
Lacerations,  
Bloody sweat—  
Le petit Jésus fait pipi.

Here the poem draws on an association of Catholicism with the Grand Guignol, a ‘violent, sensational type of melodrama’ (‘HMCM’ 292) which also held an ‘erotic appeal for those with a sadomasochistic taste’ (Hand, ‘Labyrinths of the taboo’ 73) – an association that would have already been familiar to many. As for example Hand points out, the theatre was originally a Catholic chapel, retaining its murals and two enormous carved angels in the rafters (‘Labyrinths of the taboo’ 73), while treating audiences to ‘a variety of Christological—even hagiographical—images of violence’ including crucifixion (Enders 14). The grilles fitted on the balconies, it has been argued, worked moreover to create an air of confession (Pierron, as cited in Hand and Wilson, ‘The Grand Guignol’ 276). This is claimed to have provoked ‘un vague sentiment d’inquiétude’ as you walked in (Réne Berton, qtd. in Hand and Wilson, ‘The Grand Guignol’ 276), with the effect of ‘problematiz[ing] the audience’s relationship with the comforts of bourgeois morality’ (267). The same thing is perhaps happening here as ‘petit Jésus’, slang for boy prostitute,<sup>42</sup> may be a veiled allusion to the Church’s abuse of children,<sup>43</sup> something that is not prevented by the insipid bourgeois everyday Catholicism of the Virgin

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<sup>42</sup> According to Briggs (‘HMCM’ 292).

<sup>43</sup> Child abuse within the Catholic Church, while more conspicuously in the public eye in recent years, is certainly not a new phenomenon, and has provoked a number of attempts at reform over many centuries (see for example Doyle, Sipe and Wall).

imprisoned in her garden and the holy ghost subdued in its dove cot. Just as the Grand Guignol can be viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective as providing an experience that ‘discharges all manner of perverse voyeuristic and sadistic fantasies’ (Greenberg 50), the Catholic spring ritual of Lent, conflated here with the Grand Guignol in its practice of self-flagellation which, as Briggs notes, commonly featured as part of the Good Friday procession (‘HMCM’ 292), is perhaps being presented as a similar exorcism of the perversity of child abuse persisting in the Catholic church. Alternatively, just as the passage on ‘waxen Pandoras’ can be seen to refer to both the Church’s exploitation of young girls and its self-prostitution through a trivialising commercialism, the reference to prostitution in this passage may again refer instead/also to this bourgeois commercialisation of the Church.

Whatever the sins of the Catholic Church, the aspect of purification in both the Grand Guignol and Lent rituals could point to hope for regeneration if seen against the backdrop of Harrison’s writing on spring ritual. As noted above, in *Prolegomena*, chthonic ritual, particularly the spring ritual of the Anthesteria, is seen as a festival of purification, a ‘spring cleaning’ through the placation of ghosts (28-29, 38, 49-54, 119). Harrison describes the way beating is associated with purification in ancient ritual (100-103, 136), often performed on an animal or human used as a scapegoat, a *pharmakos*, to drive out the pollution of bad spirits from the city (95-105); furthermore, the blood of a surrogate victim could be used to appease a ghost on one’s behalf through physically putting on the victim’s blood and thus identifying oneself with the victim (60-64). The Lent ritual of self-flagellation thus invokes the idea of purification so central to chthonic ritual, especially the spring festival of the Anthesteria, in Harrison. The idea of a surrogate victim being used for purification could also be seen to relate to the ritual of self-flagellation, as it is not practiced by all Catholics, and to the Grand Guignol, as an audience may identify with characters on stage and could be argued to experience the purification of catharsis through this identification. Furthermore, ‘the cyclic Grand Guignol of Catholicism’ could also be understood as pointing to a Grand Guignol-type assault on Catholicism itself, working to purify it of its sins through a ritual blood-letting. Considering the way Harrison sees purification as but an aspect of reincarnation in her analysis of the Anthesteria (*Themis* 275, 291), these hints at purification in the poem may hold hope for the regeneration of Catholicism.

The theme of ghosts and haunting in Grand Guignol plays, often noted by critics (see for example Gassner and Quinn 371; Hand, ‘Mixing the Masks’ 46; Spencer 22), furthermore invokes a reading of the line ‘the cyclic Grand Guignol of Catholicism’ as pointing to a ritual

of reviving a corpse-like Catholicism, void of vitality, and releasing its ghosts: the forgotten matriarchal pagan figures who haunt the poem as their absence from the current religion is highlighted. These revenants of Catholicism join a host of other Parisian ghosts who roam the streets as ghosts do in Harrison's description of the Anthesteria (*Prolegomena* 76; *Themis* 289). As mentioned above, ghosts, according to Harrison, were placated during the Anthesteria with the aim of purification and fertility (*Prolegomena* 53-54, *Themis* 290-295). If read in this light, *Paris* contains hope for the anticipated regeneration: ghosts pervade the poem, from the underworld frogs singing on the speaker's journey under the Seine, to 'the Ghost of Pére Lachaise walking the streets', the 'eidola' (ghosts in ancient Greek religion, see *Prolegomena* 165, 235, 616) of dead soldiers being imprisoned in 'hideous frames' on memorial statues, and the 'famous dead of Paris' who fill the Champs Elysees – the Parisian Elysian fields, the afterlife home for heroes. The 'ghosts of king fishers' arising from the Seine may allude to the Fisher King of the Grail myth, possibly carried over by the early Celtic settlers of Paris and now lying hidden in the dark sluggish waters representing the city's unconscious.<sup>44</sup> The poem's excavation of the historical ghosts of the city resembles that found by Radford to pervade Mary Butts's fictional writing on Paris. Here, Radford argue, Butts attempts to delve beneath the present day surface of the city, to a 'matrix' of mixed pasts 'evinc[ing] a seismic, even feral intensity' which is bound up – as in *Paris* – with the city's essentially feminine character.<sup>45</sup>

Regeneration may also be implied in the deployment of other ritualistic tropes and elements in the poem: for example, the rain. Rain, with its power to revitalise the dead earth, is one of the chief objects of ritual, as Harrison observes based on ritual scenes found on ancient Greek vases (for example *Themis* 77-81, 110-11, 168-176).<sup>46</sup> Its presence in the poem thus

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<sup>44</sup> This allusion to the fisher king and the grail myth anticipates Eliot's major use of this trope in *The Waste Land*, drawing on Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*.

<sup>45</sup> See Radford's 'An Atlas of Unknown Worlds: Charting Interwar Paris in the Short Stories of Mary Butts' (8-9).

<sup>46</sup> Here *Paris* can be compared with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which laments the 'dry sterile thunder without rain' in his depiction of the post-war modern world. In his poem, Eliot presents a failure of bygone forms of ritual and the infertility that ensues, but there is no attempt to reinvent ritual. While Eliot's tone is despondent and the poem is pessimistic about the power of ritual, in *Paris* there is hope, despite the tragedy of the War which is felt throughout the poem, that ritual can be made new and relevant, although the argument presented here does not fully accord with Patrick McGuinness's claim, in his online review for *The Guardian*, that *Paris* is the 'optimistic antidote' to *The Waste Land*. Mirrlees's focus on regeneration in this way parallels Mary Butts's in *Armed with Madness* (see Radford, *Lost Girls* 306).

implies rebirth, set as it is in spring, the main season for fertility festivals in ancient Greece (AAR 56-57, *Themis* 184-185). Indications can be found in the poem of a ritualistic use of primitive rain charms which emerge, however, modernised, from the context of modern life. For example, the line ‘ZIG ZAG’ at the beginning of the poem, referring to a brand of cigarettes (Briggs ‘HMCM’ 287), may also be a coded reference to the symbol for water and lightning – a zig-zag line – that Harrison notes is found on certain ancient Greek vases depicting rain-making rituals (*Themis* 77-79). The Aristophanic frogs croaking on the first page of the poem could also be interpreted as showing magical intent; Harrison notes, in a discussion of animal impersonation in primitive magical dances, that ‘a very common animal dance is the frog-dance. When it rains the frogs dance. If you desire rain you dress up like a frog and croak and jump’ (A&O 166).<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, the ghost of Pere Lachaise may represent a kind of May King figure, the central figure of a primitive spring ritual (AAR 60-61, 113-115, 190), the wreaths the figure wears recalling Harrison’s descriptions of May Kings and Queens (AAR 187-190, 86). The letter ‘H’ embroidered on the curtain he is draped in, is ‘hache’ in French, also meaning ‘axe’ (‘HMCM’ 294), which invokes Harrison’s detailed discussion of the double axe as a sacred object in rain-making ceremonies, particularly in the context of ancient Greek spring rituals (*Themis* 158-182). The presence of an axe here – possibly amplified by the resemblance borne by a double axe to the capital letter ‘H’<sup>48</sup> – might therefore be interpreted as a coded rain charm. However, the May King the passage potentially presents is also the personification of a cemetery and the image is linked with the devastation of the lines ‘The unities are smashed /The stage is thick with corpses’. This linking of life-giving rain and May King with images of death leaves the passage profoundly ambivalent: is new life able to emerge from so much destruction? Harrison’s argument that ghosts and the rebirth of nature in the spring go hand in hand (*Themis* 275-293) implies the possibility of rebirth even in this gloomy passage.

The presence of plants and flowers throughout the poem also signifies hope for the rebirth intended by the poem’s spring ritual. Harrison explains that ‘in the Anthesteria, the

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<sup>47</sup> Bearing in mind the punning allusion to the French with the word ‘frogs’, this primitive rain charm is also given a modern context.

<sup>48</sup> This visual effect, as well as the fact that the figure wears wreaths made of paper, is discussed further in the next chapter, which considers the performative typography of the poem in detail.

Blossoming of Plants and the Revocation of Ghosts are one and the same' (*Themis* 339). The same vital impulse behind both is embodied in Harrison's figure of the Eniautos-Daimon, who lies 'stiff and stark' in the barren fields on the previous page of the poem, and in whose rebirth in spring all of nature participates. Harrison's concept of 'Eniautos' centres on the idea of time as its own content, time inseparable from its manifestation in nature. She explains that there are two conceptions of a 'year' in Greek mythology: the year proper in the sense of a fixed length of time which revolves, an ἔτος, and an ἐνιαυτός (eniautos), the turning point at which one year ends and another begins, a point in time which is seen as embodying the fruits of the whole year (182-184). This notion of time finds expression in *Paris* in this passage which shows the passing of time through its fruits in nature:

Far away in gardens  
 Crocuses,  
 Chionodoxa, the Princess in a Serbian fairy-tale,  
 Then  
 The goldsmith's chef d'œuvre—lily of the valley,  
 Soon  
 Dog-roses will stare at gypsies, wanes and pilgrimages

The flowers in these lines appear in the order that they bloom: crocuses and chionodoxa in early spring, then the lily of the valley in April or May, and 'soon' – following the spring season in which the poem is set – dog-roses in summer. Harrison argues that the Eniautos embodied the 'cardinal turning-point of the year' in spring, which 'to ancient thinking must be marked out by *rites de passage*' (184). Mimicking the functioning of the Eniautos-Daimon during spring, this passage represents an invocation of the daimon and thus a hopeful ritualistic expression of desire for its resurrection.

The Eniautos-Daimon is at the heart of the 'mystical' experience of ritual key to Harrison's theory. While the Olympian gods are 'of conscious thinking, divided, distinct, departmental ; the mystery-god [synonymous with the Eniautos-Daimon] is the impulse of life through all things, perennial, indivisible' (*Themis* 476). For this definition of the Eniautos-Daimon, she draws on Bergson's concept of *duree*, which she describes as 'that life which is

one, indivisible and yet ceaselessly changing' (542).<sup>49</sup> Describing the proceedings of an ancient Greek spring ritual, she writes that 'because life is one at the Spring Festival, the young man carries a blossoming branch bound with wool of the young sheep', showing this continuity of new life throughout nature (AAR 114). This 'sense of immediate, non-intellectual revelation, of mystical oneness with all things', she writes elsewhere, is what vitalises Primitive mystery cults (A&O 176). Within Harrison's comparative, evolutionary view of the 'primitive', the role of vitalism and mysticism in ancient Greek religion is paralleled with their role in 'primitive' tribes as outlined in ethnographic studies during her time (66). Drawing on such studies, she discusses the way in which the perception of mana, an elemental vital force, in individual things and people gives rise to the idea of 'a *continuum* of mana, a world of unseen power lying behind the visible universe, a world which is the sphere [...] of magical activity and the medium of mysticism' (68-69, 512). There is a 'oneness and continuousness' connecting the entire natural world in this sphere, which Harrison writes comes out very clearly in the force known as Wa-kon'-da among the Omaha Indians, which is accessed through a tranced 'rite of the vision' (68-69). The trance at work in *Paris* (discussed in section 6) can be argued to display this element of a mystical perception of unity in nature, for example in the lines

Little boys in black uniforms whose hands, sticky with  
play, are like the newly furled leaves of the horse-  
chestnuts ride round and round on wooden horses till  
their heads turn.

Here young boys are associated with young leaves, invoking the idea of the spring resurrection as being 'of man as well as nature' (*Themis* 339). This same idea can be glimpsed in the line 'The jeunesse doree of the sycamores', which translates as 'gilded youth' but could also refer to the buds on the sycamore trees.<sup>50</sup> The association of human youth with spring is a recurring theme in Harrison's writing on ritual, most noticeably in that Dionysus – connected with the spring – is a young man, the collective representation of the group of young male Kouretes. She also refers, for example, to the prominence of a young central figure in May Day rituals,

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter one for a full discussion of Harrison's debt to Bergson.

<sup>50</sup> This translation is offered by Briggs ('HMCM' 291).

commenting that ‘(o)ld men and women are for death and winter, the young for life and spring’ (AAR 113-14), and cites an orator in a Greek spring ritual who is recorded to have stated that ‘the young men (...) are “the Spring of the people”’ (AAR 114).

This indivisibility of all life as it is reborn in the spring can also be seen in the lines

The poplar buds are golden crysalids ;  
The Ballet of green Butterflies  
Will soon begin.

The first of these lines present an image fusing the earliest stages of the lives of leaves and butterflies, while the second and third look forward to a full flowering of these insect-leaf hybrids. There may also be a subtle reference here to *Papillions*,<sup>51</sup> a ballet running 1914–1920, produced by Sergei Diaghilev who also produced the epitome of ritual enactment in modernist art, *The Rite of Spring* in 1913. As *Papillions* is set during a carnival, the allusion also adds to the Dionysian, ritualistic atmosphere. An allusion to Russia also invokes the fact that for Harrison and Mirrlees (in their fascination with Russia, considered in Chapter 1), the Russian language and culture stood for a greater spirituality and ‘complexity and concreteness of life – felt whole, unanalysed, unjudged, lived into’, mirroring Harrison’s description of mysticism in primitive religion (Harrison, *Aspects, Aorists and the Classical Triplos* 35; see also Mirrlees, ‘Some Aspects of the Art of Alexey Michailovich Remizov’).

The final scene can be seen to exude an immense energy which also holds hope for a revitalisation. The scene is contrasted with the immediately preceding lines which are steeped in an atmosphere distinctly invoking Harrison’s description of Olympian Greece. These lines describe the aristocratic quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement from which ‘all colour, all sound’ is sucked out and

The winds are sleeping in their Hyberbórean cave ;  
The narrow streets bend proudly to the stars ;  
From time to time a taxi hoots like an owl.

As Rendel Harris (who Harrison quotes in the second edition of *Themis*) argues, the Hyperborean realm is strongly associated with Apollo (Harris, ‘Apollo at the Back of the

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<sup>51</sup> Incidentally, the play also impressed T.S. Eliot, who saw parallels between Diaghilev’s experiments in dance and his own in poetic drama (see Schuchard 110-11).

North Wind'), who for Harrison stands most fully for Olympian Greece and its rejection of its roots in primitive, chthonic, totemistic mystery religions. The image of narrow streets bending proudly to the stars also contributes to this atmosphere as it intimates a reverence for the sky, the home of the Olympians. The occasional, soft hoot of a taxi contrasts starkly with the taxis in the following passage, and this serenity and calm is associated through the image of an owl with Athena, whose companion was an owl, and who according to Harrison is a true Olympian, 'all for the father', always closely linked with Zeus and Apollo (*Themis* 208, 500-502).

Contrasting with this colourless, soundless Olympian image, the final passage bursts with Dionysian energy as the poem goes 'beyond the ramparts of the Louvre', a former fortress, signifying leaving the safety associated with the stasis of art and Catholicism throughout the poem, and moving further into the liminal realm of ritual entered at the start of the poem on the metro journey under the Seine. At first identified with the underworld river the Styx, the Seine becomes associated midway through the poem with the unconscious as well,<sup>52</sup> in the lines

The Seine, old egotist, meanders imperturbably to-  
wards the sea,

Ruminating on weeds and rain . . .  
If through his sluggish watery sleep come dreams  
They are the ghosts of king-fishers.

Dreams, pointing to the unconscious, are associated here with ghosts, and possibly the ghost of the Celtic myth of the Grail, recalling Harrison's description of the 'supersensuous' world of primitive religion, the secondary reality consisting of trance, dreams and dead ancestors, a 'fairyland' where anything might happen (*Themis* 512). In her *Epilegomena* (as mentioned in the section above on 'Liminal atmosphere' and the chapter on *Lud-in-the-Mist*), this secondary world, crucial to ritual and tied up in her earlier books with a 'primitive mentality', becomes associated with the unconscious theorised by Freud and Jung (*Epilegomena* xlvii-xlviii;

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<sup>52</sup> The association of the unconscious with the Greek underworld is a theme that has been located in modernist literature by a number of critics [see for example Margot Kathleen Louis (Xi,117-120), Andrew Radford (16-18, 243-244, 258), Art Berman (104)].

*Themis* 551). Thus, in the final scene of the poem, moving beyond the protective fortress of the Louvre, the orderly stasis of art, invites a sense of tapping into the vital, inchoate, unconscious energies that comprise the psychological origin of ritual.

Over the course of the poem the speaker has descended further and further into this realm, wading knee-deep and then waist-deep in dreams (lines 310, 376), and now the unconscious is fully dredged from the bottom of the Seine and waved by Freud himself – ‘grinning horribly’ – in a modern glare of electricity. The shock and energy of this image is matched in the next lines with the noise of taxis fused with a frantic animal sexuality:

Taxis,  
Taxis,  
Taxis,  
They moan and yell and squeak  
Like a thousand tom-cats in rut.

The next line presents a similar shape-shifting image, between ‘whores’ and ‘lions’, in ‘The whores like lions are seeking their meat from God’, amplifying the wild, animal-like energy of the scene. The notes of jazz music, as well as the musicians playing them, add to the frenzy as they ‘writhe in obscene syncopation’.

This energy comes with an air of illicit transgression, which recalls – as mentioned briefly in Section 2, Harrison’s writing on the anthropological concepts of *mana* and *taboo*, two aspects of a force or energy in nature which is at once illicit and a powerful source of regeneration and is the ‘the material of magical action’ (*Themis* 66). The line ‘Freud waves his garbage in a glare of electricity’ encapsulates this double-sidedness of *mana*. Harrison admits her ambivalence regarding Freud in her *Reminiscences* while also acknowledging his undeniable importance to modern thinking and impact on her own thinking (81-82). The dramatic final two pages of the poem echo this simultaneous need for and horror of what an excavation of unconscious fears and desires might offer. The unleashing of the unconscious – the depository of illicit desires but also, according to Harrison, the source of ritual, and therefore art – comes with a stream of images that liberally flout conventional middle class respectability: prostitution; the nightclub scene, clashing with the respectable but futile authority of an ‘English padre’ who for Briggs embodies social inhibition (‘HMCM’ 265, 302); the ‘*gurls of the nightclub [who] love women*’; the shouted refrain ‘*Toutes les cartes marchant avec une allumette !*’ The ‘Masque of the Seven Deadly Sins’, echoes ‘Mantegna’s Seven Deadly Sins’ earlier in the poem, the latter occurring in a list of ‘serene, unetiolated’ paintings – still, motionless pieces of art reflecting the calm, lifeless stasis of Catholicism. The

masque, most likely a floorshow, in this scene of wild nightlife, contrasts with and mocks this calm, hypocritical piety. The line ‘Perhaps someone is reading *le Crime et le Châtiment*’ furthermore invokes the themes of crime and vice in Dostoevsky’s novel, but also the spirituality and vitality Mirrlees and Harrison associated with Russia (as mentioned in the section on ‘Liminal atmosphere’ and discussed in Chapter 1).

This dual aspect of mana crystallises in the way the events in this scene are described as ‘Manuring the white violets of the moon’, signifying in agricultural terms fertilisation – a main aim of ritual – and in a more associative, intuitive sense a destructive soiling. As violets are associated within Catholicism with Mary,<sup>53</sup> this dual magical action can be seen as both breaking down and vitalising the Catholic faith and its treatment of its female figures. The birth of babies in the Abbaye of Port-Royal also suggests new life is possible for the Church, but is equally ambivalent; what will this new life look like? As a study by Daniella Kostroun has shown, Port-Royal, now a maternity hospital, was until the early eighteenth century run by highly-educated nuns, and was the physical centre of the Jansenist movement. Loyal to the teachings of St Augustine, many of its inhabitants possessing strong mystical leanings, and opposed to the absolutism being imposed by Louis XIV, Port-Royal could also represent hope for a more powerful female presence in the Church. The final note of the poem is, however, overwhelmingly uncertain. Who or what is the ‘Paris’ saluted at the end of the poem? A useful parallel can be made here with Mary Butts’s Parisian short stories. Radford’s essays on these stories consider the attention Butts draws to the Gallo-Roman ancestor of the city – Lutetia Parisii.<sup>54</sup> The etymology of the name, ‘the Celtic root *luto-* marsh and the Breton *loudour* ‘dirty’ (‘Atlas of Unknown Worlds’ 11), sheds light on Butts’s description of Paris as ‘really and truly both a sink of iniquity and a fountain of life at one and the same time’ (Butts, qtd. in Radford, ‘Atlas’ 4), which resonates with the ambivalence in the final passage of *Paris*. Mirrlees paints a similar picture of Paris, as buzzing with subterranean currents that threaten the placid edifice of a stale, bourgeois religion which has lost touch with its roots in vitalising ritual. The scene implements the ‘complete upset of the old order, a period of licence and

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<sup>53</sup> See Ann Ball’s *Catholic Traditions in the Garden* (111).

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Radford, ‘Mary Butts and the “Secret Map” of Interwar Paris’ (84-85); ‘An Atlas of Unknown Worlds’ (193-195).

mutual hilarity' (*Themis* 507) that Harrison argues is necessary to pass from one age into the next. In such a liminal state, one is 'neither here nor there' (AAR 112), implying that chaos may and perhaps must temporarily reign in order for a true change to be brought about. Thus, the poem ends with the sun rising, symbolically ushering in a changed present, but one that is unknown. However, the constellation of the Ursa Major, a she-bear and associated with Artemis,<sup>55</sup> implies that among cosmic forces, the mana of the ancient matriarchal, theriomorphic religious order may again be stirring and change may thus be on the way.

## 9 Conclusion

The poem's announcement of its desire for the holophrase, an all-encompassing utterance, or *myth*, bound up with the primitive, magical performance of ritual, thus foreshadows an attempt to revive the vital primitive matriarchal mythology and rituals from which Catholicism departs. The poem's use of everyday urban life as material for its ritual, and its use of the modern figure of the flâneur helps to situate the ritual firmly in a modern context, upholding the insistence in Harrison's theory on ritual and art arising from life as it is lived. The figure of the female flâneur, the flâneuse, being used as the mode for ritual performance furthermore claims, or reclaims, the prominence of women in the ancient matriarchal religious myths and rituals that the poem seeks to excavate and revive. Rather than presenting a finished, polished vision of what this myth, resurrected in the modern world, would look like, the poem remains in the liminal stage of the ritual that hopes to bring about such a spiritual and cultural revitalisation. It occupies the space between desire and outcome, the stage of transition, *agon* and longing which Harrison argues is at the heart of ritual. This sense of transition is fuelled by the figure of the flâneur, always in flux, with no fixed destination, acting as the initiate in the poem's ritual. It is a thing in progress which, as the next chapter will show, is mirrored in its form: the typographical texture of the poem is amorphous, fragmented, open-ended, and points, together with its other bibliographical characteristics, to the process of its material construction. This emphasis on its materiality, I will argue, constitutes the other half of the ritualistic gesture performed by *Paris*: the concrete, embodied performance of the text. This

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 1.4 for a brief discussion of the Ursa Major in Harrison's and Mirrlees's writing.

chapter has aimed to show the workings of myth in *Paris*; the next will outline the performance that accompanies this myth, completing an analysis of the text as a ritual gesture combining speech and act.

# Chapter 3:

## *Paris: A rite of spring, part 2:*

### performance of the text and book

#### 1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the analysis of ritual elements in *Paris* in Chapter 2. It considers the originality of the use of typography in the poem, which this thesis sees as showing a meeting point between the ritual theory and the evolution of the book and literacy. The poem's typography does this as it shows on the page the place of speech in ritual; that is, it shows the ritual integration of speech with act. In order for there to be an intersection between ritual theory and the way the book as an object was approached, the evolution of the book and reading habits had to reach a certain point where the body of the text was made visible and active in presenting meaning; at this point only could it show the integration of speech and act that exists in ritual. Getting to this point, of course, would not mean that the connection would ever necessarily be made between a bibliographic development and an anthropological theory of art, and this is where *Paris's* formal uniqueness lies. Mirrlees uses these bibliographic developments in a way that puts a ritual performance physically on the page and demands one of the reader. This chapter thus continues the exploration in this thesis into Mirrlees's use of Harrison's ritual theory in her writing, focusing on the way ritual informs the material, textual form of the poem.

This chapter will highlight the importance of the Renaissance of Printing, spearheaded by William Morris,<sup>1</sup> in bringing about the necessary conditions for Mirrlees to perform this poetic experiment. I invoke the work of Jerome McGann who examines how this movement gave writers control over the arrangement of the physical body of the text, awakening them to its potential for signification. This formally radical movement began by looking back to the medieval example of book-making which paid greater attention to material aspects of texts

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<sup>1</sup> I follow McGann in his use of this term – although a reviewer of his book *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernity*, mentions the circulation of this term previous to the publication of this book (Stetz 440).

and books. Mirrlees, I argue, is part of this movement; wielding considerable control over the physical arrangement of the body of her text, she shows a sense of it forming an active component in making meaning.

Like William Morris, Mirrlees had (as discussed in Chapter 1) strong antiquarian leanings which, like him, led her to look to bygone understandings of texts as material objects and explore the signifying potential of nonverbal aspects of the book and text. Her antiquarianism, however, is strongly linked to ritual theory. For her, antiquarianism shares with Harrison's theory a tangible, anti-logical aesthetic. *Paris* grows out of this antiquarian bibliographic context, as Mirrlees uses the new innovations of liberated space (drawing on continental experiments as well as Morris's) to express this aesthetic, making the connection between the performative potential of these spatial innovations and ritual. As shown in the previous chapter, *Paris* is infused with ritual elements; what makes the poem a modernist masterpiece is the way this content is manifested in its form.

In attempting to historicise *Paris* as a gesture by focusing on the material aspects of the first edition of the text, this chapter engages with a perspective on literature opened up by critics such as D.F. McKenzie, Jerome McGann and George Bornstein. The work of these literary scholars centre around a desire to reject a traditional view of bibliography and textual criticism in which the 'linguistic code' of a work, that is, the message conveyed by its words, is considered the only proper object of hermeneutic enquiry, which ignores the historical circumstances of its production. In various ways, these historians of the book investigate the signifying power of the physical aspects of books and book-making, locating them in specific historical contexts and thus contributing to a better understanding of the book in question as well as the period in which it was produced. The context in which *Paris* was printed can be fruitfully connected to the strong antiquarian impulse in Mirrlees's writing as well as to the typographic experimentation in the poem, all of which, I argue, lead back to the influence of Harrison's ritual theory. The presence of Harrison's theory was explored as a thematic structure in *Paris* in the previous chapter; in this chapter, the physical aspects of the book will be revealed as part and parcel of the same gesture. In terms of the history of the book, the poem becomes a relic – a self-conscious one, considering Mirrlees's antiquarian leanings – of a shift in literary history; it stands on and records a cultural fault-line by directly addressing and dramatising the struggle between the written and spoken word as the visual culture of modernism infiltrates literature and blurs the boundaries of visual and verbal systems of signification.

This chapter does a close reading of the visual dimension of *Paris*, in light of a discussion of how the poem sits in the history of the book, showing how its typographical elements and hand-crafted nature are central to establishing the poem's status as a performative ritual artefact. The centrality of space and wandering in *Paris* is at the heart of this investigation, and an analysis of the interplay of time and space in ritual and in the history of the book – showing the Renaissance of Printing as a key turning point – will be central to the argument. The unusual uses of margins, lineation and space between words and the shapes that words make on the page are the poem's most immediately noticeable features. This emphasis is mirrored in its content in that it also relies heavily on a spatial dimension; the movement pushing the poem forward is the wandering of the speaker through the city, situating herself in and making a record of its different spaces, and this movement is mirrored in the wandering thoughts of the speaker. I will consider how this spatial emphasis in the poem, both in what is said and how it is laid out – and the engagement it demands from a reader – marks a point in the history of book-making and reading habits which intersects with a similar orientation in Harrison's theory of ritual.

## **2 'Forms effecting meaning': aspects of ritual theory at the heart of a historical, materialist bibliography**

The seminal work of textual theorists and book historians such as Jerome McGann, D.F. McKenzie and George Bornstein foregrounds, among other things, the importance of the material, nonverbal aspects of books and their processes of production and reception to the history of the book. In doing this it has challenged dominant orthodoxies in the fields of bibliography and textual criticism which ignore the nonverbal semantics of the book as a material artefact. This traditional approach to the study of texts makes a sharp distinction between literary criticism on one hand which is focused on interpretation, and bibliography on the other which is unconcerned with interpreting the materials it catalogues, enumerates and describes.<sup>2</sup> A leading voice in this orthodox view was the bibliographer Sir Walter Greg, for

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<sup>2</sup> The state of the field to which McKenzie is responding is succinctly summarised by McGann in 'Theory of Texts', a review of McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts: The Panizzi Lectures 1985*.

whom the concerns of the bibliographer were limited to 'pieces of paper or parchment covered with certain written or printed signs'. 'With these signs', Greg asserted, '[the bibliographer] is concerned merely as arbitrary marks; their meaning is no business of his' (qtd. in McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of the Text* 9).<sup>3</sup>

D.F. McKenzie, writing in 1985, expresses a dissatisfaction with the state of the field of bibliography which he argues is widely felt in the field, and puts forward his notion of the 'sociology of the text' which puts 'historical bibliography' at the centre of the study of texts. Within the traditional school – referred to as the New Bibliography school or often the Greg-Bowers school of textual scholarship, after Sir Walter Greg and fellow textual scholar Fredson Bowers – 'historical bibliography', that is, the technical processes and decisions involved in book-making are considered irrelevant to bibliography altogether, belonging rather to such fields as the history of technology or information science (McKenzie, *Bibliography* 11). For McKenzie, however, there can be no clear border between such fields and bibliography, as he urges bibliographers to accept that 'forms effect meaning' (13). 'If a medium in any sense effects a message,' McKenzie argues, 'then bibliography cannot exclude from its own proper concerns the relation between form, function, and symbolic meaning' (10).

At the core of McKenzie's argument is the conviction that the 'material forms of books, the non-verbal elements of the typographic notations within them, the very disposition of space itself, have an expressive function in conveying meaning' (*Bibliography* 17). This belief deviates from Greg's influential doctrine of the 'accidentals' and 'substantives' of a text. In Greg's bibliographical paradigm, 'formal presentation' that is, spelling, punctuation, layout, word division and so on are considered to be of little consequence while the author's intended meaning, 'the essence of his expression' is considered all-important (*Making Meaning: Printers of the Mind' and other Essays* 201-202).<sup>4</sup> McKenzie exemplifies his approach in a detailed case study of how the Restoration playwright William Congreve and his printer were together able to make the typography of a play signify in such a way as to produce what he calls a performance on the page, staged within the 'hand-held theatre of the book' (*Making Meaning* 199-201). His study highlights the signifying potential of 'accidentals', shedding light

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<sup>3</sup> Cited hereafter as *Bibliography*.

<sup>4</sup> Henceforth cited as *Making Meaning*.

on an innovative moment in the history of the book at which typography was used to performative ends. Such scholarship, I will argue in this chapter, sets a precedent for the study of *Paris*, due to the poem's innovative typographical features and the unorthodox institutional framework in which it was printed and published.

Similarly to McKenzie, in *The Textual Condition*, Jerome McGann points to the prevailing concern in philology with what he calls the 'linguistic code', that is, the verbal message, over the nonverbal semantics of the 'bibliographic code', which comprise the material aspects of the text and book (77-78). He calls for a 'materialist hermeneutics' which will account for the 'double helix of perceptual codes' that all texts deploy (15; 77). He takes issue with the method of editing aligned with the New Bibliography, that is, eclectic editing, which focuses on creating definitive, ideal editions of texts which most closely approximate what is presumed to have been the author's intention, even if a text never existed in that exact form. While in this way committing what the New Criticism termed 'the intentional fallacy', this traditional view shares with the New Criticism a de-historicised view of a text, as texts are lifted from their material context and contemplated as autonomous, ideal and almost abstract entities.<sup>5</sup> 'Traditional textual criticism,' McGann notes, 'with its concentration on the linguistic text, is thus happily married to traditional hermeneutics, which elucidates meaning—which *locates* meaning—entirely in linguistic symbologies', thus ignoring the bibliographic code (57).

This bias, according to McGann, comes down to a view of textuality dominating the field when McGann was writing in 1991. On this view,

texts are largely imagined as scenes of reading rather than scenes of writing. This 'readerly' view of the text has been most completely elaborated through the modern hermeneutical tradition in which text is not something we *make* but something we *interpret*. (*Textual Condition* 4)

McGann contests this hermeneutical view with what he calls a constructivist one, which imagines texts and their readings as material constructions. Such a view points strongly to their making and the historical conditions surrounding this event. As will be discussed in this chapter, this constructivist view of texts has enabled textual theorists such as McGann and

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<sup>5</sup> The similarity between the New Criticism and New Bibliography has been noted by Bornstein and others, as Bornstein notes in *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (43, 169-170n).

Bornstein – following the lead of D.F. McKenzie – to excavate a craft-oriented British literary tradition reaching back to William Blake’s illuminated manuscripts and continuing with the work of William Morris and the pre-Raphaelites through to W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. Morris’s role in the Renaissance of Printing emerges, McGann reveals, as an pivotal turning point in the history of the book at which the bibliographic code, after a century and half of being ignored by printers and publishers, begins to regain its prominence. The event of making and the physical construction of the book become highlighted, sparking a wave of experiments among modernists exploring the signifying potential of the material aspects of books. This literary craft tradition, from Blake to Pound, harnesses the materiality of texts to signify a historical context, which, this chapter argues, is precisely what *Paris* does; Mirrlees’s preoccupation with the tangible and iconic, highlighted in Chapter 1, is marked by a historical awareness that fits her into this tradition, as the sections considering her antiquarianism in this chapter will show, while maintaining a clear link with Harrison’s ritual theory.

The reverse Platonism in this emphasis on materiality and production rather than message and interpretation parallels Harrison's argument for the importance of the body, space and process in thinking about the ritual origins of religion and art. She posits a primitive past where in the ritual context, myth and physical act went hand in hand, mirroring McKenzie's, McGann's and Bornstein's attempt to marry the verbal and material concerns of bibliography. She raises the importance of the embodied ritual act – the producing of the performance – because it has been neglected in favour of myth, just as these scholars raise the importance of the embodied form of the text and its process of production in relation to the message of the text. Just as these bibliographers question the process of eclectically editing works to produce an ideal authoritative version and favour an acceptance of multiple texts with different material codes, Harrison's theory questions the validity of abstract, intellectualised, ideal gods and belief in favour of the material circumstances and physical act of ritual. Importantly, as discussed in Chapter 1, Harrison's approach to the classics is grounded in archaeology rather than merely in the textual tradition of classical scholarship, giving it a material basis that parallels the materialist bibliographical approach to literature. If merged, Harrison's theory and archaeological approach and a materialist approach to textuality would imagine the text as an object emerging through ritual; in hindsight the text becomes an artefact inscribed – like a shard of pottery painted with images of Dionysus and Maenads – with the ritual from which it emerged.

If seen in the context of Mirrlees's investment in ritual theory – and if *Paris* is placed into the context of a broad history of the material circumstances of book-making and reading habits, the poem could provide a perhaps unique case study – to follow McKenzie's terminology – of a 'hand-held ritual'. This line of argument, drawing support from the previous chapter which demonstrated the presence of numerous ritual elements in the poem, will centre on an analysis of the way in which the typography of *Paris* and the manner in which the book was made show yet another dimension of Mirrlees's literary use of Harrison's ritual theory. The parallel between the role of time and space in ritual and Mirrlees's manipulation of time and space in *Paris* is especially important to this exploration of ritual elements in the poem. The poem gestures towards an integration of spatial and temporal experience by drawing attention especially to the neglected element – in literature – of space. This echoes Harrison's highlighting of the ritual act in primitive religion despite her insistence that speech is equally important in ritual. In *Paris*, this results in the re-integration of a performative aspect into literature that has been lost through centuries of subjugating the visual character of print to the authority of the speaking voice at the same time as the oral performative mode has been replaced by silent individual reading.

*Paris*, this chapter argues, asks to be read in the context of the history of the book. The section on Mirrlees's antiquarianism will discuss the way the poem highlights its own datability, consciously making it possible to place it historically. Her interest in books as part of the history of material culture is evident, I will show, in her enormous commitment to writing the life of the antiquary Sir Robert Cotton, who is of enormous importance in book history as being among the first to value writings themselves as valuable iconic artefacts. Mirrlees appears to share this materialist, visual approach to writings as artefacts, which parallels Harrison's approach to understanding ancient Greek religion through material artefacts such as vases. This section will consider Mirrlees's antiquarian notion of tangibly preserving the present – marking the time – through poetry. *Paris* can be seen to highlight its materiality precisely because a poem is part of material culture that will one day be excavated by antiquarians. Mirrlees's materialist-performative approach to writing also draws on a 'primitive' conception of the word as thing-like and sacramental. The overall result is a self-consciously visual, concrete, performative use of space and type on the page and a work that points to its own construction and the historical and material circumstances of this event. Therefore, its material features and how the book was made and the motivation behind these things demand to be brought to the fore.

This analysis of *Paris* sees the poem's typographical and bibliographical innovations as conspicuously integrated into its search for the all-embracing, 'primitive' word, the holophrase. Thus, the poem deliberately marks a point in the history of thinking about language and its powers of signification; it consciously captures the first flowering of aesthetic experimentation with typography, signalling a shift in the way the content of poetry is expressed. It conveys the often-expressed modernist hope to stretch and extend the powers of expression through language. Importantly, it reveals Harrison's ritual theory to be a potent approach within this quest for the reborn, performative word.

### 3 Time and space in ritual

The relationship between the two formal dimensions of existence, time and space, is integral to both the ritual theory and to thinking about the history of bibliography. This section will examine how, in rooting religion and art in embodied practice, which then becomes either theological dogma or the static, representational work of art, Harrison makes a key distinction between ritual and myth, which can be seen to formally correspond to the elements of space and time. Harrison's emphasis on the role of the performing body and her suspicion of the myths that replace ritual show an affinity with the view first put forward by Robertson Smith which argued for a recognition of the primary role of the ritual act in religion. But Harrison does not follow his argument all the way through, positing rather the original integration of myth and act.

#### 3.1 Embodied time in pre-Classical religion

The fusion of time with material content is at the heart of Harrison's understanding of the *Eniautos-Daimon*, a term which has no antecedent in classical scholarship, which Harrison employs to denote the 'spirit of the year' which she posits as the primary form of mystery god, the centre point of the most basic ritual, that of the rebirth of nature in the spring. Harrison's account in *Themis* of the ancient Greek conception of time links the temporal and spatial, in the figure of the *Eniautos-Daimon* – briefly summarised in the previous chapter.

She discusses the 'Year' that features in the Dithyramb in the phrase 'To Dikte for the Year' and how the 'Year' for which the Kouros is summoned is not an ἔτος, the year proper in the sense of a fixed length of time; it is instead an ἐνιαυτός (182-3), a year embodied by the fruits of the seasons, time as its own physical content (186). She notes that the two different conceptions of a year are frequently juxtaposed by Homer (183). 'This notion that the year is

its own content,' she writes, 'or rather perhaps we should say that the figure of the divine Year arises out of the food-content, haunted the Greek imagination' (186). She insists that to the 'primitive', the year and seasons 'are not abstractions, divisions of time ; they are the substance, the content of time. To make of ἐνιαυτός as god, or even a daimon, seems to us, even when he is seen to be not a year but a Year-Feast, a chilly abstraction' (185). 'The gist', she says, 'of the ἐνιαυτός as distinguished from the ἔτος comes out in the epithet τελεσφόρος "end bringing", which is frequently applied to ἐνιαυτός.' While the ἔτος is a period that revolves, the ἐνιαυτός 'is not a whole circle or period but just the point at which the revolution is completed, the end of the old ἔτος, the beginning of the new' (183).

### 3.2 'The mythos in the dromenon': integration and disintegration of time and space

In a subsection of a chapter of *Themis* entitled 'The mythos in the Dromenon', Harrison (as summarised in the previous chapter) points out that in ancient Greek, myth, or *mythos*, simply meant speech, while the dromenon was the act, the thing done. Together these made up the rite. She relates that 'a *mythos* to the Greek was primarily just a thing spoken, uttered by the mouth', and here she inserts a footnote about the connection between the shared etymology of mouth and myth (328). 'Its antithesis or rather correlative', she says, 'is the thing done, enacted, the ergon or work' (328). She gives the example that 'old Phoinix says to Achilles "Thy father Peleus sent me to teach thee to be both

Of words the speaker and of deeds the doer." (328)

She writes that while the myth is originally really just 'the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done', 'always there is the same antithesis of speech and action which are but two different ways of expressing emotion, two forms of reaction ; the *mythos*, the tale told, the action recounted, is contrasted with the action actually done' (328).

Harrison bases her argument for the integration of speech and act in ancient ritual on contemporary ethnological studies suggesting the significance of myth, sacred things spoken, to ritual. 'As man is a speaking as well as motor animal,' she argues, 'any complete human ceremony usually contains both elements, speech and action'. Here she corrects Robertson Smith who 'has here led many of his weaker followers astray' by claiming that mythology was merely dogma and had no part in ancient rites. 'Had it been granted him to tarry awhile among the Iowa Indians or among the Zuñis', she writes, 'he would have told another tale'. She draws on a reported quotation from an Iowa Indian tribesman to show the interlinked nature of myth

and ritual among 'primitives': 'These are sacred things and I do not like to speak about them, and it is not our custom to do so except when we make a feast and collect the people and use the sacred pipe'. 'A pious man' she writes,

would no more tell out his myths than he would dance out his mysteries. Only when the tribe is assembled after solemn feasting, and holy smoking, only sometimes in a strange archaic tongue and to initiate men or novices after long and arduous preparation, can the myth with safety be uttered from the mouth; such is its sanctity, its mana. (329)

She insists the object of the myth is not to give a reason for the act, which was Smith's position, arguing that

[w]hen the Grizzly Bear dancer utters his myth, says the words, 'I begin to grow restless in the spring,' he is not explaining his action—that, if he has any gift of observation and mimicry should be clear enough—he only utters with his mouth what he enacts with his shambling, shuffling feet, the emotions and sensations he feels in relation to the 'most Honourable One,' the Bear. (330)

Rather than providing a ready, coherent explanation for ritual, a series of 'myths', utterances that accompany ritual action, together make up a sequence which can then be understood as a narrative:

Possibly the first *muthos* [sic] was simply the interjectional utterance *mii*; but it is easy to see how rapid the development would be from interjection to narrative. Each step in the ritual action is shadowed as it were by a fresh interjection, till the whole combines into a consecutive tale. (330)

The narrative is thus the consolidation of the individual utterances, each of which describe an event but are only conceivable as a narrative once a whole cycle is represented.<sup>6</sup>

This integration of tangible, physical actions and circumstances with a narrative is evident as well in Harrison's archaeological approach to classicism, which reads concrete, visual artefacts – depicting physical rites – against the narratives around which classicism was at that time based. If this key dichotomy of tangible, physical action and circumstances on one hand and narrative on the other, in Harrison's work is dissected formally, the two elements of ritual – ritual speech or myth, and ritual act – can be seen to relate to the two core dimensions

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<sup>6</sup> This integration of word and deed in ritual became a more accepted idea in anthropology a few decades after Harrison's death when Malinowski, who acknowledges Harrison as a forerunner in this aspect, incorporates this idea into his own anthropological theories (*Magic, Science And Religion And Other Essays 1948 76*).

of experience, time and space. Myth, that is, the original sacred speech as well as the aetiological narrative which eventually develops, takes place only in time. It has only an intangible mental and spoken temporal existence. The ritual act, on the other hand, has to take place in space, normally a specific, even sacred place – what Harrison refers to as a ‘temenos’ – in which the ritual is enacted and re-enacted,<sup>7</sup> and it requires bodies which must move through the space in the form of a specific journey or other performance. Thus, by positing ritual as a process in which performance and the performing body are integrated with sacred speech, Harrison highlights the intertwined relationship between the temporal and the spatial in ritual. The temporal element of speech, as she says ‘combines [the whole] into a consecutive tale’. It gives order and continuity to the spatial, physical aspect of the rite. It is significant that her one completely independently invented concept, and the main focus of *Themis*, is a daimon in whom time is inseparable from its material manifestation – the Eniautos-Daimon. With this concept she is positing a lost ideal which represents integrated spatial-temporal experience. As the ritual theory shows myth becoming separated from the ritual act and becoming the dominant factor in religion, it also shows the historically increasing dominance of the temporal aspect. This rise in the dominance of the temporal, the myth without its embodied counterpart in ritual action, is linked, for Harrison, with an increase in cerebral, disembodied rationality, tied to language rather than the body. As Carpentier puts it, Harrison was always drawn to the act rather than the word (51). In highlighting the neglected spatial element of the ritual act she confronts the imbalance between the temporal and the spatial and throws her lot in with ‘anti-rationalist’ philosophers such as Bergson and Lev Shestov,<sup>8</sup> and develops her passion for Russia, based on the popular primitivist view of the mystical, irrational Russian mentality.<sup>9</sup> In suggesting that modern art is recrossing the ritual bridge to

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 4 for the application of a ‘temenos’ to *Paris*.

<sup>8</sup> While it may first seem counter-intuitive to connect Harrison's ritual theory to an emphasis on space, considering her devotion to Bergson, it could be argued that the notions of time and space deployed here are only nominally at odds with Bergson's. Bergson's Time, *durée*, is experience that is indivisible from a situation. His image of a snowball increasing in size as it rolls downhill is often used to describe what he means by the accumulation of time as it takes into itself events and circumstances on its way. What he leaves out of this image is the fact that the snowball is a spatial body moving through space as well as time. For him, Space is an intellectual category, not a physical one. Physical space would appear to be included in the notion of *durée*. Otherwise, how would experience even be possible? Harrison conveys her admiration for the Russian religious philosopher Lev Shestov in her *Epilegomena*.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 1, section 5.6 for Harrison's love of Russian.

life, she indicates, whether intentionally or not, that a more widespread confrontation is also taking place between space/act and time/speech. Chapter 1, Sections 5-5.5 considered this return to ritual as a heightening of, primarily, performativity, process and materiality in different art forms. The following section will recap and build on some of this discussion regarding spatialisation in literature.

### 3.3 Space and act v. time and language in literature

A growing attraction to the nature of space and objects in literature in the early twentieth century is briefly sketched by Hugh Kenner in the chapter 'Space-Craft' in his seminal book *The Pound Era*.<sup>10</sup> He notes the increasing closeness of literature to painting over the nineteenth century which had enacted 'a massive bafflement at the question, how to go about meaning anything. For objects are even more enigmatic than stories. What are they doing here?' (25). Rebecca Beasley more recently notes that this development led Virginia Woolf to exclaim in 1925 'we are under the dominion of painting' (Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* 2). Kenner points to the discovery of primitive art as a decisive factor in this turn to the spatial. Primitive art did not fit into any known canon in the history of art, it was outside time: 'a wholly new kind of visual experience confronted whoever cared' (29); 'no one could begin to imagine how it felt to draw such things; one could only look at the confident lines' (30).

Kenner also observes the 'radical incompatibility between language and the silent world where things appear' which writers since Wordsworth had begun to concern themselves with (26). Fleshing out this increase of the presence of objects in literature, he also mentions Keats interrogating an urn, the objects which dominate Arthur Conan Doyle's fiction, Henry James' 'house of fiction', E.M. Forster's flat and round character's, and the way we now speak in literary analysis of 'structure', 'perspective', 'surface' and 'depth'.<sup>11</sup> Kenner remarks that 'so a whole generation felt, deaf to words' duration, blind to their transparency'; 'Space, with its talk of structures, was whelming verbal art' (27). He notes that Joseph Conrad's literary aim 'above

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<sup>10</sup> Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* also examines the changing conceptions of space and time around the turn of the century in response to developments in technology.

<sup>11</sup> To this we could add Gertrude Stein's fascination with the identity of objects, notably in her collection *Tender Buttons*.

all to make you see'. Echoing this, Beasley similarly finds that 'measure, compare – but first of all, look, is Pound's injunction in his textbooks' (1).

This emphasis on space and objects resonates with an attitude toward graphic art that flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century, namely that pictorial expression should move away from strictly mimetic representation and towards a greater emphasis on its material qualities.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 5.5, the now best known literary strand of this general aesthetic shift was epitomised by European authors whose works highlighted the physicality of the written word. These works included, notably, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrammes, the Surrealist *livre d'artiste* and typographical experiments by the Futurists and poets such as Pierre Reverdy, Paul Dermée published in avant-garde poetry magazines like *Nord-Sud*. Julia Briggs, who provided the first extensive annotated reading of *Paris* in 2007, assesses the poem's typographical innovations in relation to continental aesthetic credos and trends in her essay 'Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism' (2007).<sup>13</sup> Without dismissing the importance and influence of these innovations, the framework for reading *Paris* constructed in this chapter complements and complicates Briggs's by drawing attention to how she fits into the neglected craft-based British literary tradition beginning to be excavated by textual historians such as McGann. Mirrlees's place in the history of the book rests on the intersection between a shifting emphasis regarding temporal and spatial aspects of language and Mirrlees's emphasis on space in *Paris*. This emphasis can also be sensed in her approach to Romanticism, which the next section will briefly consider.

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 5.2 for a brief discussion of this development in the visual arts and a reference to further reading.

<sup>13</sup> Suzanne Henig notes, as well, that Mirrlees credits Jean Cocteau and his *Le Cap de Bonne-Espérance* (1919) with 'liberating' *Paris*, just as he had been liberated from 'la forme fixe' ('Queen of Lud' 13). Echoes of Cocteau's experimental, performative typography can indeed be found in *Paris*, especially in the lines

	Secrets	
	exquisite	significant
	fade	plastic
which visually recall Cocteau's		
	Ariadnes	
	dragging	along
	Ariadnes	seals

## 4 Mirrlees's resistance to time: the romance of space and movement

Mirrlees's participation in the modern literary emphasis on space connects this trend to ancient classical texts and Harrison's description of magic. A significant aspect of her conception of Romanticism is the element of breaking up what she seems to consider the harsh, inevitable flow of time, an element she sees in works by Homer and Euripides that she considers Romantic.<sup>14</sup> In an unpublished, undated and only half preserved essay in which she discusses the process through which the Olympian gods emerged, she argues (echoing her unpublished 1913 essay 'The Ballad and the Ritual Dance') that there is another process which dove-tails into this process, and that is 'the creation of a magical Land of Hearts' Desire'. This land, she writes, quoting from *Themis*, is 'a sort of continuum of mana, a world of unseen power lying behind the visible universe, a world which is the sphere, of magical activity & the medium of mysticism'. This is a reference to Harrison's description of the 'supersensuous' world of the savage, the 'fairyland' created by the 'savage' which is given a 'secondary reality' and includes dreams, visions, ghosts of dead ancestors and portents of the future (*Themis* 512).<sup>15</sup> One of the elements that go into creating this country, she says, is nostalgia (the other is memory of ritual), and to consider nostalgia, 'we must talk a little about romantic art.' She continues with a description of nostalgia creating an imagined place to wander through, and how this to her is the definition of Romanticism:

The essential quality of real romantic art has always seemed to me the power of creating a country which is perfectly subject to Mr. Bullough's 'antimony' – viz. The minimum distance is exactly hit. For it is no phantastic country, it is just the pleasant places of the world we know with a glamour on them. And it corresponds with the picture we carry in our memory of almost any period of our life which is over, when, as Burne-Jones said of his years at Oxford 'the sky was always blue, & there was the sound of bells in the air.' It shares another quality with the picture in our memory, & that is simplification, for it is an art of suggestion & atmosphere, not of detail. There are few places we know as well as Celia and Rosalind's Forest of Arden, or the Bohemia of the Winter's Tale, where Autolysis steps lightly through the daffodils, & yet in these plays there is but little word-painting. Well,

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<sup>14</sup> Other aspects of Mirrlees's ritual-based conception of Romanticism are discussed in Chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>15</sup> This idea of the 'Land of Hearts' Desire' is also discussed in chapter 4 on *Lud-in-the-Mist*, where the phrase appears in the epigraph to the novel.

these warriors of the Heroic Age were the first romantics, & also, perhaps, the first sentimentalists. They longed for wide spaces & the wonderful Northern woods, & the comforting noise of rivers, in that little, hard, bright country of Greece. And out of this nostalgia for the North & the glorified picture of it they carried in their memories, they wove that country through whose shadowy hills Hermes drove the cattle of Apollo. The Homeric Hymn to Hermes seems to me one of the most perfect examples of romantic art. It suggests such a lovely, kindly land. And it has the feeling of movement which is so very romantic, for the country of romance is essentially one to wander in. And in the Hymn all this is suggested by the two lines: -

πολλὰ δ' ὄρη σκιάοντα καὶ αὐλῶνας κελαδεινούς  
καὶ πεδί' ἀνθεμόεντα διήλασε κύδιμος Ἑρμῆς.

[this passage is translated by Evelyn White as follows:  
'through many shadowy mountains and echoing gorges  
and flowery plains glorious Hermes drove them'. (ll.94-114)]

As this passage shows, romance, space and movement for Mirrlees are closely intertwined.

This spatial sense of Romanticism is contrasted with a time-driven verbal art:

But the Athenians as a whole were not romantic in this sense of the word. In Sophocles & Aeschylus there is only space in its mathematical sense of extension, it has none of its connotations of grass & wind & birds. The sense of Time is paramount. But plays of Euripides, to whom the epithet romantic has always been applied, there is a longing which can no longer be contained to get out of the prison of the plot, to escape from the inevitable march of Time to quiet cool places. Like Falstaff, in her delirium Phaedra 'babbles of green fields,' & (to adapt Bacon's metaphor) the choruses come & go, like a wind blowing over the flowers of the happy meadows.

This literary distinction Mirrlees makes between Romantic and spatially-oriented on the one hand and time-driven on the other, is not confined to classical texts. Section 6 considers her use of these same categories for thinking about antiquarianism and more recent writers, including herself. *Paris*, as discussed in the chapter on *Paris* and ritual as thematic structure, is highly spatial in its content: the movement of the wandering *flâneuse* and the imagistic descriptions of places in the city highlight a sense of place and spatial presence. This chapter complements the previous one by exploring how this spatial emphasis is incorporated into the form of the poem on the page. Firstly, the following section (Section 5) will look broadly at the relationship between space and time in how the book has been conceptualised in different phases of its history leading up to the modernist period.

## 5 Materiality and space in book-making

As in ritual, time and space comprise important categories in thinking about reading, writing and making books, and can be seen to correspond to the elements of speech and spatial act. In going on to discuss ritual in relation to books and literacy, I will consider the way in which the dynamics of time and space can work to create a performative form of writing, book-making and reading. That is to say, a form where the material construction of the book is on display and the book requires a recreation of a performance from its reader, and could thus be considered ritualistic.

### 5.1 Renaissance of printing: setting type, handling meaning

In *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923*, Johanna Drucker discusses the early twentieth-century ‘theme of materiality, the self-conscious attention to the formal means of production in literature and the visual arts (as well as music, dance, theatre, and film, it could be added), [which] cuts across the lines which otherwise separate Cubism from Futurism, Dada from Nunism, Vorticism from the rest.’ What connects all these different uses of materiality in art, she writes, is the insistence on ‘the capacity of works to claim the status of being rather than representing’ (10). Ferdinand de Saussure is highlighted as an especially important figure in the turn away from the voice-centred linguistics of the nineteenth century which had morphed into phonology, towards an acknowledgement of the importance of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Nineteenth-century linguistics, she explains, considered writing itself to be invisible and insignificant. ‘Not only were the forms and material properties of writing, or even of written texts, not a distinct object of inquiry,’ she writes, ‘but its very existence, the fact that it served as language, went unacknowledged’ (13).

Saussure's linguistic theory is thus given primary credit for this new realisation while the material circumstances which led to a realisation regarding the materiality of the visual signifier is somewhat glossed over (despite Saussure's bias against the ‘tyranny’ of the written word in education which he felt was beginning to oppress the ‘natural’ spoken form of language [18], and the fact that in Saussure the signifier is not granted materiality; it is a purely mental phenomenon [17-21]). The ‘insistence of the expressive content of visual form’ in William Morris's hand-printing experiments is noted, but its impact on spatial literary innovations is downplayed. It is described in terms of ‘a new fetishistic concern for the artisanal properties of letterpress technology’ and its influence is limited to ‘the book arts, and

[...] the general look of journals and ephemeral publications associated with a certain segment of the avant-garde' (92). The Continental poetic avant-garde is instead assumed to have first properly transferred Saussure's insights about the existence of the signifier to the physical look of the page, as Morris's influence is considered merely to have been superficially stylistic – encouraging the use of 'intertwined borders, organic motifs, sinewy forms and decorative patterns' (93) – rather than having a serious effect on thinking about the materiality of the signifier.

A view which challenges this perspective is that put forward by Jerome McGann in *Black Riders*. Here the engagement of writers in the printing process is seen as paramount. Rather than pointing to any theory of linguistics, he argues it is the practice of physically handling the material signifier itself in its independent external form – type – that led to the self-reflexive emphasis on the signifier in modernism and beyond. So far reaching were the consequences of this turning point, McGann argues, that even Gertrude Stein's self-reflexive linguistic experiments in her poetry – while not visually experimental – would not have been possible had not Morris brought the physical, visual aspect of written language to the fore (18-23). Morris, a central figure in the Renaissance of Printing in the late nineteenth century, anticipated this modernist attitude to language in his elaborate emphasis on the materiality of the signifying visual text and book.

Following McGann's analysis, Morris's often overlooked experiments can be seen to mark a turning point in the way texts have historically been regarded. Morris's aesthetic gesture as a writer and printer is not a merely nostalgic stylistic one; it represents a move towards an entirely new way of thinking the word on and off the page.

## **5.2 Historical development of the body of the text and spatialisation of language**

As Walter Ong famously argued in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), written language in the highly oral culture in the West up until the invention of the printing press could not be said to have the same physical permanence and integrity that it gains with the invention of print. Physically, the hand-written word comes into being only as it is written. Furthermore, the written word was given an only ephemeral physical existence in a manuscript culture as manuscripts were often written over as soon as they were memorised. Added to this, the appearance of the written word would vary from each scribe to the next. Manuscripts were essentially aids for memorisation, as reading them was also laborious work

due to their ornate style, especially before spaces were added between the words. Silent reading was only a gradual development, Ong points out, only gradually gaining ground following the invention of print. A 'text' can thus be said to have retained a mostly mental, oral and slightly abstract existence before this invention. A text had only a very slight spatial aspect to it, existing almost entirely only in time, the time it took to recite or read it out loud.

Over the course of the evolution of the book, Ong explains, written language gradually gains more and more independence from speech. 'Print', he writes, 'suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did' and 'situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did' (118, 121), whereas before print, 'writing served largely to recycle knowledge back into the oral world' (119) – keeping language in the invisible realm of thought and speech. With print, the written word gains a spatial body that is assimilated in various ways to the living body – it develops a header, footer, chapter – and different points in the text are furthermore spatially referred to with 'above' and 'below' (100). McKenzie also points out how the term 'remains' even comes to be used to refer to the books an author leaves behind when he dies (*Making Meaning* 210). To this it could be added that the concept of the body of the text arises. With print, words literally gained a separate physical existence from speech, as pieces of moveable type pre-exist the text. Spatial conventions develop, furthermore, that are specific to written language, such as indexes, end- and footnotes, title pages and lists (Ong 123-6).

Ong also connects the independence that writing gains from speech through print with literature becoming much more concerned with spatial description. Manuscript culture, he notes, barely differentiated between poetry and rhetoric (111, 133). The structure of texts followed the pattern of conversations. As the text establishes itself as a body, and as the spatial arrangement of a text, and icons that are included in the book, become more precisely reproducible, it also becomes spatial in another way. The attitude to writing changes, slowly but decisively: the content of writing becomes more space-oriented in general. The industrial revolution, which saw increased production in print, occurs alongside the Romantic Movement, which begins to include descriptions of places in more detail than ever before. Ong argues that this would not have happened if it were not for print (127-8). The parallel with Mirrlees's spatial conception of romance is apparent, and *Paris*, provides an extreme example of this.

### **5.2.1 Contradiction: the increasingly important but invisible textual body**

Plato's definition of writing as thing-like and inhuman (Ong 78) demonstrates the attitude of an oral culture to writing. When writing is first introduced in an illiterate culture, it is perceived as so different to speech as to be considered magical (Ong 93-94). The idea that words can take physical, permanent shape is considered unnatural and as being bound up in some way with sorcery. S.J. Tambiah points to a 'survival' of this early way of thinking about writing in the fact that the name of the main alphabet in India, 'devanagari', literally translates as 'abode of the gods' (182). Writing was also for a long time considered less reliable, less natural and direct in the context of law (Ong 96-97). This raises the question: where did this sense of written language as strange, magical even, deceptive and 'thing-like' go? Ong stresses the point that writing is indeed a technology, a tool. Robert Bringhurst, in a study devoted to typography, *The Elements of Typographical Style*, emphasises this point by commenting that 'Typography is the craft of endowing human language with a durable visual form, and thus with an independent existence' (11). Writing is indeed something artificial: it is a thing.

In *Textual Bodies: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Print*, Michael Kaufmann shows that this otherness and strangeness is something that was gradually forgotten at the same time as written language became more and more a separate thing, with its own conventions, and in this way became more object-like. Even as written language became more and more independent of speech in the sense that it developed its own conventions, organisation, and a physicality which would presume that it had an integrity of its own, it also became increasingly invisible as these spatial conventions became subordinated to the speaking voice.

### **5.2.2 Confronting the paradox of the increasingly spatialised but invisible text**

Kaufmann highlights this contradiction. Print was until the late nineteenth century increasingly internalised as natural, its strangeness dissipating as it became increasingly assimilated to the voice, bibliographers bridging the gap between the two by making print follow the logic of the voice as much as possible (22). Johanna Drucker, as discussed above, also observes the Victorian emphasis on the voice in linguistics. The text, despite its increasingly sophisticated spatialisation, thus still retained a mainly temporal orientation in that it was tied to the speaking voice.

Kaufmann relates how this contradiction came to a head in modernism: in the modernist period the textual body starts to show itself again. The physical material of language comes to the fore, the most dramatic precedent being set by the Futurists. In light of the attitude of an oral culture to writing, holding writing to be something thing-like and different

from speech, the Futurists' self-imposed label, 'primitives of a new sensibility', would seem to take on a certain relevance with regard to the meanings attached in the period to the term 'primitive' (that is, the labelling of illiterate cultures as primitive). Saussure, as well, as he disdainfully declares that writing is to speech what a person's photograph is to the face of the living person (Drucker 18) – an inferior imitation – is rediscovering a clear distinction that an oral culture makes between writing and speech. Poetry that flaunts its spatial body could indeed be seen to start to recover some of its 'primitive' – that is, pre-literate – strangeness.

### **5.2.3 Morris's resurrection of the highly visible and meticulously crafted printed word of early print**

Printing, which began in a highly oral cultural setting, medieval Europe, showed this perception of the difference between speech and writing in full. This is evident in the way early printed books often displayed unusual (by today's standards) typographical layout, such as setting inconsequential words in huge typefaces, or hyphenating over two lines important words, even the name of the author (Ong 120-1). As Ong explains, reading was primarily a listening process, so 'what difference did it make if the visible text went its own visually aesthetic way?' (121). The craft tradition in which texts were produced also helped to maintain the status of the written text as an object as it had to be physically made by human hands.

In harking back to this medieval mode of book-making, Morris is resurrecting this status of text as a crafted object. This tradition involved a collaboration between different craftsmen, close attention to visual detail, and always the physical engagement of the craftsmen and the accompanying inescapable awareness of the meticulous process that stands between a manuscript – let alone disembodied words existing only in time as they are spoken – and the finished object, the book. This contrasted greatly with the mechanised production of books that began in the nineteenth century, where human beings are largely removed from the physical process of putting letters, words and designs on paper. McGann's argument is that the sense of the materiality of texts could only be rediscovered by physically handling and producing texts. Without this direct engagement, the text is prevented from being thought of as anything very different from its disembodied message. In other words, it might as well be speech, which accords with Kaufmann's analysis of the obsession with speech in the eighteenth century and growing throughout the Victorian period, as well as with Drucker's work which makes this same point.

When Morris scholars discuss Morris's medievalism, they tend to focus on his Romanticism, his nostalgic longing for a better world left behind without counties overhung

with smoke and the noise of machinery. What they leave out of the story is his ground-breaking use of space in printing. McGann points out that even though the words of Morris's texts are *about* being romantically transported to another world or age, the importance of his poems lies in how form is manipulated to reach this end:

The textual move is the opposite of transcendental because we are not borne away with these pages, we are borne down by them. The work forces us to attend to its immediate and iconic condition, as if the words were objects in themselves, as if they were values in themselves (rather than vehicles for delivering some further value or meaning). (*Black Riders* 75)

Their iconic condition points to the medieval world with which their content is also concerned. As McGann says of the pre-Raphaelite trend, 'for those swept up in this phase the material form in which a book was read was as important as the story inside.' However, the important thing was not just that a book should look attractive; the emphasis, McGann argues was on 'the historical meanings that could be carried by a book's "ornamental" features' (77).

Through his manipulation of the material and spatial aspects of the book, Morris can be seen to be harking back to a Catholic period, following in the footsteps of William Blake, whose illuminated manuscripts the Pre-Raphaelites were responsible for saving from obscurity. Like Blake, Morris is in dialogue with the medieval debate between Catholicism and Protestantism on whether the iconic image or the word more crucially signifies religious meaning and constitutes the proper focus for prayer and contemplation. While 'playing at the middle ages', to use Mirrlees's phrase,<sup>16</sup> Blake's work became a rallying point for the group. It was the basis for the bibliographic component of their much-disparaged 'fleshly school of poetry' in that just as their poetry and painting focused on the sensuality of the body, Blake's manuscripts represented written artefacts with a more visible and sensual body than existed in any other contemporary form of publishing.

McGann refers to Blake as 'unique in the history of English literature precisely because of his effort to bring every aspect of the signifying process, linguistic as well as bibliographical, under authorial control' (*Textual Condition* 57). It is thus, according to McGann, to Blake, through the Pre-Raphaelite movement, that the entire reflexive emphasis

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<sup>16</sup> This is how Mirrlees refers to the Pre-Raphaelites, in a discussion of their place in the history of Romanticism focused on the Gothic (Mirrlees papers 6/4/1). This will be contextualised in Chapter 4.

on the signifier found in the modernist canon can trace itself (141-2). This is seen in the way that, firstly, the modernist period saw authors – following Morris's example – gaining increasing control of the process of production and therefore the spatial and material format of the text. McGann argues that *Poems by the Way* (1891) printed by the Kelmscott Press ‘put us on the brink of a new world of poetry’ in the way that we are meant ‘to read this typographically rendered poetry as much with our eyes as with our minds’; this book, he argues, anticipates not only modernist innovations like imagism, vorticism and objectivism but also later experiments in concrete poetry (*Black Riders* 69). McGann talks in detail about the important role given to space in Morris's writing (49-67), noting how he sometimes even filled up parts of pages with poetry simply for the visual effect (71).

Going hand in hand with the Pre-Raphaelite heightening of the materiality and visuality of text is, as McGann refers to it, Rossetti's ‘explicit critique of the hermeneutical and symbolist program’ (*Textual Condition* 149). McGann examines the way in which Rossetti's ‘Sonnets for Pictures’ uses words in such a way that they become as explicit as the images they refer to, ‘striv[ing] to eliminate the gap that the symbolic imagination had opened between the figura and its interpretation’, harking back to the classical idea of ‘*ut pictura poeses*, a making like a picture’ (149-150). Rather than using language as symbols that interpret the picture, ‘the poetry is working to transform symbols back into an original concreteness’ (150). This poetry, McGann observes, is ‘phanopoeia and ideography in a Victorian mode’ (150), making a direct link with Pound's programme for poetry years later. Rossetti, like Blake who was his chief inspiration, aimed for an art whose meaning did not lie at the bottom of a well, as the symbolist commonplace claimed (151), but rather showed itself on the surface of the artwork: ‘an art whose meaning is no more (and no less) than the actual and determinate play of the energetic mind’. While for Blake and Rossetti (and Morris, it could be added), this means recovering a lost art of ornamental profusion, this mode of art aimed for is, as McGann argues, ‘the exact inheritance received and passed on by Ezra Pound, and by those other modernists who followed similar constructivist lines: not so much Frost and Stevens and Eliot, as Stein and Williams and Zukofsky’ (151-2).

Instead of following Blake down the route of calligraphy, however, Morris tilts the balance of power between the word and the image not by including images – at least not to anywhere near the extent that Blake does – but by making the word itself recognisable as an image. ‘Recognisable’ because the word is of course always an image once it is written down (McKenzie, *Making Meaning* 214-15), but this (following Kaufmann, Drucker and McGann)

had long been forgotten. As discussed above, bibliographers of the past century and a half had sought to assimilate print to the voice (Kaufmann, Drucker), efforts which were perhaps a result of, and at any rate consolidated by, the mechanisation of the printing process, which paid little attention to the signifying potential of visual aspects of the book. Rather, disembodied words-as-speech were the only acknowledged carriers of meaning. How they were laid out, punctuated and embodied in founts was purely down to the house style of the publisher. Morris reintegrates the medieval logic of including images in manuscripts into a print and design context, harking back to fifteenth-century styles of typography and book making. Beyond merely including representational images, it is words themselves that he makes visible, highlighting them as concrete, spatially striking images.

The fact that he used the modern technology of print to do this is crucial. As discussed above, print (according to Ong) gives written language a fixedness, an integral physical existence in a way that writing by hand does not. The word written by hand can never be entirely detached from the writer. Therefore, words written in an unusual style (a hypothetical example being if Morris's texts were copied by hand, the founts reproduced as closely as possible) would invoke the action of the writer writing in an unusual fashion, whereas the visually unusual printed word has an independent unusual existence. It is an unusual thing in itself that has been crafted by, but is separate from the writer. This was the only way in which the problem of the invisible textual body could be addressed. This assertion of the thingness of the text was meant, McGann argues, to produce an 'alienation effect' of the sort Brecht would later write about, as

the artisanal features of Morris's books declared themselves as made things. Suddenly letters and words were not simply counters to be manipulated for the presentation of those more important things, ideas. The letters and words were dragged back to a new presence, as it incised on the page in an apocalypse of their materiality. (*The Textual Condition* 85)

Thus, Morris was the first to react to the contradiction between the increasingly sophisticated spatialisation of the printed word (in the conventions it had developed for itself apart from speech) and the neglect of the role of space in book-making. For this, he had to be a printer himself. Physically wielding the independently existing pieces of type brings a heightened awareness of written language as a physical, spatial material which leads to emphasising the role of space in the finished text.

Those Modernists who followed in his footprints in involving themselves in the printing process had the same realisation about the visual nature of words in writing – while

often considering their experiments to be an exact antithesis of the old-fashioned Romantic Morris. Notably, the Omega workshops and the Hogarth Press attempted to distance themselves from the ornamental tradition of design associated with Morris and the Kelmscott Press,<sup>17</sup> while exploiting the rich new horizon for craft and book-making that Morris was responsible for opening up to them. Joyce's symbolical use of pagination in *Ulysses* serves, for McGann, as an example of how Morris's attention to the signifying power of the material page and book is echoed in the work of modernist writers. 'The example of *Ulysses*', he writes, 'ought to remind us that many of the key works of the modernist movement in literature, especially the work produced before 1930, heavily exploit the signifying power of documentary and bibliographical materials' (*The Textual Condition* 79).

McGann discusses Pound's work as a prime example of modernist writing drawing on the legacy of Morris's and the Pre-Raphaelite's experiments in printing, adopting the 'fully materialized understanding of language' that marks Morris's work (*Black Riders* 80), as well as an understanding of how material aspects of a book could carry historical meanings. McGann argues that the *Cantos* project is launched in *Canto* 1 'in explicitly bibliographic terms: the voyage of Odysseus is a matter of linguistic translation and book production' (80). Involving himself at every stage of the technical production of his *Cantos* (79), Pound chose, for the first two volumes (1925 and 1928), ornamental designs of headpieces, titles and initials as well as a contrasting modern typeface, pointing backwards to both medieval printing and Morris's Kelmscott Press, and to the more modern style of the Bodley Head Press which also opened in the late nineteenth century and is part of the story of the Renaissance of Printing. These early volumes thus 'recollect at the design level the epochal (bibliographical) events of the fifteenth century and the late nineteenth century', a historical nexus in which the *Cantos* project locates itself (80). Pound's modern epic, or 'poem containing history' (Pound's definition of an epic [qtd. in McGann, *The Textual Condition* 129]), thus inscribes history also on the physical level of bibliographical features.

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Southworth (145-146).

#### 5.2.4 A return to process and material: meeting point between book-making and Harrison's ritual theory

The similarity between this arch of developments and Harrison's narrative of ritual in religion and art lies in the resurrection of the importance of the material component and production event in both processes. Similarly to the way the textual body has been neglected in mechanised practices of book-making, the physical body, Harrison is concerned, has lost its place in how art and religion are understood, contrasting with a more holistic understanding that she posits as having existed in the primitive past pre-dating Olympian Greece. Instead of acknowledging the embodied practice of art and religion, she argues, all emphasis has been laid on the product of these practices – the work of art, representational, subtracting the physical process of its making and the body of the artist, and theological dogma which involves mental contemplation more than physical participation.

In light of this intersection between the two narratives, this development in book-making could be seen as a ritualisation of the book-making process. The emphasis on spatially crafting a text and physically making a book, rather than merely verbally conveying thoughts, highlights the process of writing and book-making. As the maker experiences what Harrison describes as the full ritual process from emotion (which fuels writing) to mental representation (what the writer wants to say) to physical representation (the final external product), it could be said that this development in book-making highlighted text production as a ritual act. Leaving the physical stage of representation entirely to a printing company, especially if mechanical printing is done, disconnects a writer from this physical element of making the text into an object of art and devalues the spatial arrangement of the text. As physical and spatial engagement are integral to ritual, the Renaissance of Printing can potentially be viewed as a ritualisation of the book. The following chapter will conclude with an investigation into how Mirrlees's *Paris* realises this potential as it joins ritual content with external ritual form.

The factors behind Harrison's own materialist aesthetic have been outlined in Chapter 1 – the early aesthetic influence of the 'fleshly school' of the Pre-Raphaelites; the tangibility of her archaeological approach, and a primitivist interest in anthropology, highlighting the assumed greater physicality in the life of the 'savage'. As noted in Chapter 1, these were factors which were widely influencing the popular imagination, and although Harrison's ritual theory channels these concerns in a unique way she was by no means alone. Harrison's is just one paradigm fitting into the nexus of thinkers at the turn of the century turning away from rational abstractions and emphasising immediacy, a grouping in which Sanford Schwartz

includes Nietzsche, William James, F.H. Bradley and Bergson.<sup>18</sup> Harrison's theory, however, makes more specific mention of the body and its spatial role in performance, highlighting its integration with and disintegration from its counterpart, speech, and has a more central focus on art, which is why a more direct parallel can be drawn between it and innovations concerning the spatial role of the body of the artistic text.<sup>19</sup>

Of the factors feeding into Harrison's materiality-based aesthetic, the shared pre-Raphaelite influence on both Harrison's theory and the Renaissance of Printing is a significant connecting point. The iconic signification in texts and crafting process that Morris retrieved from the medieval period had a focus on body, process and material that was part of the overarching pre-Raphaelite aesthetic. As mentioned in Chapter 1, pre-Raphaelitism constituted a key early influence on Harrison. As also noted, the pre-Raphaelite emphasis on the visual and embodied form of books furthermore parallels Harrison's archaeological approach to classicism which took the paintings on excavated vases as a starting point for understanding ancient Greek religion and art. German excavations at Troy and Morris's Kelmscott Press, two contemporaneous archaeological and antiquarian projects with shared a similar basis in their concern with space and materiality, can be understood as having together contributed to this focus in Harrison's work.

The next section will look at how this focus is inherited and comes to the fore in Mirrlees's antiquarianism. Here I aim to establish the link between Harrison's ritual theory and the physical concerns regarding books that for both Mirrlees and Morris were rooted in an antiquarian instinct harking back to an era with a greater appreciation than their own for the materiality of language. This discussion will lead into an analysis of how Mirrlees's ritual-infused antiquarianism plays out in *Paris*, and how what emerges from this is a heightened emphasis on space that complements the temporal, mythical elements discussed in the previous chapter, producing an integrated ritual performance in which story and act, time and space, go hand in hand.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.5.2.

<sup>19</sup> As well as the human body. See Sections 5.3 and 5.4 on Isadora Duncan and Antonin Artaud in Chapter 1.

## 6 'It is touch that matters most': poetry as preservation and poem as ritual artefact in Mirrlees's antiquarianism

There is a particular way of appreciating a book or a work of art peculiar to the historico-literary view - grasping it & appreciating it together with the process that has produced it similar to the attitude of a romantic-minded scientist [illegible] a shell, which he admires partly as an intrinsically beautiful object & partly as the culmination of a curious intricate process.<sup>20</sup>

[O]ne of Nature's gifts to antiquaries is a sense of the Present, as history in the making.<sup>21</sup>

A swift, fleeting sense of the past is as near as I have ever got to a mystical experience . . .<sup>22</sup>

These three snippets from Mirrlees's writing introduce some of the key themes in her antiquarianism. One is the way that, to antiquaries, art and books are artefacts, tangible relics of the past; the tangible, visual qualities of these artefacts and their material construction thus becomes of prime importance. The other key theme is that of the mystical role of antiquaries – and poets, as these next few sections will show – in connecting the past with the present, and the present with the future. Mirrlees describes an antiquary as someone who 'awakens the dead' by showing survivals of antiquated traditions of a certain place or people (*Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton* 111), making the past suddenly intrude into the present. A related aspect of Mirrlees's understanding of antiquarianism concerns the preservation of the present as it becomes the past, and this aspect, I argue, was rooted in a similar context to Morris's antiquarianism. Both writers hark back to an era in which books and art in general were rooted in craft, and texts signified not only through words but also through their visual, tangible character. Like Morris, who, according to McGann, moves text and book-making into a modern, self-reflexive direction, Mirrlees's antiquarianism paradoxically also leads to a radically tangible aesthetic in poetry that in her context becomes 'modern'.

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<sup>20</sup> Mirrlees, Unpublished folder entitled 'Art' (Mirrlees papers 6/4/1).

<sup>21</sup> Mirrlees, *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton* (25).

<sup>22</sup> 'Listening in to the Past' (670).

## 6.1 Dionysian Elizabethan antiquaries and Russian folktales: concreteness, craft and collections

While Morris's antiquarian focus was the fifteenth century, Mirrlees's was the Elizabethan age in which Sir Robert Cotton lived the first half of his life, and his collection of medieval manuscripts. Both historical focal points are poised in different ways on the fault-line dividing a manuscript culture from a print culture: the fifteenth century is the actual turning point where printing begins but retains the iconic visual imagery of manuscripts, while Cotton's age saw the dissolution of the monasteries, which, for people averse to their contents, generally meant manuscripts were without value, but for Cotton and other antiquaries they were deemed valuable as physical artefacts. Thus, Cotton, if placed in Ong's evolutionary narrative of literacy, can be seen as having been among the forerunners of an increasingly literate culture that thought of books and writing not only in terms of their oral/aural potential, but also in terms of their visual, spatial qualities.

After *Paris*, and her novels written in the twenties, Mirrlees wrote a biography of Cotton, who was one of the founders of the Society of Antiquaries in the sixteenth century (of which Morris was later a member) and one of the first collectors of manuscripts at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. The book is not a slight one and took her three decades to write (in her acknowledgments she thanks T.S. Eliot, who published it in 1962 at Faber & Faber, for his encouragement 'without which [she] would not have had the heart to complete it'). Until her death she was researching a second volume which was never completed but filled up copious scrapbooks now confined to her archive at Newnham College in Cambridge.

Cotton's interest in manuscripts primarily as material relics is a feature that Mirrlees homes in on and makes central to her depiction of the antiquarian sensibility. The dichotomy running through this chapter, with time and narrative on the one hand and space and act on the other, is central as well in Mirrlees's attempts to define antiquarianism. The aim of the book, she says, is to show 'what constitutes an antiquary', which she regrets not having space for as 'this book is not the Baltic Sea' (88). Despite the decades of research and the two almost completed volumes, there was not enough space, because the subject matter was too personal. 'If I am anything at all,' she declares in the book, 'it is a romantic antiquarian' (118-119). The question this section sets out to answer is 'how does Mirrlees connect her antiquarian leanings and her role as a poet, and how does it result in so modern a piece as *Paris*?' An equally central, and intertwined, thread in this argument is the Harrisonian theory of ritual and how it informs also this aspect of Mirrlees's thinking.

In her biography of Cotton, entitled *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton* (1962),<sup>23</sup> she identifies two types of 'magic' that antiquaries perform. One is restoring the past; awakening its ghosts. Chapter 2 considered the fusion of religious figures and motifs from the ancient Greco-Roman past with the present in *Paris*; the present in which the poem is written is haunted by a past invoked for a spring ritual of purification and regeneration. The role of the speaker as *flâneuse* and high priest can thus be further integrated with the figure of the antiquary, whose task it is to bring the past to life for those who visit their cabinets of rarities. This task is closely related to the second type of magic which the antiquary, for Mirrlees, performs; this involves preserving the present, which she says is made possible by the way in which 'the present is painted for antiquaries in the colours and perspective of the past'. This is a disposition she ascribes to poets as well, and therefore preserving the present becomes the task of poets as well as antiquaries. 'Indeed', she writes, 'when poets preserve the present by turning it into poetry, in a sense they too are antiquaries. The greatest antiquary among them is Horace. Did he not say *Carpe Diem*, seize the present?' Here she goes on to quote from an ode by Horace depicting a bustling house preparing for a feast and asks 'does it not catch and eternalize the glints and gleams, the tinkle and tinsel, the workaday dust and smoke of what we call the Present? (92)'. The difference between the two disciplines is of course that antiquarianism preserves things tangibly, and poetry is made of words. And so Mirrlees interjects – typically, as this book is neither a straightforward addition to scholarship on antiquarianism nor a literary treatise, but rather a blend of the two – 'Ah, if poets could only be antiquaries! For antiquaries alone among mortals can restore the past and preserve the present, *tangibly* [emphasis hers]—and it is touch that matters most' (92-3).

Here we hit on the crux of Mirrlees's concern with the relevance of antiquarianism to poetry. There is the idea in Mirrlees's writing that poetry could be, magically, a tangible relic of the present of a certain point in time. In 1926, before Mirrlees began work on the biography, she expressed a similar attitude towards literature and appears to have been enthralled by another Romantic antiquary. In her essay 'Some Aspects of the Art of Alexej Michailovich

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<sup>23</sup> Cited hereafter as *A Fly in Amber*.

Remizov' (Mirrlees papers 6/3/5),<sup>24</sup> Mirrlees discusses how her friend, the folklore-inspired Russian fantasy writer Alexej Remizov, relates to the category of what she calls 'decorative' or 'rococo' writers. This grouping, for Mirrlees, is for writers who see life as a collection of beautiful objects that they can rearrange, like a painter creating a still life. Here she mentions William Morris, who 'will place "two red roses across the moon," then stand back, head on one side, eyeing them critically', as well as literature she describes more unflatteringly as

books wherein the writer's contemporaries and all their appurtenances are shown as small, grimacing, and amusing. Such, for example, are Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, and, *parva componere magnis*, some of the stories of Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime*.

Unlike these authors who she thinks of as using life as a 'plastic and docile and malleable' material simply for the sheer love of decoration, Remizov goes about using his materials, Russian folklore, which is on the brink of extinction, in a way that has 'more of the antiquary than the decorator' about it. She argues that it is the antiquary's consciousness of something becoming part of the past which produces the delusion that it is the past and, she writes, 'hence, static and solid – a thing that one can turn round in one's hand and examine at one's leisure [...] He treats the present with the reverend accuracy of the antiquary, handling it delicately and lovingly, as if it were a rare and very fragile object' – and so the writer becomes an antiquary for Mirrlees, handling the present in a way that creates of it an historical artefact.

Artefacts are things that have been made, and part of their appeal for antiquaries is the way in which they point to how they were made, how they are – in Mirrlees's words, 'the culmination of a curious intricate process' (Unpublished folder entitled 'Art'. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1). In the Cotton biography, Mirrlees points out that 'for those of us who are children of either the aesthetic 'nineties or of the aesthetic 'twenties it is difficult to remember that works of art originally merely meant works of human skill', adding that "'Nature altered or wrought" is Bacon's definition' (77). She refers (drawing on the scholar Edgar Wind) to the 'revolutionary fusion' of the liberal and mechanical arts in the sixteenth century, which she calls one of the 'heresies of the cinquocento' as it contradicted the Aristotelean distinction

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<sup>24</sup> This essay was published in French in 1926 while the English version was only published in Parmar's collection in 2011. As this chapter was researched before the appearance of Parmar's collection, the published version is not cited here.

between the liberal, servile and mechanical arts and the superiority of the first. It was, she says, 'a fusion that endured for the greater part of Cotton's life', and notes how within this aesthetic paradigm painting was grouped with various crafts, such as carving, engraving, architecture, making engines for water-works, horsemanship and navigation (78). She notes, for example, how Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* 'prescribes cabinets as a cure for melancholy', listing, among the rarities found in them, paintings by Michaelangelo and Raphael in the same breath with old coins, pieces of China, perspective glasses and so on (79). Mirrlees seems especially to relish (because she refers to it a few times) the example of a certain rarity admired by an English traveller in an Italian cabinet: "the motions of little animals that run about by springs"—in short, clockwork mice'. 'And what, after all,' she comments, 'was the difference aesthetically between Greek statues and clockwork mice? Nature has to be 'altered' and 'wrought' for the fashioning of the one quite as much as for the other' (78).

While Spenser was influenced by 'Quattrocento Neo-Platonism and its mystical cult of beauty' and the "Italianate" Elizabethans' would have been familiar with its principles, she is not inclined to think that this was what was admired by the 'curious men' (antiquaries), as these principles could not have been claimed for a clockwork mouse. 'Beauty, therefore,' she writes,

could not be the criterion by which works of art were judged. And it was principally owing to their skilful perspective that, in England, Italian painting was able to compete with mechanical rarities [...]. Tactile values, in fact, without any of the term's aesthetic implications, were what Wotton [an antiquary of the period] primarily demanded from painting. (80)

Highlighting the contrast between this materialist conception of art and more idealist aesthetics, she writes that "art for art's sake" and "significant form" were not yet terms in the jargon of the "curious". Nor, moreover, was beauty. Both to the Elizabethan and Jacobean, works of art tended to be rarities, and nothing else' (78-9). The chapter in which she discusses the Elizabethan tradition of arts and crafts is aptly titled 'A Peacock with a Wooden Leg' after a reported case of one-upmanship she sees as demonstrating a 'survival' of this conception of art as rarities. In this scenario, two Victorian Scotsmen are overlooking Niagra Falls and one exclaims to the other how, granted, the Falls are grand but 'I yince in Peebles saw a peacock wi' a wooden leg!' Here she remarks, in free indirect speech to chime in with her anecdote: 'Away with Beauty and the Sublime, and such new-fangled notions! "I yince in Peebles saw a peacock wi' a wooden leg."' And most of our "curious men", Peirescius, Evelyn, Lord Herbert

of Cherbury, Howell, perhaps Wotton, and certainly Dr Stukely, would have commended the verdict of the Victorian Scotsman' (81).

Considering her extensive knowledge of the craft tradition of Elizabethan times, it is odd that while Mirrlees mentions Morris's painterly, decorative tendency as a writer, she does not mention the arts and crafts movement of the later decades of the nineteenth century and Morris's resurrection of hand-printing. As the Woolfs' Hogarth Press, where *Paris* was printed, was an extension of this tradition, it is strange that Mirrlees does not mention this background, as *Paris* displays the same emphasis on the visual effects of typography, layout, iconicity as well as tangible aspects – the materials used, and the importance of everything being done by hand – as texts printed within this movement. Perhaps this perspective is the benefit of hindsight (highlighting the materiality of texts is after all a relatively new direction in criticism – one which provides an ideal context in which to bring Mirrlees to light), and Mirrlees herself was not able to be conscious of her part in this tradition's attempts to restore the materiality of texts to literature.

Julia Briggs, who brought *Paris* to the attention of modernist scholars in 2007, writes in her article 'Printing Hope' that *Paris* was the single most difficult project Woolf ever undertook as a printer (32).<sup>25</sup> With the erratic margins and use of white space, different sizes of type, Roman and Italic, it is not hard to see why. It was also only the sixth book the Woolfs printed themselves, the year before they acquired a larger, easier-to-work press and hired professional assistants, and they were very much still amateurs in the trade (Rhein, 151, 5-6). Three proofs of *Paris* have survived and include Mirrlees's meticulous corrections for layout. More labouring and toil is evident in that a few typographical errors have had to be corrected by hand after the poem was printed and bound, and Woolf recalls in her journal spending a tiresome afternoon making the corrections in each of the 175 copies (Briggs, 'Printing Hope' 32). The extended physical labour and crafting that went into printing this poem are one way in which the materiality of the poem is highlighted, and suggest themselves even without records of these details to readers who pick up on its hand-printed appearance and are at all

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<sup>25</sup> Backing up McGann's hypothesis of the Renaissance of Printing ushering in the modern reflexive attitude to language, recent studies on Woolf have suggested that she gained a strong sense of the materiality of language through hand-printing (Reid [198]; Svendsen), which underlines her importance as Mirrlees's collaborator in the printing of *Paris*.

familiar with the painstaking production process. An imprint including the names and address of the printers on the title page of *Paris* also shows its embeddedness in the private press tradition initiated by Morris which generally included this information, demonstrating the prominence of the crafting process.

Mirrlees's preference in art for craft, physical creation, above articulation is further implied in her affectionate commentary on Cotton's picture on the frontispiece of the biography: she writes that he looks somewhat helpless, comparing him to a child and a dog (Mirrlees adored dogs later in her life) showing 'his principle treasures, his *Genesis* [one of the most famous manuscripts in his collection], his pedigree, and his hands'.<sup>26</sup> She mentions in this section that Cotton had a stammer, and ends the description with 'let us remember his hands', indicating a sympathy for the aesthetics of making and doing rather than speaking.

An indication of this aesthetic is also present in her description of Alexej Remizov, who she describes as being difficult to read let alone critique 'because he leaves so much unsaid'. The essay concludes with her suggestion that '(p)erhaps the measure of a writer's greatness is just the disparity between the things he says and the things he knows.' She makes a similar comment about another artist she knew and admired greatly, the painter Maria Blanchard, about whom she wrote to her mother 'She is so different from literary people. I mean, although she is intensely intellectual & imaginative one feels that to her language is an unsatisfactory medium' (Untitled letter, Mirrlees papers 2/1/3).

Her sense also of Robert Cotton seems to be that he was a collector of manuscripts not only for what the words inside said, but as significant relics in themselves, significant mainly, in fact, for their visual and tangible properties. The two chapters describing his library of manuscripts are titled 'A Magazine of History' – magazines, like illuminated manuscripts, typically being highly visual publications – and 'The Famous Jewel House', a house and jewels being objects in space, not conveyors of verbal meaning. Mirrlees pays attention to the details of the craft and handiwork of the Lindisfarne Gospels, even mentioning the goldsmith (Billfrith) who made the gospel-case in which the manuscript was kept (60). These details suggest a blur the boundaries of the verbal element of text and the sense of a text as a visual and physically crafted and arranged thing, which is echoed in the way she speaks of Cotton's

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<sup>26</sup> His hands are unusually prominent in this painting.

collection. Of the library she declares that 'it belongs to the class of precious things of which the beauty never fades or diminishes, but waxes with the passage of the years' (59).

This material sense of texts echoes her essay on Remizov, where she says of the antiquarian writer, that '[t]reading in the footprints of Sir Walter Scott, he tracks an old tune to a shepherd whistling it in the hidden valley where it was born, chases winged words with his net, listens to old wives' tales, and hastens to catch the last faltered words of the dying gods.' This passage not only describes the activity of excavating the past, but also gives the impression of the antiquary/writer doing something very physical with words, catching them in a net, hastening to catch them, as if words were objects and antiquarian writers were collectors. In fact, Mirrlees continues her portrait of Remizov as a Romantic antiquary by commenting that, in their exuberant use of detail, Remizov's books are a 'depository of [his] collection – the small blue and white and freckled eggs that they so gleefully rifled from the visible world'.

This description of antiquarian writing invokes a sense of space as well that recalls the way Mirrlees connects Romanticism to space and wandering (in her unpublished essay on mythology, discussed above). Just as Mirrlees says of the 'first romantics' of the Heroic Age that nostalgia and memory of ritual went into creating the 'fairylane' of ancient Greek mythology, Remizov's nostalgia for 'old Russia' results in fairytales in which Mirrlees finds a strong formal spatial component. Remizov, she argues, differs from writers who she considers to be 'under marching orders', unable to dally by the wayside and linger and collect.<sup>27</sup> Remizov does this, and she connects this tendency also to the visual appearance of the page. Remizov's 'full and brimming page', Mirrlees writes, is 'pleasing to the eye', and his collecting reminds her of the flora and fauna framing a medieval manuscript. This sense of space in writing is also apparent in the use of the word 'extravagant' in the title of the Cotton biography. She means it, she says, 'in its obsolete sense of vagrant, *wandering out of bounds* [emphasis hers]' (62). This tangible and spatial focus that Mirrlees finds in Remizov and homes in on in her biography of Cotton is also found in *Paris*, where wandering, collection and an emphasis on the visual and tangible combine.

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<sup>27</sup> She mentions Tolstoy, George Eliot and Jane Austen as example of authors whose writing displays this time-driven focus.

## 6.2 *Paris* as artefact

Just as the title of her biography, 'A Fly in Amber', epitomises tangible, visual preservation, *Paris*, too, presents a similar case of preservation. While the two texts are separated by many years, Mirrlees's insistence on the precocious nature of the antiquarian tendency implies that she too had possessed this tendency from a young age: 'They must spring early who would sprout high in that knowledge', she says quoting the antiquary Thomas Fuller (23), and lists John Aubrey, Anthony Wood, the Warton brothers, William Camden, Stukeley and the Provost of Eton Dr M R James as examples of this precocity (24).

Along with the crafting process through which *Paris* was produced, the scarcity of copies of *Paris* is also in keeping with the antiquarian practices and sensibilities of the Elizabethan and Jacobean antiquaries with their cabinets of rarities. With only 175 copies, it was not an item aimed at a mass market; it was mainly only available directly from the Hogarth Press and would have ended up only in the hands of those most keen to preserve it in their private collections.<sup>28</sup> In all likelihood, these would also have been people with some training in the classics and familiar with innovations in poetry, making the ritual of the poem more accessible to them.

Artefacts are often more valuable specimens in a cabinet of rarities when they are (roughly) datable and their origin is known. They are relics of a certain time and place, a tangible, visual portal for the imagination into a time now gone. The spatial origin of *Paris* is of course evident in the toponymous title, but the poem also displays datability, firstly by including the date, 'Spring 1919', at the end (along with the place, 'Rue de Boune', which specifies its origin in more detail), but also in that it consists largely of observations of Paris at that time. These observations are delivered with such a sense of immediacy that it is as if this moment in history, Paris in the spring of 1919, were frozen and preserved as an image of what is now the past, like a fly in amber. It is a record of posters, advertising slogans, snippets of news and conversation all distinctly belonging to a specific time. It encapsulates a moment of

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<sup>28</sup> The entries for *Paris* in the Hogarth Press's order book shows that a few copies went to Boots, bookshops and magazines, but the majority of buyers were individuals. Among these were a number of major figures of the period's literary scene and intelligentsia (writers, patrons, critics etc.) including Wallace Stevens, Logan Pearsall Smith, Lady Ottoline Morrell, J.M. Keynes, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Clive Bell (Woolf, Leonard, Order Book, Records of the Hogarth Press).

transition from the devastation of the war to whatever lay ahead, alluding to the Peace Conference, the general strike, the artistic and cultural interest in Russia, Freud's theories and increasing openness about homosexuality, especially on the Parisian night life scene in areas such as the liberal Montmartre quarter, which features at the end of the poem. The idea that this preservation is what she had in mind is also supported by a comment she makes in the biography regarding the intended fruits of antiquarianism. She invokes Peirescius's defence of antiquarianism: 'That the *circumstances* of Histories may be more perfectly understood [emphasis Mirrlees's]' and adds '--what an admirable definition of the true purpose of antiquarianism!' (91). In conveying immediate impressions of sights, sounds and the associations they invoke, *Paris*, indeed, conveys the circumstances of life in Paris in 1919.

Its typography can also be seen as playing a crucial role in capturing a sense of the time it was written. As McGann says of the pre-Raphaelites, the material form of a book was important mainly for 'the historical meanings that could be carried by a book's "ornamental" features' (*Black Riders* 77). Echoing Mirrlees's wish for poets to be antiquaries, McGann remarks that texts in which 'the physique of the "document" has been forced to play an aesthetic function' – and in which consequently 'the distinction between physical and conceptual message breaks down completely' – make it 'difficult to distinguish [...] between that which is documentary and that which is literary' (*Textual Condition* 77-78). While the antiquarian tastes of the pre-Raphaelites led them to choose ornamental features from medieval texts, Mirrlees's antiquarian gesture of preserving the present can be seen as leading her to use 'ornamental features', in this case experimental, avant-garde typography, to signify the historical moment that she is capturing in her poem. It is a time which, with her antiquarian sensibility, she can already see as passing by.

The typography and spacing of the poem can also be seen as radically rendering the act of collection and preservation visually. The collected features of the time are documented in fragments suggesting snapshots in their brevity as well as, even more strikingly, in their materiality and visuality. Like Cotton's 'magazine of history', and Remizov's collection of 'small blue and white and freckled eggs', *Paris*'s account of this moment in history is concrete and visual. Both in its content and its visual form, the poem represents the disruption of chronological narrative found in photography. This is visually most evident in the inclusion of lines of advertising, where the font sizes and layout separate the lines from the rest of the text and imitate as closely as possible (given the Woolfs' modest selection of type at this time [Rhein, 5]) the actual signs they are referring to. The varying line lengths and positions of

words and lines, and punctuation separating imagistic snapshots, compound this sense of fragmentation. The physical fragmentation disrupts the continuity of a polished, fluent narrative or declaration on the experience of the end of the war.<sup>29</sup> This is similar to the way a series of photographs splits a narrative into fragments which each capture just one instant of the event.

Because of photography's disruption of narrative, and the ambiguity that can sometimes arise from this regarding the scene captured in a photography, a narrative can sometimes be constructed by reference to the title. A title assigning a time and place to the photo is often enough to supply the narrative inherently lacking within it. This technique of adding narrative to snapshot by framing it with a date and time can be found in *Paris*, as it ends by marking the time and place, '3 Rue de Boune, Paris, 1919'. As this was not the actual date of publication, it must be seen as serving primarily another purpose, that is, potentially, providing a frame for the fragmented content of the poem, the same way that a date and time provide this frame for a photo.

Another way of thinking about the lack of chronological narrative in photography is to think of individual photographs as having no beginning, middle or end, but presenting rather all their elements simultaneously. *Paris* conveys this sense of a plethora of events possessing no particular linear order succinctly in the line 'Funny little things ceaselessly happening'. This line occurs in a passage that borrows a technique from another visual medium rapidly gaining hold of the popular imagination at the time the poem was written – that of cinema. In this passage, the speaker 'gaze[s] out of her window, tranced' and, as if a camera had panned down to show us what the speaker sees, the next lines describe the scene: 'hawkers chanting their wares', and so on. These techniques are transposed from visual media into the medium of poetry, making space a crucial aesthetic element in poetry and disrupting its hitherto dominant temporality.

This fragmented collecting of sights and events is implied in Mirrlees's definition of the goal of antiquarianism as 'conveying circumstances', which differs substantially from

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<sup>29</sup> Incidentally, this is where the poem differs markedly, on a formal level, from Apollinaire's *Zone*, to which a thematic comparison can easily be made. *Zone* has no punctuation, but in *Paris* punctuation is key to separating fragments into separate often imagist snapshots of things seen by the speaker either in the flesh or in the mind's eye.

providing a historical narrative. *Paris* lacks the ordering principle of a history. Mirrlees points out, in the Cotton biography, that the main difference between historians and antiquarians concerns the antithesis of the tangible and the coherently articulable. 'A history', she writes, 'was a prose poem' in Cotton's day (143), in which Cotton and other antiquaries were largely ridiculed (89-90). *Paris*, as just pointed out above, is a prose poem split into fragments, preventing it from conveying a temporally fluent narrative. Mirrlees notes that even when an antiquary succeeded in being an author, they paled in comparison to historians who were masters of the fine art which history was then considered. It was a fine art, we could add, of articulation, of explaining, or telling a story. Antiquaries, on the other hand, she conveys, were notoriously bad at telling a story, some not even being able to turn their collections into books, just leaving behind an 'abundance of collections [...] put into no methodical order' (143). The punctuated and spatially separated snapshots in *Paris* give a visual impression of such a collection of individual objects not yet fully connected into a narrative.

She mentions that two eminent antiquaries (Anthony Wood and Humphrey Wanley) 'came near to wrecking their university careers through their inability to grasp the rudiments of logic', as logic is repugnant to antiquaries. 'Logic' she writes, 'is a manifestation of what Jung calls "the Logos" [namely the psychological principle that brings order out of chaos], and antiquarianism is the least "Apolline" of disciplines' (143). The antiquarian approach to history, fragmented and concrete, relates to a hypothetical device Mirrlees describes in 'Listening in to the Past' that would allow one to listen in on snippets of speech from the past. Mirrlees says she would be interested in such a device not as much because of her love of the past as much as her love of a kaleidoscope, as the unwieldy fragments of speech would hardly be organised into a coherent 'history lesson', as she phrases it, rather the device would be 'an aural kaleidoscope' of different languages, snippets of everything from famous lines by Goethe to 'the hoarse shriek of an English newspaper boy shouting out last year's Derby winner' (670). With its fragmented collage of snapshots, *Paris* appears to perform the function of such a device, with snippets of famous literary lines and of newspapers being hawked on the street springing to mind. Although published decades before *A Fly in Amber*, this idea of an unwieldy and fragmentary kaleidoscopic portal into history, contrasting with a 'history lesson', echoes her distinction between the chaotic collections of antiquaries and the 'prose poem' of historians.

Another echo is also apparent in the way she goes on, in 'Listening in to the Past', to make a distinction between literature and the law, arguing that the law constitutes the better

window into the past because of the way it tells us of old, homely customs and ‘details of everyday doings’. Again, the ‘solid core of history’ with which antiquaries are concerned, and the snapshots in *Paris* of everyday phenomena such as little boys riding round and round on wooden horses, snippets of cafe and nightlife conversation, advertising posters and ‘hidden courts’ away from the main tourist attractions of the city come to mind. After hypothesising about this ‘aural kaleidoscope’, Mirrlees resignedly concedes that ‘Yes, the written word, I fear, inadequate though it be, will never be superseded as the best means of telling us about the past’ (670). Echoing her wish that poets could preserve the present tangibly, and her admiration for Maria Blanchard’s visual imagination which reaches beyond the verbal, this suggests a wish that such a kaleidoscopic window onto history were possible – a wish that *Paris* could be seen as an attempt to realise.

‘The least Apolline’ implies, importantly, a closer affinity with the Dionysian, which Harrison associates with primitive, pre-Olympian, ritualistic religion. The physical immediacy of collecting material objects in order to perform the antiquarian magic of restoring the past and preserving the present shares with ritual a focus on the immediately palpable, on desire, and on doing. This focus in Mirrlees’s antiquarianism, as discussed in Chapter 1, section 4.2, centres on the possibility of making the past suddenly tangible real, which for Mirrlees can take a person into the realm of the mystical, the numinous, which defies verbal articulation. As Mirrlees writes in ‘Listening in to the Past’, ‘A swift, fleeting sense of the past is as near as I have ever got to a mystical experience’ (670). In this sense, too, antiquarianism is aligned with the Dionysian, which represents mystical communion, whereas the Apollonian powers of order, clarity, separation, but also illusion, are channelled through historian scholarship which makes sense of the material circumstances of events, reducing them to a pleasing, coherent narrative. As Section 7 will argue, *Paris* engages the reader in a ritualistic experience, combining both myth and act through an engagement with the poem’s thematic and physical performance of ritual. The reader is offered a mystical experience of connecting to the past inscribed in the poem. Fragments of this past are collected and presented by Mirrlees the antiquary, who is also the *flâneuse* in the poem’s urban journey and ritual initiate or high priest invoking the past and expressing the desire for spiritual renewal.

It should be noted that just as antiquarianism for Mirrlees is not history, nor is it sentimental longing for the past or passing. Mirrlees writes that following Bacon’s definition of antiquities as ‘some fragments of time’, several antiquaries took to comparing time to a shipwreck (*A Fly in Amber* 93). ‘But’, she says, ‘the antiquaries (even the romantic ones),

although they know that they are shipwrecked are too busy salvaging to be sentimental. And with dry eyes and alertly practical curiosity they watch the dissolving views of the present, it is the solid core of history that focuses their attention' (93). Mirrlees's tone in *Paris* is similarly never sentimental. She presents her snapshots with little commentary, merely documenting the circumstances she wishes to convey to posterity.

## **7 Materiality and space plus magical utterance: *Paris* as an integrated ritual performance**

The rest of this chapter will consider how the dynamics of space and time in ritual theory feed into the highly visual, concrete use of typography in *Paris*. The result, I argue, is that the poem demands that the reader engage with it in a way that always re-makes the work of art, highlighting the act of reading, too, as a ritual act, and the reader as a participant.

Artefacts do not speak, they simply exist as material objects in space, the not only solid but also silent core of history. *Paris* highlights its own thingness and materiality in a number of ways. Not only does its material form convey its physical, amateur crafting process, the concrete elements in the poem also frequently encroach on, impede or inform the reading voice. This spatial emphasis shows Mirrlees taking poetry out of the purely verbal realm and showing it to belong equally to the visual, tangible realm of material culture. This visual and tangible approach to writing echoes her portrayal of Cotton and his primary interest in the visual and tangible aspects of the manuscripts he preserved. It also roots her in the hand-printing tradition begun by Morris, that 'painterly' writer (in Mirrlees's words) who, as noted above, sometimes filled up pages with poetry simply for the visual aesthetic effect.

In line with the concerns of these two key figures in the evolution of the book, *Paris* highlights the nature of the poem as a spatial object. It marks an enormous distance from the voice-centred poem in its use of conventions specific to print. One is ellipses, used frequently, which limit speech and even point to the unsayable. Asterisks and borders are similarly impossible to convey verbally. Another is variable margins, which give no clue as to their verbal translation. Endnotes (two years before Eliot's use of footnotes) are similarly a purely visual convention belonging to print. They are in all likelihood not meant to be read aloud, and in any case cannot be integrated into the points of the poem which they explicate during the reading process. As Ong writes, 'orally presented sequences are always occurrences in time, impossible to "examine", because they are not presented visually but rather are utterances

which are heard.' Texts, on the other hand, being 'thing-like, immobilized in visual space', are 'subject to what Goody calls "backward scanning"' (113). End notes are an especially good example of texts calling for 'backward scanning', that is, jumping around in a text to re-examine missed points. These bibliographic elements move the poem out of the purely oral-aural context and make vision (and the physical activity of moving between endnotes and the main text) equally important to fully experiencing the poem. The effect is that the poem refuses to exist exclusively on a temporal plane, something that could merely be read out and memorised and stored intangibly in the abstract mental realm. Greg's hierarchy of 'substantials' and 'accidentals', discussed at the beginning of this chapter, is challenged as here the accidentals, the embodiment of the 'message' of the poem is crucially bound up with and partially constitutes the 'message'. The poem's materiality is foregrounded and, because of the control Mirrlees had during the production process – and because of the sensitivity of Virginia Woolf to the materiality of the printed word – impossible to ignore or suppress.<sup>30</sup> The act of reading the poem must happen in a specific place: the physical space of the poem.

## 7.1 Myth and temporality in *Paris*

Making place and spatial experience crucial to reading the poem creates one half of the conditions for a ritual experience. In Harrison, as discussed above, the ritual act arises concurrently with the myth, the sacred speech. Speech and myth, as this chapter has aimed to convey, are temporal phenomena and bring order to spatial fragments. In her biography of Cotton, when pointing out the ineptitude, among antiquaries, for creating a chronological narrative, Mirrlees asks, 'How can one build a well-knit fabric from materials as broken, fragmentary, and defaced as are antiquities?' She explains that 'although the antiquaries could sometimes weave their facts into a tissue, they were rarely capable of giving to them a pattern, the spiritual logic, without which a book cannot be a work of art' (148; 143-4). This inability to create order, as noted above, was what distinguished them from historians who were capable of making of historical events a 'prose poem'. In an unpublished, undated essay

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<sup>30</sup> By contrast, McGann considers how Emily Dickinson, writing over half a century earlier, lacked any substantial control over the printing process, and as a result her work was printed in a way that ignores her formal innovations (*Black Riders* 26-41).

entitled 'The Buckets. The Vegetation King. George Ferrers',<sup>31</sup> Mirrlees refers to herself as 'a historian of antiquaries', indicating that she, despite being a self-confessed 'Romantic antiquary', at least considered herself to be in possession of the story-telling ability of a historian.

Mirrlees can be seen as following in the footsteps of her mentor, who rejected the 'prose-poem', linguistic approach to classicism (the 'din of words' promoted by Arnold and others), basing her classicism on the physical evidence of archaeology. Just as Harrison nonetheless connected fragmented pictorial depictions on shards of ancient poetry into an extensive, coherent theory of religion and art, Mirrlees does manage to build the broken, fragmented snapshots of her time into a meaningful fabric. Rather than lacking any sense of order, the collection of disjointed snapshots that make up *Paris* are tied together by a certain temporality – that of ritual. As discussed in Chapter 2, following Harrison's description of ritual, the poem shows a progression from day to night to dawn, from death to life (images of death, descent into the underworld, and mourning are replaced by babies being born, and image of the 'stark and stiff' spirit of the year is replaced by the image of the fertile moon). As discussed in Section 8 of Chapter 2, the poem also shows the passage of time through spring in the lines which flowers – crocuses, chionodoxa, lily of the valley and dog-roses – are presented in the order in which they bloom; the passage from life to art and mythology is furthermore indicated, in the lines 'whatever happens one day it will look beautiful / Clio is a great French painter', which shows the poem in transition, journeying through the liminal space between life and art. As also mentioned in Chapter 2, numerous instances of the word 'soon' also give the impression of anticipation, waiting, indicating the passage of time. The collection of fragments thus represents a process rather than a static arrangement. The process is a concrete one, building the collection into the semblance of a narrative without allowing the temporal element to dominate.

As the logic of this narrative can perhaps only be seen in hindsight, it echoes Harrison's description of myth in which 'each step in the ritual action is shadowed as it were by a fresh interjection, till the whole combines into a consecutive tale' (*Themis* 330). These

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<sup>31</sup> While the essay is undated, in it she mentions something written by Charles Péguy 'in the last war', implying that the essay was written between the wars or during the Second, as Péguy died in the First World War.

'fresh interjections', Harrison explains (using as an example the Rutuburi dance), are such as the following:

The Blue Squirrel ascends the tree and whistles.  
The plants will be growing and the fruit will be ripening,  
And when it is ripe it falls to the ground. (330)

Several lines in the poem display a similar brevity and express a similar theme of change and approaching events, for example the following three sets of lines:

'Pigeons perch on statues / And are turned into stone';

'Soon / Dog-roses will stare at wanes and pilgrimages'

'The Ballet of green Butterflies / Will soon begin.'

A real sense of unity and order among the fragments only emerges at the end of the poem, with the dawn and new life and fertility. Rather than having the smooth continuity of a myth born out of what Mirrlees refers to as 'Apolline' historicising, this description of myth can, again, be seen as being closer to the antiquarian process of collection, as the ritual narrative, only builds up fragment by fragment. The constellation, while most notably a private message to Harrison, could also be a reference to Mallarme's constellation at the end of *Un Coup de Des* which symbolises order arising in hindsight from the world of endless chance represented by a throw of the dice.

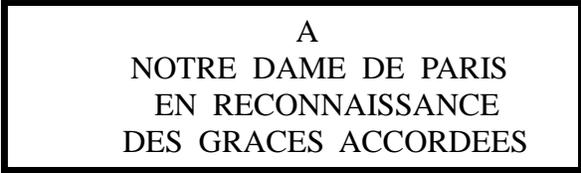
As discussed in Chapter 2, the myth or word desired – the holophrase – is a magical word that would give coherence to the situation at hand. But rather than a disembodied word or pronouncement, the all-embracing utterance takes the form of a spatialised, visual and visionary journey through the city and, mirroring this, a journey *of* the text, as it speeds up and slows down, takes a few steps, stops, then carries on, falls dramatically down the page and so on. The poem's typography thus reflects Harrison's and Mirrlees's emphasis on space and embodiment, as the next section will show.

## 7.2 Typographical space in *Paris*: a ritual performance on the page

Can we wonder that a classical writer should say ‘the statues of the craftsmen of old times are the relics of ancient dancing.’[...] ‘Drawing,’ says a modern critic, ‘is at bottom, like all the arts, a kind of gesture, a method of dancing on paper.’<sup>32</sup>

This observation by Harrison in 1913, highlighting the connection between the embodied ritual dance and the arts that sprung from it, anticipates Mirrlees’s dramatic typographic gesture in *Paris*. Just as Harrison highlighted the spatial act of ritual and presence of the body in ancient religion, Mirrlees makes space and the body of the text an equal counterpart to speech in enacting the ritual of the poem. The poem contains, throughout, a tension, even a conflict, between being a poem that is meant to be read aloud, concentrated on a verbal message, and one that almost cannot be read aloud – one in which words can only be taken in in conjunction with, inseparable from, their concrete arrangement and appearance on the page, so the experience of reading cannot be fully conveyed verbally. Rather, an integrated spatial-temporal experience of non-linear seeing and speaking/hearing must be undergone.

This tension is evident immediately upon opening the book. The first lines of the poem are set in a frame:



A  
NOTRE DAME DE PARIS  
EN RECONNAISSANCE  
DES GRACES ACCORDEES

As suggested in Chapter 2, these framed lines bring to line a votive plaque outside a church (as Briggs notes (‘HMCM’ 287)) as well as the votive plaques Harrison finds on many vases she analyses, framing the depiction of the ritual action, or the god itself (*Themis* 148, 298, 304-6). The frame thus signifies a historical context that words cannot, reflecting the way historical meanings are carried by ornamental features in pre-Raphaelite works (McGann 77). The frame works as part of the system of juxtaposition in the poem which was discussed in Chapter 2, placing the ancient alongside the modern, the pagan alongside the Catholic, fusing the two,

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<sup>32</sup> Harrison, *AAR* (108). Here she quotes firstly from Athenaeus and then from her friend D. S. MacColl’s ‘A Year of Post-Impressionism’ (1912).

and does this in a non-verbal capacity. The frame is a palimpsest in itself, being at once a 'primitive' sacred ornamental feature and a more recent religious ornament – a plaque outside a Catholic church – as well as pointing to a new incarnation of the religions it builds on.<sup>33</sup>

On the next page, usually referred to as the first page, we notice the zig zagging of the margins, the jolts of the changes in typeface, before we read lines like 'NORD-SUD', the name of the Paris metro line, and words from advertising posters, indicating she is on the metro describing sights on the way. The jolts in typography enact what the meanings of words convey, creating an integrated performance of speech and act which the reader must re-enact through an integrated seeing and speaking/hearing experience. Similarly, the line 'ZIG ZAG' refers to an advertising poster (for tobacco), but also verbally confirms the movement we already sensed visually from merely looking at the passage. Here, Harrison's description of the integrated ritual act appears to be realised. Ritual, in Harrison, begins with a desire – in *Paris*, the holophrase – which 'grows and accumulates by inhibition, till at last the exasperated nerves and muscles can bear it no longer; it breaks out into anticipatory action' (*Ancient Art and Ritual* 20) and the result is at first a 'vague excited dance' to relieve emotion (35). The first page, in the movement and verbal meaning of the words, contains this sense of desire and 'exasperated nerves and muscles' and also somewhat resembles a 'vague excited dance'. The 'savage' in a ritual dance, Harrison says, 'only utters with his mouth what he enacts with his shambling, shuffling feet, the emotions and sensations he feels' (*Themis* 330). The shambling, shuffling margins and metric feet do exactly that – enact the sensation of the metro ride and the anxiety felt by the speaker.

The typographically frantic first page ends with the line 'I can't / I must go slowly', which is followed by this slow movement of the words across the page.

The	Tuilleries	are	in	a	trance
Because		the	painters	have	
stared	at	them	so	long	

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<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 2 (Section 7) for my suggestion of how these lines leave open the question of who the deity is that they are addressing.

Again, we notice this slowed down pace (the 'eye' really does go slowly) as or even before we read words like 'trance' and 'stared at them so long' which verbally also convey this sense of slowness. The visuality of the passage is also mirrored in its references to painting and staring.

Chapter 2 discussed the way the line 'CONCORDE', signifying arriving at a place and also at peace (the Peace Conference after the War), is what leads to this deceleration, as for the speaker it is too soon to arrive at this destination; there must first be a transition, a rite of passage leading to it. The typographically decelerated passage following the frenzied first page shows this resistance to rushing forward and enacts the escape from the 'march of time' that this chapter has shown to be central to Mirrlees's ideas of Romanticism and antiquarianism. The first sentence rushes on headlong like the speeding metro without punctuation but then pauses at the end of the page and proceeds with slower steps, and only ends after a slightly dizzying passage which, together with the foregoing elements of ritual desire, alcohol (advertised on posters) and trance can be seen to create the necessary conditions for the ritual initiate to 'pass out of the actual, sensible, "objective" world, into that other world of dream, of ecstasy, of trance' (*Themis* 512) – the liminal fairyland of ritual:

Little boys in black overalls whose hands, stick with  
play, are like the newly furled leaves of the horse-  
chestnuts ride round and round on wooden horses till  
their heads turn.

These lines again display visually what we then read and process verbally. It is a tightly wound, quickly moving passage in contrast to the preceding lines, heightened by the presence of a hyphen which speeds up the transition even more from one line to the next, sticking the lines together as if they comprised a folded linked chain. This movement is also conveyed through the language of the stanza: the phrases 'ride round and round', 'till their heads turn'; words like 'furled', suggesting being wound up, folded, closing tightly around itself, the way the stanza is concretely arranged, and 'sticky', mirror the way the stanza sticks tightly together. It rides round and round and the speaker's (and possibly the reader's) head is turned.

Further into the poem, the passage showing the temporal movement of the season through flowers also suggests movement through space, bringing to mind footsteps moving forward and stopping in a way that parallels the sense of chronological sequence and waiting signified verbally:

Far away in gardens  
 Crocuses,  
 Chionodoxa, the Princess in a Serbian fairy-tale,  
 Then  
 The goldsmith's chef d'œuvre—lily of the valley,  
 Soon  
 Dog-roses will stare at gypsies, wanes and pilgrimages  
 All the time  
 Scentless Lyons' roses,  
 Icy,  
 Plastic,  
 Named after the wives of mayors. . . .

As discussed in Chapter 2, this passage can be seen as giving poetic form to the Eniautos-Daimon which is composed of seasons, or Horae, of whom Harrison says 'their virtue, their very being, was in the flowers and fruits they always carry in their hands' (185). As the flowers are named in the order that they bloom, there is a progression through phases of time, which is mirrored in the way the longer lines are separated by pauses, enacting a rhythmic choreography of running, stopping and holding, and running again. The passage thus enacts the idea of embodied time that Harrison expresses through the figure of the Eniautos-Daimon.<sup>34</sup> The two one-word lines 'Icy, / Plastic,' isolated by their commas and capital first letters, appear more static than the others, which mirrors the stasis that the words verbally convey.

Space is also made to powerfully signify beyond the power of the verbal through the poem's presentation of advertising slogans and snippets of conversation or other speech, which are mainly recognisable as such because of the way they are set apart from the rest of the text by typography. Here again the visual speaks as loudly as the verbal, and in this use of typography *Paris* anticipates, notably, Louis Aragon's collaged advertisements in *Le Paysan de Paris*.

This emphasis on the visual makes reading aloud difficult because of the problem of determining pace – how slowly or quickly would you read these collections of lines (which

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<sup>34</sup> See Section 3.1 above for a discussion of the eniautos as embodied time.

cannot all strictly be called stanzas) aloud? Some lines take this difficulty much further, to where it interferes with the ability to read aloud at all:

Secrets  
exquisite      significant  
fade            plastic

How is this meant to be read? Left to right or top to bottom? Is 'Secrets' meant to be read twice? The ambiguity of verbalisation in these lines makes it almost impossible to commit them to oral/aural memory to recite at will.

The climax of this conflict between the voice and the eye is the vertical line:

T  
h  
e  
r  
e  
i  
s  
n  
o  
l  
i  
l  
y  
o  
f  
t  
h  
e  
v  
a  
l  
l  
e  
y

Firstly, reading aloud is problematic here because we are not accustomed to reading vertically and because the gaps between the words are very small, and just making one's way down without knowing what will follow will inevitably produce a rather inarticulate-sounding reading. Secondly, once a reader has figured out what the line says, how does he/she render it

verbally? Extremely slowly? As a sort of inchoate wail? This problem is similarly foreshadowed by the words 'Thick halting speech—' preceding this line – these words themselves being, as well, halted by a long dash. The anticipation of this moment is revealed in these lines which also produce a 'halting' oral reading:

What time  
Subaqueous  
Cell on cell  
Experience  
Very slowly  
Is forming up

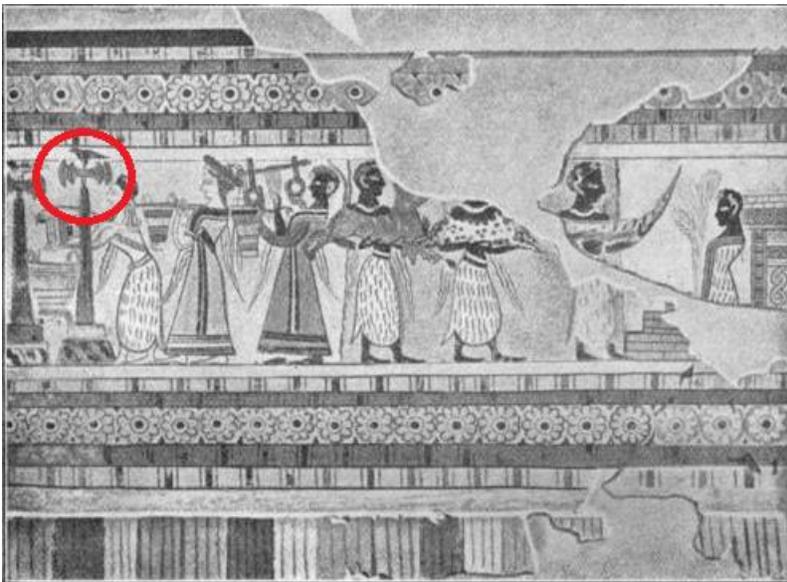
Here the sense of waiting conveyed in the words is amplified in the way that the words are stacked up, a visual analogue of the line 'Cell on cell', taking one 'Very slowly' to whatever 'Is forming up'. The next line (before 'Thick halting speech') is 'The coming to . . . . .', the extended ellipses signifying the long silence of someone regaining consciousness. After 'Thick halting speech—' we are halted almost completely from speech by the long vertical line, but first are made to feel the immenseness of this silence, by reading the rest of the line after the dash: 'the curse of vastness', which is followed by the vastness of white space surrounding the vertical line.

This disruption of speech by images is encapsulated by the line 'The Scarlet Woman shouting BYRRH and deafening / St John at Patmos'. Julia Briggs, in her annotation of the poem, writes that this line is a rejection of the Logos, the Logos being a unifying principle which is also the Word of God discussed by St John, among others before him. The fragmentation of the poem disrupts the all-embracing, unifying use of the word, and this line can be taken in some ways as encapsulating Mirrlees's poetic gesture. Here we have an image, drowning out the spoken word.<sup>35</sup> Another instance of the power of the word being undercut directly by something literally said in the poem is the line 'H u s s h' which of course (besides being problematic to read out loud because the letters are a space apart and there are three 's's'), means 'do not speak' – which is amplified by the fact that the next 'line' is a bar of music, marking another obstacle for the reading voice.

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 7, for this image.

The signifying power of space in the poem highlights writing and seeing as much as speech and hearing as part of the ritual process. In other ways as well, the ritual process is distinctly connected to writing. The figure of Pere Lachaise who was considered in Chapter 2 (Section 8) to represent a ritual May King figure is hung with the materials of writing: paper and letters. He is hung with paper wreaths, and has a letter – ‘H’ – on the curtain he wears. The H is furthermore embroidered, conjuring an image rather than the sound of the letter; this image is amplified by the fact that the letter H is ‘hache’ in French which also means ‘axe’,<sup>36</sup> and the letter H indeed bears a visual resemblance to an ancient Greek double axe, a sacred object in rain-making ceremonies, as seen from the following image in *Themis* (161):



Similarly linking processes of ritual to writing, when the rain does arrive, the word 'Rain' is preceded by the long vertical line. The allusion to Apollinaire's calligramme 'Il Pleut' ('It's raining') in *Calligrammes* (1918) is evident:

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<sup>36</sup> Briggs provides this translation information ('HMCM' 294).

# IL PLEUT

il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir  
écoutez tomber les liens qui se retiennent en haut et en bas  
écoutez riller pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique  
écoutez ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires  
écoutez ces nuages aussi qui pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie où routelettes  
écoutez ces nuages aussi qui pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie où routelettes

Soon after the rain, the Eiffel Tower becomes 'two dimensional / Etched on thick white paper', which also brings to mind Apollinaire's 'La Tour Eiffel'. The highlighted materiality of Apollinaire's calligrammes is alluded to in the reference to 'thick white paper', and to craft in the word 'etched'. As with Pere Lachaise's embroidered letter and paper wreaths, the poem makes writing a target of its regenerative ritual. Apollinaire's experiments are potentially been presented as part of what Harrison sees as modern art's return to ritual. This linking of the ritual to the avant-garde emphasis on the performative materiality of words may also have to do with a view of the 'primitive' word – the holophrase desired by the speaker – as especially

alive and potent. The next section will explore this dimension of the desire for the holophrase – what this desire could suggest in terms of typography.

## 8 Typography of the holophrase: printing the primitive

While Mirrlees is heir to Morris in looking back to early printing for a model to think about the crafted materiality of written language, she follows Harrison in looking even further back, to the ‘primitive’ word, which was considered in a discussion of the holophrase in Chapter 2, Section 3. The next three subsections will consider the way the typography of *Paris* forms part of the poem’s expression of desire for the magical primitive word. Subsection 8.1 considers the way in which Mirrlees, in other writings, intimates a sense of writing as magical, which can be seen as rooted in a conception of primitive language as magical. Subsection 8.2 invokes Marshall McLuhan’s notion of how the transition from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilised’ societies involves a separation of the senses of sight and hearing, which entails a loss of the magical power of words. Subsection 8.3 uses McLuhan to consider the way the typewriter may have been instrumental to the excavation of a lost magical performativity of language in *Paris*.

### 8.1 Sacraments and ‘light winged things’: performativity and the primitive word

In her unpublished essay on mythology (Mirrlees papers 6/3/4), Mirrlees imagines the emergence of Hermes, the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, as a daimon projected from the commonly held ‘attitude of the Ancients to speech’. As discussed in Chapter 2, this attitude involves a belief in words as magical, and speech as a sacrament wielding ‘winged’ words, ‘tiny living creatures, quivering with power, & such of them as were malicious, own cousins to the Keres’. Her comment that ‘in Homer there lies this carefulness of the manipulator of Mana – of someone to whom it is of vital importance to say exactly what he means’ echoes Harrison’s description of the sanctity and mana of the speech belonging to ritual – the *mythos*. This conceptualisation lends language an integral power of its own whereby it cannot possibly be reduced to an invisible carrier of meaning. Instead, this view looks forward to the notion of speech as performative in the sense first described by J.L. Austin in 1962 in his seminal study, *How to Do Things With Words*. Here, to say is to do; rather than describing, words perform their meaning.

Referring to the ancients’ understanding of words as living creatures also highlights the materiality of the primitive word. Noting how Homer talks of ‘winged words’, she further

speculates that ‘perhaps Plato had in his mind some such connection between the popular conception of words and their wielder,<sup>37</sup> when he called poets “light winged things”’, adding to this conception of the primitive word as thing-like. As the following chapter will argue, the idea of words as active and material – as well as magical – reappears in *Lud*, where Mirrlees refers to the written word as a fairy. The duplicitous nature of fairies also disconnects words from ‘truth’ or ‘reality’, giving them a life of their own.

The notion of particularly the written word as a fairy is echoed in Mirrlees’s unpublished essay ‘Time & Gold’. As discussed in Chapter 1, magic is considered here as ‘an unnatural mating of the tangible and intangible’, epitomised in the phrase ‘time is money’, and consoles us for the fact that the two cannot really be fused: ‘the word can never, never be made flesh’. Mirrlees then proceeds to provide such magical consolation (attempting to make the word flesh) by embarking on a fantasy in which time and gold are ‘unnaturally mated’. (Charles Lamb is retrospectively endowed with a fortune.) What emerges from this strange essay is the sense of the ‘word’ as equated with the ‘intangible’ (which can never be made flesh) while its written form – demonstrated in Mirrlees’s fanciful text – is its representation which realises the thing desired in the ‘flesh’ the same way a magical ritual performance pre-does or re-does the thing desired. Mirrlees can thus be seen as positing writing as a form of magical ritual. The magical enactment of ritual in *Paris* highlights this fusion of the tangible with the intangible, which is key to magic and at the root of writing, as the text is given a strikingly tangible and active feel: the ‘tiny living creatures’ of ‘primitive’ speech, ‘quivering with power’ become quite alive and quivering on Mirrlees’s page. The search for the holophrase – a primitive word – can thus be seen to enlist the poem’s typography to express the active materiality of sacred ‘primitive’ language.

The unconventional use of space also helps to create a ritualistic atmosphere simply by way of its strangeness, which produces an ‘alienation effect’ similar to Morris’s,<sup>38</sup> and which studies on anthropology show is a typical feature of the language of rituals, which is often

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<sup>37</sup> Presumably referring to the way that mana, as a magical force in nature, can reside in objects, sacred words and actions, absorbed by ritual participants (cf for example *Themis* 64-72, 329). An overlapping description of mana is made decades later by Marcel Mauss (133-150) in which he elaborates on the performative character of mana as magical act or ability to act magically.

<sup>38</sup> See Section 5.2.3 in the previous chapter.

archaic or foreign, not natural-sounding (Sørensen 88-90). The line 'brekekekek coax coax' could work as an example of this in *Paris*; the bilingual aspect of the poem – especially the use of brand names which may not be recognised in Britain where the poem was printed – may also add to this 'strangeness' in sound. To match this sound, the look of the page compounds this sense of strangeness in language that goes with magic. The outlandish look of the pages thus complements the theme of magic in that the written form of the poem is assimilated into the realm of unusual language that belongs to ritual. The idea of written language as strange and magical furthermore recalls Ong's description of the way writing tends to be regarded as 'artificial' or magical in a pre-literate society (*Orality and Literacy* 80-82). *Paris* can thus be seen, in its attempt to reach back to a 'primitive', magical use of language, to be making the written form of the poem part of this gesture. The next section will explore, with reference to Marshall McLuhan's understanding of the history of literacy, how the poem may thus be recovering an integration of the senses belonging to pre-literate culture.

## 8.2 Literacy and dis-/integration of the senses

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argues that the phonetic alphabet performs a 'unique separation of sight and sound from semantic and verbal content' (87), creating a 'breach between the visual and auditory experience of man'; this, he argues, has been the means of creating 'civilized' man (83). He writes that this split in experience 'releases the individual from the "tribal web" of an oral society (84-5) by 'freeing him from the tribal trance of resonating word magic and the web of kinship' (84). Other systems of writing, he argues, do not cause this split in experience:

pictographic and hieroglyphic writing as used in Babylonian, Mayan, and Chinese cultures represents an extension of the visual sense for storing and expediting access to human experience. All these forms give pictorial expression of oral meanings. (87)

The ideogram, he argues, is an inclusive gestalt, not an analytic dissociation of senses and functions like phonetic writing (84). Only in writing using a phonetic alphabet do 'connected lineal sequences' become 'pervasive forms of psychic and social organization'. The phonetic alphabet involves 'breaking up of every kind of experience into uniform units in order to produce faster action' (85).

*Paris*, in its deployment of space to direct or challenge the straightforward progress of the speaking voice, suggests an undoing of this effect of phonetic alphabet literacy, which,

following McLuhan, fits Mirrlees into a larger context of writers trying to undo the disintegrating effects of literacy:

Literate man undergoes much separation of his imaginative, emotional, and sense life, as Rousseau (and later the Romantic poets and philosophers) proclaimed long ago. Today the mere mention of D.H. Lawrence will serve to recall the twentieth-century efforts made to by-pass literate man in order to recover human 'wholeness'. (*Understanding Media* 88)

*Paris*, this chapter has attempted to show, joins the activity of the eye to that of the voice, sometimes by having them work in consort, sometimes by conspicuously opposing them. The holophrase, the 'primitive' all-embracing word, implies this wholeness of experience, the integration of different sense-experience in language.

The holophrase, as a pre-literate word, could thus also be seen as desired for its potential to undo the sequential, linear rationality of the phonetic alphabet and the 'pervasive forms of psychic and social organization' attached to it, and slow down the fast-flowing uniform progression that McLuhan argues is intrinsic to the phonetic alphabet. This would enact Mirrlees's vision of Romanticism: breaking out of the plot and escaping the march of Time, and the non-linear, non-uniform typographical caprices in *Paris* appear to be transferring this vision onto the page. The next section considers the historical role of the typewriter in creating the conditions enabling Mirrlees to experiment with space in *Paris*.

### 8.3 'Performance as composition': the typewriter and the primitive word on the page

'The typewriter', McLuhan writes, 'fuses composition and publication, causing an entirely new attitude to the written and printed word' (*Understanding Media* 260). As the poet at the typewriter 'commands the resources of the printing press' (260), he or she can control the spatial layout of his or her writing, and as Charles Olson says, rephrased in McLuhan, 'for the first time, the poet has the stave and the bar that the musician had' (259). While no manuscript of *Paris* has survived, it is clear from a number of early texts by Mirrlees that she worked on a typewriter early in her writing career.<sup>39</sup> Even if *Paris* was not typed, she was in any case able

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<sup>39</sup> For example 'The Ballad and the Ritual Dance' (1913); a list of personae dramatis, 'Happy Families' featuring some of the members of the Mirrlees family and presumably their friends (the manuscript is dated 1917, while

to '[command] the resources of the printing press' throughout its production because of her collaboration with Virginia Woolf, whose hand-printing venture gave her the freedom to experiment with and control – in McKenzie's terms – the 'accidentals' of her work, which a more mainstream commercial printer of the day may have completely effaced through assimilation to a uniform house style.

McLuhan argues that the newfound control of typographical space reintroduces a performative element into poetry: 'seated at the typewriter, the poet, much in the manner of the jazz musician, has the experience of performance as composition. In the non-literate world, this had been the situation of the bard or minstrel' (260). 'The poet at the typewriter can do Nijinsky leaps or Chaplin-like shuffles and wiggles', he writes, and '[b]ecause he is an audience for his own mechanical audacities, he never ceases to react to his own performance. Composing on the typewriter is like flying a kite' (261). As explored above, this action and even dance-like movement is evident in the typography of *Paris*. The improvisory quality of writing with a typewriter that McLuhan draws attention to highlights the active process of writing, rather than the finished product, which resonates, as well, with *Paris*. In Chapter 1 (Section 5.5), Harrison's theory of art returning to ritual in the early twentieth century was linked to experimental writing that Marjorie Perloff has termed 'compositional'. The reading of *Paris* in this chapter associates Mirrlees with these poets – Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound – in the sense that the meaning of their work, Perloff argues, can be found in the process through which they are composed and experienced, rather than what they refer to.

The manipulation and frustrating limitation of the speaking voice in *Paris* can in light of McLuhan's insights into the historical role of the typewriter, be seen as resulting from the spatial control gained not only through control over the printing process – McGann's thesis – but also by the control afforded by the typewriter. McLuhan writes that 'the typewriter brought writing and speech and publication into close association' (262), which can be seen as facilitating a ritualistic intertwining of speech with action. On the effect of typographical space on the voice, he says that 'just how much the typewriter has contributed by its unjustified

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the typescript is undated); Mirrlees's translation, entitled 'The Invocation', of a poem by Anna de Noailles (1908).

right-hand margin to the development of vers libre would be hard to discover, but free verse was really a recovery of spoken, dramatic stress in poetry, and the typewriter encouraged exactly this quality' (261). *Paris* experiments with the effect of space on the voice, both liberating the speaking voice from speaking in traditional metres, spatially instructing the reader to read in new ways – for example slowly and then very quickly, fading with ellipses – and at other times restricting or distorting speech (for example, the vertical line producing an incoherent long monotonous wail with connotations of a ritual cry). This experimentation challenges the voice, forcing it to negotiate the workings of space in the poem, demonstrating Ong's observation (drawing on Mary Ellen Solt) that 'concrete poetry climaxes [...] the interaction of sounded words and typographic space.' Some of its displays of words can be 'viewed but not read aloud at all, but none [...] can be appropriated without some awareness of verbal sound. Even when concrete poetry cannot be read at all, it is still not merely a picture.' (129).

#### **8.4 Typographical space and reader participation: *Paris* as 'hand-held ritual'**

The performative nature of a typographically experimental poem is something that is first enacted by the poet but then re-enacted by the reader. Referring to Cummings's poem 'in Just-' McLuhan notes that the poem 'when read aloud with widely varying stresses and paces, will duplicate the perceptual process of its typewriting creator' (261). He points out the way the poet Charles Olson eloquently speaks of 'the power of the typewriter to help the poet to indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspension, even, of syllables' (259). The performance of *Paris* is similarly, in the first instance, Mirrlees's performance as composition, and after that it becomes the reader's re-enactment of the process. This demand for the reader's participation is also something the critic of visual poetry Willard Bohn notes. Of Apollinaire, he writes that 'by placing a number of stumbling blocks in the reader's way he forces him to earn the calligramme by inscribing himself in the economy of the poem. In the process of decoding the visual and verbal message(s) the reader must participate in the structures of signification that govern the text. The act of reading thus replicates the original act of creation' (Bohn 50). This heightening of participation can also be seen as integrating a participative aspect of oral literary culture. According to McLuhan, 'a basic aspect of any literate audience is its profound acceptance of a passive consumer role in the presence of book or film' which, he argues, contrasts with the response of a non-literate audience (*Gutenberg Galaxy* 38).

Bohn points out that in Apollinaire's quest to revolutionise the concept of writing but also of reading he is inseparable from a modern context of writers who demand the participation of the reader, and that this is part of a larger 'modern cultural experience and its preoccupation with process' (50).<sup>40</sup> McLuhan describes this modern development as a shift from 'hot media' to 'cool media' in the information media, the former being high in definition and pre-packaged information, not inviting much involvement, and the latter insisting on participation. He mentions a number of modernist writers – Gertrude Stein, Eliot, Pound, Cummings, Joyce – whose writing is at times 'a carefully devised strategy to get the passive visual reader into participant, oral action' (*Gutenberg Galaxy* 83).

As argued in Chapter 1, Harrison's ritual theory, with its emphasis on process and participation, is a clear progenitor of this modern cultural direction, a fact that Mirrlees, with her antiquarian eye for history in the making, seems to have noticed. Seeing how the poetry of Apollinaire, Reverdy and others published in *Nord-Sud* was recrossing the ritual bridge in its performative use of space, she highlights this performative use of space in her own poem, making the connection between this type of form and ritual, and at the same time has this moment of experimentation inscribed into a hand-made book, creating a physical artefact of that moment. It is a rare artefact that demands of the reader the willingness to treat it as an esoteric relic and uncover its palimpsest of historical allusions. It asks to be approached the way McKenzie approaches the 'hand-held theatre' of William Congreve's typographically performative Restoration play: readers are invited to treat *Paris* as an excavated 'hand-held ritual' and undergo its concretely laid out journey and, like an amateur archaeologist, discover the underlying ritual.

## 9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show that *Paris*'s ritual performance also plays out on the physical level of the text and book. A key notion in this analysis has been Harrison's reading of ritual as involving, equally, both body and voice, corresponding to the experiential categories of space and time. Echoing Harrison, Mirrlees highlights the concrete and spatial

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 5 for my consideration of examples of this broader trend across different art forms.

way in which antiquarians record history, as opposed to how historians record it temporally through a story. Mirrlees's commitment to the history of antiquarianism and her identification of herself as an antiquarian invites a reading of *Paris* as an antiquarian gesture. It is a collection of elements of her present – which as an antiquarian she sees as history in the making. With *Paris* she preserves the present and thus practices the 'magic' of antiquarianism, providing future readers the potential mystical experience of a 'swift, fleeting sense of the past'. Just as Mirrlees highlights that such an experience is a physical, tangible one, the poem, too, inscribes its history physically: it points to its own laboriously crafted construction, and invokes the new visual style of much avant-garde poetry that marked high literary culture of the period. Furthermore, on a Harrisonian view, a mystical, ritualistic experience – both for Mirrlees the writer and for future readers of her poem – must involve both categories of experience that belong to a ritual performance, that is, space and time, and *Paris* demonstrates this integration of the temporal and spatial. The temporal outline of a ritual, and its mythical meanings, were discussed in Chapter 2; this chapter has shown how the poem displays the physical dimension of ritual with its highly visible, active, performative typography. What Mirrlees creates is thus an integrated performance, a performance which readers must recreate as they experience the poem, as Bohn put it 'inscribing him[or her-]self in the economy of the poem'. The poem can in this way be seen to gesture towards the condition that Chapter 1 argued constituted, for Mirrlees, the 'magic' of Catholicism, that is, the fusing of the esoteric and exoteric.

Through its signification of a historical context through its tangible bibliographic features, this chapter has argued, *Paris* lends itself to the sort of textual and literary analysis pioneered by book historians and textual critics like McKenzie, McGann and Bornstein. This research raises the importance of a text's 'bibliographic code' to the same level as its 'linguistic code' and in doing so pays increased attention to the material circumstances surrounding the production of texts. As Mirrlees herself highlights these circumstances in *Paris*, crafting the poem as a self-conscious artefact of her time, this direction in criticism would seem to provide a highly fruitful context in which to bring *Paris* to light and celebrate its position in the history of the book. As argued in this chapter, the poem displays and records a shift towards a greater emphasis on the visual in literature; moreover, it marks a highly original intersection between this shift and Harrison's theory of ritual, which, as Chapter 1 argued, can function in hindsight as a lens through which to understand and bring together a

number of key aesthetic, cultural and philosophical developments of the early twentieth century.

The emphasis on materiality in the poem conveys, as discussed in Chapter 1, a mistrust of language as a means of representing lived experience, especially experience that lies beyond the rational: mysticism, dreams, unconscious emotions, desires and fears, recalling Harrison's emphasis on ritual over its aetiological, representational products – theology and art. The language of myth, on the other hand, does not attempt to explain; it is part of the ritual expression of emotion and has its roots in the liminal mental states associated with ritual. The following chapter will consider how these attitudes towards language lead to a championing of the fantasy genre. Here, again, Mirrlees's 'magical' antiquarianism is key to her literary approach, as the roots of fantasy must be excavated both within the narrative of the novel and by Mirrlees herself, through a delicately spun web of intertextual allusions to fantasy writing over the centuries.

## Chapter 4: Ritual and the land of heart's desire: Mirrlees's fantastic Romanticism in *Lud-in-the-Mist*

### 1 Introduction

The previous chapter considered how *Paris*'s typographical adventure points to a conceptualisation of language as an embodied material rather than an invisible conveyer of meaning. As noted, the modern literary preoccupation with the self-reflexivity of language has been traced by Jerome McGann to the late nineteenth-century Renaissance of Printing – highlighting the role of William Morris in this movement – due to the way in which writers from this period onward (Pound being an important heir of Morris's) gained control over the physical production of their texts. McGann argues that handling the material manifestation of language in the form of type produced a heightened sense of language as a material, a thing, a technology, rather than a direct means of expressing reality. In *Paris*, the physical layout of type carries meanings of its own beyond the verbal, working together with the verbal message of the poem but not subordinated to it. The use of language in the poem, as argued, is performative, magical and mystical in its physical enactment of ritual on the page and the map it supplies to readers to themselves enact the same ritual. In McGann's terms, this shows language engaged not in pointing to a referent in the world but rather in creating a world. *Lud-in-the Mist*, this chapter argues, pushes this view of language one step further. Here not only is language (and written language in particular) shown to be duplicitous, 'a fairy', but what we do with words, the stories we tell, are shown to be equally fictitious. As well as being a main theme of the novel, this is something the novel demonstrates by highlighting its own fictionality through intertextual allusions to other fantasy works. The novel is, as this chapter shows, a self-reflexive fantasy about fantasy, defending the genre against declarations by certain leading modernists (including Hulme, Lawrence and the later Yeats) who dismiss writing that they consider not to deal with the 'real', writing they see as a flight from reality into fairyland. The novel argues the importance of fantasy in literature through links it makes between Harrison's ritual theory and the fantasy mode. This can be seen, firstly, in Mirrlees's historical research on Romanticism, in which she focuses on a certain strand of the tradition that mines Gothic fantasy, dream-vision and mystical experience and which, she argues, grew

out of ritual. Secondly, the novel can be read as deploying the Nietzschean concepts of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Socratic – a cornerstone of Harrison’s theory – to polemically argue a case for fantasy literature. Echoing the antiquarian gesture in *Paris*, Mirrlees’s ‘magical’ antiquarianism is key here to excavating as well as preserving what is suggested to be at the heart of fantasy writing: a mystical, mythic expression of emotion arising from the depths of the unconscious – the psychological source of ritual. Thus, this chapter explores how in *Lud-in-the Mist* Mirrlees continues her quest to recross the ritual bridge in writing.

## 2 Ritual and the ‘silver stream’ of fantasy in Mirrlees’s history of Romanticism

The strand of Romanticism Mirrlees strives to bring to light across much of her work connects writers whose works centre on dreams and the supernatural, the magical and frightening, and whose writing is metaphorical, symbolic rather than realist. This focus on experience beyond the rational can be seen to unite this ‘stream’ of Romanticism under the heading of fantasy.<sup>1</sup> It is a mode of writing that Mirrlees sees as rooted in ritual, which, this chapter argues, her own fantasy novel brings to the fore in its self-reflexive defence of the genre.

### 2.1 Ritual and fantasy: the creation of Fairyland

Mirrlees’s history of this strain of Romanticism begins, as briefly noted in Chapter 1, with medieval poetry, as shown in her unpublished 1913 essay ‘The Ballad and the Ritual Dance’, written while at Cambridge and presumably for Harrison.<sup>2</sup> Here Mirrlees argues that Christianity was the great emotional adventure of the Middle Ages, when ‘people were haunted by the longing for the mystical lover they believed they [sic] had in the skies’, which ‘helped to liberate love from the wheel of earthly activities and speed it on its way to poetry’. Religion was thus a sublimation of earthly passions and desire. But, she writes, while ‘liberating a vision imprisoned in carnal love, it did not in the main make for freedom. For it

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Timmerman (2-4), LeGuin (62) for definitions of the genre.

<sup>2</sup> Mirrlees’s interest in medieval fairy lore is also evident in her essay ‘Listening in to the past’ where she claims that when she wants to ‘listen to the past’ she turns to records of the witch trials in which, because of the level of domestic detail, ‘we are continuously getting whiffs of the homely acrid smell, like that of a peat fire, of the Scotland of James VI’ (670).

was moulded by the doctors into a squat stuffy creed that shut the shutters on the shadowy vistas'. Meanwhile, 'the border-people were slowly turning an old and shadowy vision of life itself into the substance of poetry'. This, she argues, explicitly basing her argument on Harrison, is when ballads arise, out of 'ritual songs and dances' (underlining in the original). She argues that this must be the case 'for the simple reason that it is ritual which is nearly always the chain that in the beginnings of things binds dance and song and music together'. She notes that in ballads like 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight', we can almost watch the process of a spell being changed into a ballad. She argues that fairy stories arise in the same way, noting their unmistakable similarities.

Ballads and fairy stories thus created Elfland, a frequent trope of ballad writers. Unlike Christianity and the poetry it inspired, Elfland is 'a place not only beyond the world, but beyond the ordered universe, a place outside the jurisdiction of the divine laws, and of which the strange happenings are noted by no Recording Angel'; 'There is nothing in the world as pagan as a real ballad, things just happen, and there is no moral pointed, no commentary made'. Mirrlees writes that 'In ballads like Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight, we can almost watch the process of changing a spell into a ballad – the dim outlines of a story are traced, phantom characters arise, and then they are all blown away, back into the inarticulate darkness.'

In this she points out that she disagrees with Yeats, for whom, according to Mirrlees, fairy stories spring directly out of life as they are the literature of a class 'for whom every incident in the old rut of birth, love, pain, and death has cropped up unchanged for centuries.' Not subscribing to this idea of an unvarying order of life events, and noting the absurdity of the plots of many ballads which also made it unlikely that they arose from life as it was actually lived, she argues that through ritual, a step removed from reality, medieval ritual participants were able to 'get a picture of the whole, so far from the real thing, to be sure, as to be a dance where "Lent and Love" go always hand in hand, and high adventure and summer romp together, and the fall of the leaf is the unerring harbinger of death'; and thus the ballad – a form central to the Romantic tradition – was born.

The imaginative creation of a separate realm to act as a setting for the fantastic connects directly to Harrison's writing on primitive ritual. Drawing on the German ethnologist Paul Beck, Harrison describes the subjective secondary world created by the 'savage' out of his 'imagination, of his feelings, emotions, dreams' as well as 'all his remembrances of the

past, all his hopes and imaginings for the future'. It is the 'other world of dream, of ecstasy, of trance', a

supersensuous, supernatural world which is the eternity, the other world, of primitive religion; not an endlessness of time but a state removed from full sensuous reality, a world in which anything and everything may happen, a fairyland of heaven and hell, a world too peopled with demonic ancestors and liable to a 'once upon a time-ness' denied to the present. (512)

In her later work, *Epilegomena*, descriptions of the 'primitive mentality' for which Harrison had relied on anthropologists such as Levy-Bruhl are replaced by Jung's notion of 'dream or phantasy-thinking', as opposed to his 'directed thinking', and Freud's concept of the pleasure principle.<sup>3</sup> These types of thinking are now used by Harrison to describe the type of thinking that is 'engendered by the fertility rite', and from which 'primitive theology and mythology spring'. Building on her discussion in *Themis* on myth as the verbal expression of desire accompanying the ritual act, she writes here that

myth is not an attempted explanation of either facts or rites. Its origin is not in 'directed thinking,' it is not rationalization. The myth is a fragment of the soul life, the dream-thinking of the people, as the dream is the myth of the individual.<sup>4</sup> As Freud says, 'it is probably that myths correspond to the distorted residue of the wish phantasies of whole nations, the secularized dreams of young humanity'. [...] myth acts in such a way that it always reveals a wish-thought common to humanity and constantly rejuvenated. (XLViii)

This type of thinking, she writes, 'is typified by the mental operations of children and savages and by those of adults in their dreams, reveries and mental disorders'. It arises from the 'vital impulse' that for Harrison is at the root of all primitive ritual (XLViii),<sup>5</sup> and, turning away from the objective world, 'sets free subjective wishes' (XLVii). Rather than being

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<sup>3</sup> Although, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 3.5.2, as early as 1911 she suggests in her Introduction to *Themis* that 'the Olympians stand for articulate consciousness, the Eniautos-Daimon for the sub-conscious' (*Themis* 551).

<sup>4</sup> Here she footnotes a reference to an essay by the anthropologist W.H.R. Rivers entitled 'Dreams and Primitive Culture'.

<sup>5</sup> Here she suggests Jung's statement 'the gods are libido' be rephrased, substituting 'vital impulse' for 'libido' because of its 'offensive and misleading connotations' (XLViii). Jung indeed references Bergson in *Psychology of the Unconscious* which Harrison references in this section of the book, albeit without much commentary. The translator Beatrice M. Hinkle's Introduction to the 1917 edition of the book, however, remarks on the similarity between the two concepts in her Introduction, commenting that Jung's term can be understood to mean a kind of 'cosmic energy' like Bergson's *élan vital* (XXVi).

conceptualised anymore as the mentality only of non-Western tribal peoples, Harrison writes here (ending with a quotation from the Sufi mystic poet Omar Khayyam), that

The older mind is still buried in all of us, the mind of dream-fantasies is, and always has been, incessantly weaving dream-images of imaginary wish fulfilment. The soul in self-defence, unable as yet to adapt itself to its environment, finding that Fate withholds satisfaction in the visible world, would fain  
—grasp this sorry scheme of things entire  
And having shattered it to bits  
Remould it nearer to the heart's desire. (XLViii)

Harrison thus explicitly argues that this ritual mentality is still a part of human psychology by conflating it with the new concept of the unconscious.<sup>6</sup>

Mirrlees also makes this link in her unpublished essay on Greek mythology (Mirrlees papers 6/3/4). As mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 4 in relation to Mirrlees's view of Romanticism as spatial and dynamic, she considers in this essay the

process which dove-tails into the one that made the gods, & ought not really to be treated separately. This is the creation of a magical Land of Hearts' Desire. It is 'a sort of continuum of mana, a world of unseen power lying behind the visible universe, a world which is the sphere, of magical activity & the medium of mysticism'.<sup>7</sup>

This secondary world, she argues, was created by the warriors of the Heroic age who 'longed for wide spaces & the wonderful Northern woods, & the comforting noise of rivers, in that little, hard, bright country of Greece'. These warriors, she claims, were 'the first romantics' in that they created 'that country through whose shadowy hills Hermes drove the cattle of Apollo'.

## 2.2 Fairyland as a changing but enduring setting for fantasy

In 'The Ballad and the Ritual Dance' Mirrlees also draws attention to the function of symbols, and how they are inherited and adapted over the ages, in this form of literature arising from ritual. She notes how the Elizabethan poets' extravagant praise of their mistresses is inherited from medieval hymns to the Virgin, who was in turn descendant from Eastern Mother-

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<sup>6</sup> As Section 5.3 will show, the notion of the unconscious is also directly related in the novel to Fairyland and thus to fantasy writing.

<sup>7</sup> Here Mirrlees references *Themis* p.68.

Goddesses. This reincarnation of central figures or tropes of religion, as argued in Chapter 2, is a central theme of *Paris*, and, as the following will show, is central to Mirrlees's idea of the development of Romanticism.

The 'stream', as Mirrlees calls it, of Romanticism that she homes in on begins with Spenser and Shakespeare, the "'Gothick" writers par excellence' (Folder entitled 'Art', Mirrlees papers 6/4/1),<sup>8</sup> and picks up again with the eighteenth-century Gothic revival as writers begin to look back to the middle ages for inspiration and substance for their works. In Mirrlees's 1928 essay 'Gothic Dreams' she expounds on the function that the medieval past serves during this period, which suffered a 'hunger for the sublime'. She suggests that perhaps the sublime that eighteenth-century authors longed for in literature was a 'dream-like atmosphere' (such as they found in Spenser and Ariosto), quoting Edmund Burke's assertion that terror is the 'common stock of everything that is sublime' and commenting that 'in our dreams we have often even more terrifying adventures than Emily in "The Mysteries of Udolpho"' (810).<sup>9</sup> She credits the eighteenth-century German Romantic writer Johan Gottfried Herder with offering a good understanding of the beginnings of the Romantic Movement, pointing out how he had declared that 'a novel should be like a dream.' Elsewhere she also notes Herder's medievalism.<sup>10</sup> The 'Pre-Romantics' – as she calls them – of this period found in the Middle Ages 'the right background for the sublime' in their writing. She argues that what caused this was a sense that the medieval Catholic past was frightening, that, quoting from Sir Walter Scott's essay on Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, 'ages of feudal

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<sup>8</sup> The medievalism of both Shakespeare and Spenser has been discussed by for example Saunders; in collections of essays edited by Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray, and in another collection edited by Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper and Peter Holland (*Medieval Shakespeare*). Whether Mirrlees is referring to Shakespeare and Spenser as writers who look back to the middle ages or writers who inhabit a medieval mode is unclear. Arguably she saw these writers as poised on the verge of a modern, post-Renaissance world disenchanted of medieval lore but with one foot in the old medieval world and therefore still able to evoke an enchanted 'gothic' atmosphere in their works.

<sup>9</sup> The essay leaves out the fact that 'dream visions' were also a popular convention in medieval literature (e.g. Marti), which would also help to explain the centrality of dreams to the gothic revival.

<sup>10</sup> In her unpublished notes, considering the role of emotion in early Romantic literature, she says of Herder that he 'found in the Middle Ages the realisation of his aesthetic ideas, namely strong emotion, stirring life & action, everything guided by feeling & instinct, not in morbid thought: religious ardour & chivalrous honour, boldness in love & strong patriotic feeling' ('Art'. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1). Her attraction to German Romanticism is further suggested in 'The Metamorphosis of Enfantin' (1927), a review of E.M. Butler's *The Saint-Simonian Religion in Germany*, which she ends with asking 'Will [Butler] not give us a book on, say, the German Romantic Movement? Freud tells us that in every soul the analyst arouses a hidden foe. Miss Butler would, in Novalis or Jean Paul, find foemen worthy of her steel' (514).

power and papal superstition' corresponded to a sensation of 'supernatural awe, if not of terror' ('Gothic Dreams' 811). This terror in the work of 'gothic writers', she argues (quoting from the eighteenth-century writer on the Middle Ages Richard Hurd), was due to 'the superior solemnity of their superstitions', compounded by post-Reformation rhetoric which linked Catholicism with paganism.<sup>11</sup> This darkly superstitious past, she writes, evoked a 'two-edged emotion': it 'had exercised a sinister fascination over the minds of Englishmen, at once repelling and attracting them'.<sup>12</sup> In this she disagrees with what she notes is the general tendency to identify the origin of the gothic revival in simply the birth of the historical imagination: 'it is because [the past] is Gothic that it is frightening rather than because it is the past', she argues.

Drawing on the Finnish scholar Eino Railo's study on English Romanticism *The Haunted Castle* (1927),<sup>13</sup> which traces the motif of the haunted castle in gothic fiction back to castles and caves of wonder and horror in Spenser and Shakespeare, Mirrlees argues that the gothic castle was actually a symbolic reincarnation of the Catholic church. Highlighting the importance of the symbol to the transference of the feeling for the sublime, she remarks that

This is not to suggest that the craving for the sublime sprang entirely from a sense of the ambivalence of Rome. It is merely pushing the symbol a stage back and discovering behind the Gothic castle a Popish church. What lay behind *that* would take a psycho-analyst to discover; and as the patient would be a couple of centuries instead of an individual, Professor Freud himself might find it a nut too hard to crack. (811)

This description of the Catholic church and Gothic castle suggests that they are the mythical projections of a collective unconscious and therefore what they really signify cannot be rationally known. Fairyland in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, this chapter argues, occupies this position as

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<sup>11</sup> This connection between Catholicism and paganism, central to Chapter 2 on *Paris*, is also made by Mirrlees in 'Listening in to the Past', where she discusses reading records of witch trials – which give her a concrete sense of the past – and notes the 'curious fact that the spells the witches confess to using, and the words with which their familiars greet them, are often Pater Nosters and Ave Marias. The Reformation came late to Scotland [the records are Scottish], and all these witches must have been baptized into the old faith; but, evidently, Papistry had already acquired the sinister terrifying atmosphere, the smell of incarnate evil, which can, I think, only be understood by such of us who have been brought up by a Scottish nurse' (670).

<sup>12</sup> This echoes Mirrlees's own admission, in a letter to her mother, of finding in a piece by the Catholic painter Maria Blanchard 'the aesthetic quality of Catholicism that at once repels & attracts' (Mirrlees papers 2/1/3).

<sup>13</sup> Mirrlees mistakenly spells the author's name 'Rialto'.

well, as it is associated with the unconscious and unknowable, the source of both terror and longing.

The Gothic Revival, however, according to Mirrlees, ‘sought the sublime and found the ridiculous’ (811). While important to rediscovering the middle ages as a symbol for the sublime,<sup>14</sup> she regards the eighteenth century as ‘a Childe Roland who never came to the Dark Tower’<sup>15</sup> – this, she believes, was accomplished in 1798 with the publication of ‘Lyrical Ballads’ by Wordsworth and Coleridge:

[B]oth Tintern Abbey and the baronial hall in ‘Christabel’ are Gothic castles; while Kubla Khan’s ‘stately pleasure-dome’ is a palace in a dream. (811)

In her unpublished notes she considers the pre-Raphaelites as a continuation of this strain of Romanticism in their reverence for the middle ages (‘Art’. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1).

This Romantic tradition, however, she writes in her unpublished folder of notes entitled ‘Art’, ‘flowered with Keats’ (‘Art’. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1), who she says is, like Rimbaud, ‘un mystique à l’état sauvage’ with a craving for union. This craving, which as Mirrlees notes ‘is generally accepted as the essence of mysticism’, is ‘the common denominator of all his various enthusiasms & inspirations at all the various stages of his creative development’. She considers Keats’s project of writing *Endymion* as his exploration of poetic expression, of how to merge ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’, and satisfy his appetite for nature by ‘an identification – a union – a metamorphosis’, not by telling a story about the beautiful things in nature but rather by ‘turn[ing] them into a story’. An earlier version of the poem (‘I Stood on Tip-Toe’), she argues, expresses the need to write a ‘flowery tale’ inspired by Spenser and the gothic world. Keats is then taken to see the Elgin Marbles and is enchanted by ancient Greece; Mirrlees claims that it must have been the Panathenaic Frieze that affected him. ‘Here in this frieze’, she writes, ‘is something both Greek and storied’. She argues that Keats’s later lines in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ actually refer to this frieze:

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<sup>14</sup> In her unpublished notes she gives much attention to eighteenth-century ‘gothick’ poets, including Thomas and Joseph Warton, William Collins and William Mason, who ‘regarded the Middle Ages as the home of true poetry & romance; & the imagination rather than reason, as the creative faculty, & the Faerie Queene was their chief [source?] of inspiration’ (‘Art’. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1).

<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, in her unpublished notes for Harrison’s biography, she refers to the eighteenth century as ‘a slow recovery from the age of reason’ (Harrison papers, draft biography 4/3/1).

Sylvan historian who canst thus express,  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme

This echoes Mirrlees's own mystical approach to antiques, her antiquarian argument that the silent, tangible sense of the past that they impart is more direct than the 'prose poems' of historians.<sup>16</sup> According to Mirrlees, this encounter with ancient Greek artefacts enables Keats to write *Endymion*, written in an allegorical mode drawing on the classical myth of Endymion, with its fantasy of a 'lovely forest community [...] & the merry-makers at the feast of Pan'.

Mirrlees writes that '[h]enceforward Greece in English poetry was Gothick – that is to say it was annexed to the great empire of romance', and after this Keats uses gothic and Greek as interchangeable symbols (Mirrlees papers 6/4/1). A letter of his that she refers to again points to his use of symbols to signify meanings beyond the visible world. Here, she says that in this letter he writes of

the 'turmoil & anxiety' arising, among other things, from 'the looking upon the Sun, the Moon, the stars, the Earth & its contents, as materials to form greater things – that is to say ethereal things – but here I am talking like a madman – greater things than our creator himself made.' It is no longer enough to write a 'flowery tale'. Nature is full of 'huge cloudy symbols of a high romance' but a youth turning into a flower would not express it. Endymion's passion for the moon is something different, new; something much greater.

She refers to F.M. Owen's 1880 study on Keats and suggests that this greater thing was his abstract passion for the principle of beauty, that this was his quest.

This chapter shows Mirrlees echoing Keats in her use of a self-consciously symbolic, mythical, allegorical mode in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, making the point that such a mode is necessary for expressing elements of life that are beyond the pale of realist representation. As will be discussed later, Mirrlees reanimates Keats's concept of negative capability in the novel's promotion of fantasy. Tied in with this promotion of fantasy, the novel also explores some of the same literary issues as Keats's poetry: the quality of 'bittersweetness' that fuses a Romantic and tragic vision, and the relationship between fact and fantasy– Keats's 'Truth and Beauty'.

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<sup>16</sup> See the previous chapter, Section 1.2 for Mirrlees's comparison of historians and antiquarians.

### 2.3 *Lud-in-the-Mist* as a reaction to Harrison's relationship to fantasy?

The similarities that Mirrlees finds between Keats and Harrison suggest a link between her research interest in the former and dedication to the latter— which could shed light on one of the motivations behind writing *Lud-in-the-Mist*. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Keats's negative capability shows parallels with Harrison's ritual theory, with its emphasis on mysticism, desire and longing rather than rational certainty. Mirrlees writes in her unpublished notes that Harrison's attitude to beauty was very much like Keats's: in 'her semi-mystic adoration of it, it always meant something intangible to her, as it had to Keats'. She claims that this 'remained her one link with the Unseen' ('Art'. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1).

Apart from this mystical attitude to beauty, Harrison displayed (as discussed in Chapter 1), more ambivalence than Mirrlees regarding the mystical and unknown, at least in her published work. While Mirrlees views Harrison's career as a sort of religious quest akin to Winckelmanns, Keats's or Goethe's (Harrison papers 4/3/3), she implies that it was Harrison's own ingrained agnosticism that thwarted her attempts to find religious fulfilment. Mirrlees claims that Harrison

came in time to maintain that the sense of mystery is merely the result of ignorance, 'the unknown is always becoming the known' she used to always say & would not admit that there was anything outside & beyond this process. ('Art'. Mirrlees papers 6/4/1)

Art therefore, according to Mirrlees, was for Harrison merely an escape. *Lud-in-the-Mist*, this chapter shows, may have been an attempt to suggest otherwise. Mirrlees explicitly uses Harrison's own theory to support her case for fantasy, starting with the epigraph to the novel, which is a quotation from Harrison's *Prolegomena*:

The Sirens stand,<sup>17</sup> it would seem, to the ancient as to the modern, for the impulses in life as yet unmoralized, imperious longings, ecstasies, whether of love or art, or philosophy, magical voices calling to a man from his 'Land of Heart's Desire' and to which if he hearken it may be he will return home no more—voices too, which, whether a man sail by or stay to hearken, still sing on. (206)

In this section of the *Prolegomena*, she discusses the figure of the Siren, a type of Ker – a ghost or spirit predated goddesses and invoked in primitive chthonic rituals. It is a figure

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<sup>17</sup> Mirrlees replaces 'They' with 'The Sirens'.

shrouded in mystery, seductive but dangerous (197-202). Sirens are ‘demons of the underworld’ and haunt mortals in their sleep, producing ‘troubled, tormenting illicit dream[s]’ (202-203). ‘In sleep the will and the reason are becalmed and the passions unchained’ (205), Harrison writes, and the sirens function as personifications of this fact. The siren is also ‘a soul that sings to souls’, through her enchanting song mystically inspiring ‘a love for things heavenly and divine and a forgetfulness of things mortal’ (204-205). In having this passage as the epigraph to the novel, Mirrlees implicitly identifies Fairyland in the novel as the ‘Land of Heart’s Desires’ and fantasy as the sirens standing for unmoralised impulses, ‘imperious longings’ and ecstasies – the ‘magical voices’ that will not stop calling. With this she implies that fantasy is born from the same need that created the spirits and gods of primitive religion. As the following section shows, the novel takes a stance on the genre as a whole by weaving itself into the long, rich history of fantasy writing through numerous allusions, borrowings and adaptations from texts and lore created in this vein.

### 3 Fantasy about Fantasy

Through intertextual allusions to literature and folklore concerned with dreams and the supernatural and magical, *Lud-in-the-Mist* presents itself as a self-reflexive enquiry into the tropes and themes synonymous with fantasy. Fairyland in the novel directly invokes the trope of Elfland found in the medieval ballads Mirrlees analyses in her 1913 essay, as well as its adaptations in gothic revivalist literature. The mystery and fear surrounding Fairyland and all things faerie reanimates the eighteenth-century fascination with the sublime and mysterious, a frightening, haunting past and a supernatural realm. Indeed, *Lud-in-the-Mist* can be seen to use the eighteenth-century notion of the picturesque, against which the sublime is defined, to define Dorimare in opposition to Fairyland. Dorimare is literally as pretty as a picture, with its ‘old arches, framing delicate landscapes that one could walk into, and a picturesque old graveyard on the top of a hill’. The Dapple is furthermore described as ‘stained like a palette, with great daubs of colour reflected from sky and earth, and carrying on its surface in autumn, red and yellow leaves which may have fallen on it from the trees of Fairyland’; the propinquity of doves, similarly, gives ‘an almost startling greenness’ to the expansive lawn. The description of the protagonist’s kitchen garden alludes to the way the picturesque was first defined in relation to the art of gardening. Here flowers are

imprisoned in a walled kitchen-garden, where they were planted in neat ribands, edging the plots of vegetables. Here, too, in spring was to be found the pleasantest of all garden conjunctions—thick yew hedges and fruit trees in blossom. Outside this kitchen garden there was no need for flowers, for they had many substitutes.  
(2)

The passage conveys the sense of augmentation of nature for aesthetic purposes that first defined the picturesque (Hunt 131-132). The emphasis on composition is further implied in the lines that follow:

Let a thing be but a sort of punctual surprise, like the first cache of violets in March, let it be delicate, painted and gratuitous, hinting that the Creator is solely occupied with aesthetic considerations, and combines disparate objects simply because they look so well together, and that thing will admirably fill the role of a flower. (*Lud-in-the-Mist* 2)

These descriptions imply the processing of nature that creates the picturesque, the way nature is ‘safely pictorialised’ for human aesthetic consumption (Hunt 133).

The awe and terror of the sublime, on the other hand, is shown in responses to Fairyland. The first time the protagonist hears the Note that will forever haunt him, and which leads him to Fairyland at the end of the novel, it is ‘plangent, blood-freezing and alluring’ (5). The ambivalence felt towards Fairyland by the Dorimarites – its magnetic pull on those who have heard its siren call and the terror it holds – recalls Harrison’s discussions of the concept of *mana*, a vital energy flowing through nature that is the ‘medium of mysticism’ (*Themis* 68). Things that possess *mana* are essential to life, yet also *taboo*, dangerous, to be avoided. Indeed, as Harrison writes of the Sirens, who are associated by Mirrlees with fantasy in her epigraph,

though Plato and the poets and the mystics exalt the Siren, ‘half-angel and half bird,’ to cosmic functions, yet, to the popular mind, they are mainly things, if not wholly evil, yet fearful and to be shunned. This is seen in the myth of their contest with the Muses. Here they are the spirits of forbidden intoxication, as such they join the motley crew of Centaurs and Satyrs who revel with Dionysos.  
(*Prolegomena* 206)

The final passage of *Paris*, as Chapter 2 argued, intimated this double-sidedness of *mana*. One image to do this was that of the wild nightlife scene ‘manuring the white violets of the moon’, signifying destruction but also fertilisation. This image is echoed in *Lud-in-the-Mist* in the comment that fruit from Fairyland, while unspeakably dangerous, is also ‘a mighty fine manure for the crops’ (158).

In addition to these allusions to the gothic sublime, Keatsian fantasy – which, as discussed above, embodies for Mirrlees the pinnacle of Romantic attempts to suggest the sublime and dreamlike – is encoded into the novel, firstly through the character Endymion Leer, who smuggles fairy fruit into the country of Dorimare from neighbouring Fairyland. In her notes, Mirrlees writes that Keats's *Endymion* 'builds for itself a refuge in the past, an earthly Paradise, a fairyland, where youth, happiness & beauty are immortal' (Harrison papers 4/3/3). The escapism that this allusion to *Endymion* implies, however, is tempered by accompanying allusion to Keats's later poem 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again', in which the speaker bids adieu to 'golden-tongued Romance'. This has often been read as a disavowal of Keats's earlier escapist Romantic stance in *Endymion* in favour of tragedy,<sup>18</sup> but also as an integration of the tragic sense of mortality with his Romantic vision, yielding a quality of bitter-sweetness, a paradox of simultaneous joy and sorrow (Rodríguez 82-84). In 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again' Keats praises 'The bitter sweet of this Shakespearian fruit', finding this quality to be most perfectly expressed by Shakespeare, 'Chief Poet!' Bitter-sweetness is strongly associated with Fairyland in *Lud-in-the-Mist*. The 'bitter sweet Shakespearean fruit' is echoed in the motif of fairy fruit which, as will be discussed later in this chapter, produces strong, contradictory emotional effects in those who consume it. Furthermore, early in the novel, a pudding called 'The Bitter-Sweet Mystery' is said by the narrator to provide further antiquarian evidence of survivals of the bygone faerie-infused age (27). Later, in Endymion Leer's speech to the Ludites before he is hanged, he reproaches them for not being true men in whose mouths is ever 'the bitter-sweet taste of life and death' (236), and refers to Duke Aubrey as 'my fickle bitter-sweet master, the lord of life and death, of laughter and tears' (238). A similar reference to the bitter-sweetness of faerie is found in the novel's treatment of melancholia. One of the artefacts of the bygone days of faerie that the protagonist stumbles upon in the scene where he hears the Note is 'a fan painted with wind-flowers and violets [and] illuminated with these words: Why is Melancholy like honey? Because it is very sweet, and it is culled from Flowers'. The quotation is reminiscent of Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), which had a significant influence on

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Vendler (245).

Keats,<sup>19</sup> showing most strongly in his ‘Ode on Melancholy’, where ‘Veil’d Melancholy’ dwells in ‘the very Temple of Delight.

This merging of contradictions in Keats’s poetry is bound up with his notion of ‘negative capability’, a state in which ‘a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’ (Keats 277). As mentioned in Chapter 1, this notion is echoed in Harrison’s emphasis on emotion, longing and process in her description of ritual. It is also at the heart of *Lud-in-the-Mist*, in the way all depictions of faerie point to a great silence at the centre of the novel, the mystery of Fairyland itself. As the Nietzschean reading of *Lud-in-the-Mist* in this chapter will show, the novel can be understood as advocating an approach to literature and art that combines imagination with a sense of the tragic – both in the sense of the tragedy of mortality, and the limits of what can be rationally grasped and known.

The motif of fairy fruit, while invoking Keats’s ‘Shakespearean fruit’, alludes most directly to Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market*, where the forbidden goblin fruit leaves its intoxicated eater in a state of longing bordering on madness. While Rossetti’s poem warns against the dangers of fairy fruit, Mirrlees’s novel is more ambivalent on the matter: as this chapter will show, fairy fruit is depicted as dangerous but also necessary to living a full human life. Encoding Rossetti’s poem, rich with themes of desire, the supernatural and the grotesque,<sup>20</sup> into the novel like this – the motif of fairy fruit metonymically standing for Rossetti’s poem and the genre in which it is written – is one way in which *Lud-in-the-Mist* allegorically argues the need for literature written in this mode. The way fairy fruit is used in the novel as a medicine to calm Chanticleer’s son Ranulph furthermore invokes George MacDonald’s *Adela Cathcart*, in which stories are told to a young woman to cure her of her illness – a mysterious, non-specific ailment resembling Ranulph’s.

The banishing of Duke Aubrey in the novel also plays into this allegory. Aubrey is a reference first of all to Oberon,<sup>21</sup> a recurrent figure in medieval and renaissance Romances most famously featuring as King of the Fairies in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Cummings.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Trowbridge for a reading of the poem dealing with these aspects and considering its Gothic character (113-143).

<sup>21</sup> Pointed out by Michael Swanwick in his ‘Lexicon of Lud’ at the end of his biography of Mirrlees (82).

The reference is also likely to be to John Aubrey, a seventeenth-century British antiquary who features in Mirrlees's biography of Sir Robert Cotton. Aubrey, a pioneering folklorist, recorded the supernaturalist folklore still extant in his day in his *Miscellanies* (1696) and *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (1686-7), and laments in the latter study that the rise of literacy and the number of books available have meant a loss of 'Old-wives Tales': 'Printing and Gunpowder have frightened away Robin Goodfellow and the Fayries', he says (68). The event of banishing the Duke in the novel thus not only recalls the actual banishing of the fairies that Richard Corbet (1582-1635) memorialises in his poem 'The Faeryes Farewell' (from which Mirrlees quotes the first stanza in her Cotton biography [299]), but also represents a banishing of the fairy tale itself.

Aubrey's banishment is also seemingly a coded reference to the banishing of an older, Catholic, way of life. The overthrow of the old political system by the previous generation of Dorimarites, replacing it with a constitutional legal system, can be seen as a fantastical re-staging of the Glorious Revolution, a replacement of absolute rule with increased parliamentary power, firmly ousting Catholicism with Protestantism. As Mirrlees notes in 'Gothic Dreams', Catholicism was linked by post-Reformation rhetoric with paganism, faerie, magic and superstition (811). Further supporting this reading, the typical Dorimarite in the novel is likened to 'a Dutchman of the seventeenth century, smoking his churchwarden among his tulips, and eating his dinner off Delft place, [who] had trivialised to his own taste the solemn spiritual art of a remote, forbidden land, which he believed to be inhabited by grotesque and evil creatures given to strange vices and to dark cults...' (15, 16). The association here of Fairyland with the 'grotesque', 'evil', 'strange' and 'dark' echoes the language of gothic, modelled, as Mirrlees argues, on attitudes towards the Catholic past. Meanwhile, William the Conqueror's Dutch origins encode him into this passage, alluding as well to the fairly advanced capitalist system of the Dutch Republic in this period which, Mirrlees seems to suggest, commercialised art to the extent of trivialising it. The gothic is thus connected to Fairyland and coded into the novel's allegory of the fantasy genre.

The web of intertextual allusions surrounding Fairyland is further constructed through the Romantic names of the citizens of Dorimare which reveal their fairy heritage – for example Primrose Crabapple, Ambrose and Marigold. These recall fairy names such as 'Peaseblossom', 'Mustardseed' and 'Cobweb' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, weaving Shakespearean fantasy into the novel's defence of the genre. The main protagonist's name, Nathaniel Chanticleer, invokes Chaucer's 'Nun's Priest's Tale', a dream-vision typifying the

medieval themes of the supernatural – reflecting the ‘superior solemnity of [medieval writers’] superstitions’ – that (as Mirrlees writes in ‘Gothic Dreams’) captivated writers of the eighteenth century. Indeed, this text, it has been argued, most clearly conveys Chaucer’s belief in the prophetic power of dreams (Fleay 144). The cockerel Chauntecleer in Chaucer’s text believes in his dream, just as Nat Chanticleer (whose family’s crest is a cockerel) believes that ‘one could play with reality and give it what shape one chose’ (26). Just as Chauntecleer’s wife Pertelote does not take his dream seriously, Nat Chanticleer’s wife, the level-headed, practical Marigold, sees Nathaniel as a frantic cockchafer bouncing against its own shadow uselessly after their son Ranulph’s outburst. The way she ‘flutter[s] down on Ranulph like a plump dove’ upon hearing he has eaten fairy fruit further reinforces this identification (33).

In addition to this use of allusions to literature written in the fantasy mode, the novel also includes numerous motifs from traditional fairy lore. In addition to the motif of Fairyland, these include the motif of golden apples (traceable to classical myth<sup>22</sup>); the conflation of fairies with the dead,<sup>23</sup> and the motif of red hair as a signifier of fairy blood. The song ‘Columbine’, which (as Section 5.2 will show) is connected with Fairyland in the novel, alludes directly to folklore; it is an extract from the ‘The Mad Pranks and Merry Jests of Robin Goodfellow’, a 1628 tract by an anonymous author, which tells of the hijinks of the legendary fairy. According to at least one authority, the first part of the tract was almost certainly printed before 1588, or even as early as 1584, and was quite likely a major source for Shakespeare’s Puck (Keightley 287). In this tract we are told that ‘this mad song’ is sung by Robin, ‘for to delight himselfe’ as he helps the housemaids break hemp. Apart from modernising the spelling and syntax, the only significant difference between the original song and Mirrlees’s rendering of it is that ‘Aubrey’ replaces Saturn in the original lines:

When Saturne did live, there lived no poore,  
The king and the beggar with rootes did dine,  
With lilly, germander and sops in wine.  
    With Sweet-bryer  
    And bon-fire,  
    And straw-berry wyer,  
    And sops in wine,

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<sup>22</sup> See for example Roman and Román’s *Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology* (2009).

<sup>23</sup> See for example Monaghan (167).

And collumbine.

Mirrlees's substitution of Aubrey for Saturn (*Lud-in-the-Mist* 117), the Roman god thought to have reigned over a golden age of peace and equality, associates Fairyland with a golden age, just as the middle ages and ancient Greece were golden ages for the gothic revivalists and Romantics. The golden age alluded to in this song is the pre-Olympian period, the 'golden age' for Harrison, as Saturn is the Roman form of Kronos, who is according to Harrison a mystical daimon-king from the older matrilinear order (*Themis* 495-498). 'Kronos stands', Harrison writes, 'always for the old order, before Zeus and the Olympians; he hates his father Ouranos but reverences and takes counsel with Earth his mother' (495).

In addition to this substitution in the lyrics, Mirrlees writes her own opening lines for a verse of the song:

There are windfalls of dreams, there's a wolf in the stars,  
And Life is a nymph which will never be thine[.] (252)

These added lyrics help to tie the song into the narrative of the novel, as 'windfalls' suggests the fruit at the centre of the action. The line 'Life is a nymph which will never be thine' also points to the unknowability and unrepresentability of Fairyland, which will be discussed in Sections 5-5.4. By interweaving of motifs from fairy lore, or rather weaving itself into the already existing web of fantasy found in literature and lore, the novel shows that it is not merely an allegory promoting fairy tales; it also promotes the genre by inhabiting it.

#### **4 Antiquarian restoration and preservation of fantasy**

As discussed previously, Mirrlees describes a Romantic antiquary as one who 'awakens the dead' of a certain place or people by showing survivals of antiquated traditions (*A Fly in Amber* 111). As in *Paris*, where the past and present are continuously juxtaposed by the antiquarian speaker to reveal the cultural and religious palimpsest comprising modern-day Paris, Endymion Leer attempts to bring the fairy past of the town of Lud back into the present. Echoing Harrison's archaeological approach to Greek religion and Mirrlees's imaginative excavation of an earlier religious order in *Paris*, here the antiquary reveals survivals of fairy culture in Dorimare, the country bordered by the (now taboo) Fairyland. These include the red hair of the inhabitants, the occasional blue cow and red cornflowers, oaths such as 'by the Golden Apples of the West', names like 'Dreamsweet' and 'Moonlove', and the legal system which we are told is simply an adaptation of the old 'primitive code used under the Dukes'

(13). As with *Paris*, the past that is being excavated is a religious one: we are told by the narrator that the ‘fantastic scenes’ making up the designs of old tapestries and bas-reliefs in Dorimare

were taken from the ritual of the old religion. For, he insisted, all artistic types, all ritual acts, must be modelled on realities; and Fairyland is the place where what we look upon as symbols and figures actually exist and occur. (15)

These lines point to Fairyland as a source of ritual and myth, their unknowable origin within human nature; the ‘land of heart’s desires’ where the impulses and unconscious longings that surface in ritual and myth are imaginatively given a home, a space to exist.

Just as in Mirrlees’s history of a ritualistic strain of Romanticism, this land is a place in the past. Along with the tropes that point to a medieval past through associations with the gothic sublime, Fairyland is constructed as a golden age in a way that parallels the discovery of Greece as a golden age in the eighteenth century. Mirrlees writes in her notes for Harrison’s biography that it was thanks to the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann that ancient Greece came to be thought of as a golden age (Harrison papers 4/3/3), although his Apollonian, neo-Olympianist classicism would be challenged; ‘Jane later to explode this’, she writes in shorthand. Leer the antiquary is referred to as ‘a Winckelmann’ who, ‘had he visited Dorimare, would have found, as he did in the rococo Rome of the eighteenth century, traces of an old and solemn art, the designs of which served as *poncifs* to the modern artists’ (14). The rococo reference reinforces the depiction of Dorimare as picturesque, as the two aesthetic traditions overlap,<sup>24</sup> both contrasting with a more solemn, spiritual aesthetic ideal. In her notes for Harrison’s biography, Mirrlees compares Harrison’s religious attitude to Winckelmann’s, quoting his remark that ‘we all seek Greece with our soul’. The allusion to Winckelmann’s quest in the novel thus further implies the profound, spiritual nature of what has been lost in cutting ties with Fairyland.

The fantasy genre allows Mirrlees to animate her notion of the ‘antiquarian magic’ of restoring the stratified past, to deploy this idea as a story with characters and motifs that vividly act out this idea. The antiquarian, physical sense of the past is depicted in a scene at the beginning of the novel that ‘awakens the dead’ for Nathaniel Chanticleer. In the

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<sup>24</sup> See for example Macarthur (*The Picturesque* 6).

Chanticleers' attic as a child, the Note that will forever haunt him (and which leads him to Fairyland at the end of the novel) first rings out from an old musical instrument. The attic is filled with the 'lumber of the past: grotesque wooden masks, old weapons and musical instruments, and old costumes—tragic, hierophantic robes that looked little suited to the uses of daily life' (4). All these items are suggestive of the trappings of primitive ritual. This is also suggested in the description of tapestries in the attic:

Who has not wondered in what mysterious forests our ancestors discovered the models for the beasts and birds upon their tapestries; and on what planet were enacted the scenes they have portrayed? It is in vain that the dead fingers have stitched beneath them—and we can picture the mocking smile with which these crafty cozeners of posterity accompanied the action—the words *February*, or *Hawking*, or *Harvest*, having us believe that they are but illustrations of the activities proper to the different months. We know better. [...] What kind of beings peopled the earth four or five centuries ago, what strange lore they had acquired, and what were their sinister doings, we shall never know. Our ancestors keep their secret well. (4)

This description of the setting in which the faerie Note rings out associates the 'lumber of the past' with ritual. The description of the tapestries hints, as well, at the hermetic secrecy and unspeakability of ritual mysteries, and the coded, symbolic language arising from this root in ritual.

'Antiquarian magic', according to Mirrlees, puts one directly in mystical contact with the unknowable past, and as with Chanticleer and the Note, the antiquary Endymion Leer performs this magic by illegally providing the citizens of Lud, capital of Dorimare, with fairy fruit – a physical piece of their taboo past. Echoing the mystical, tangible sense of the past imparted by artefacts, eating fairy fruit puts people in touch physically with their fairy past and all the nameless fears and desires projected onto it. The magic practiced by Endymion Leer and other smugglers show the double-sidedness of mana and taboo that Harrison highlights: the effects of the fruit are stirring, intoxicating, upsetting, painful and ecstatic, invoking Harrison's conceptualisation of primitive ritual.

The theme of intoxication running through the novel, through the motif of fairy fruit, strongly recalls the Dionysian element of primitive Greek religion that Harrison highlights, building on Nietzsche's definition of the concepts of the Dionysian and Apollonian. As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 3.2), Harrison declares herself a disciple of Nietzsche and credits him with first apprehending the real difference between Apollo and Dionysus. Her theory of ritual builds directly upon his theory which conceptualises art as arising from the interaction of Dionysian ritual and the image-making, form-giving religion of Apollo. The

following sections will consider how the depictions of Fairyland and fairies invoke a Dionysian quality, while depictions of the law are associated in the novel with Apollonian illusion. Like Nietzsche and Harrison, Mirrlees makes a case for the importance of the neglected Dionysian element in both art and life. The theme of rationality and the loss of a sense of the tragic invoke, furthermore, another drive or force that both Nietzsche and Harrison highlight in their metahistory of the classical age: that is, the Socratic. The following section will consider how these three forces play out through the novel and enable Mirrlees to construct her argument about the value of fantasy writing.

## 5 Mirrlees's Nietzschean framework of fantasy: Dionysian, Apollonian, Socratic

Harrison's narrative of ancient Greece substantially follows Nietzsche's more abstract metahistorical outline of the succession and interplay of major psychological and religious forces or principles. Dionysus, for Harrison, belongs to pre-Olympian, matriarchal chthonic cults while Apollo is quintessentially Olympian. Following Nietzsche, Dionysus in Harrison's theory is associated with mysticism, intoxication, the body, dance, the moon and the chthonic underworld, which is the home of both chthonic deities and the dead. Apollo is, on the other hand, the immortal god of light and clarity, serenity, order, images and illusion. Unlike Nietzsche, Harrison does not refer to the Socratic as a force, drive or principle in the same sense as the Dionysian and Apollonian; however, she does begin her *Prolegomena* by positing Socrates as 'put[ting] his finger on the weak spot of Greek religion as conceived in the fifth century B.C. Its formula is *'do ut des'* – meaning 'I give that you may give'. This is the cheerfully logical formula, the 'business transaction' between gods and mortals that characterises Olympian religion (3), which clears the supernatural of the element of fear and uncertainty present in the earlier, more mystical, pre-Olympian age in which religion was marked by an engagement with intellectually unknown, merely felt, forces. Mirrlees explicitly draws on the concepts of the Dionysian and Apollonian, both in her antiquarianism (as shown in the previous chapter) and in *The Counterplot*, where the protagonist Teresa struggles in her task as an artist to impose Apollonian form and order on the Dionysian flux and chaos of life. Whether Mirrlees drew directly from Nietzsche's writing or indirectly through Harrison is uncertain, but her use of Nietzschean ideas in *Lud-in-the-Mist* points to a clear understanding of the arguments found in his theorisation of the classical age. The novel shows Mirrlees

wielding the Nietzschean precepts of Harrison's theory to make her case that fantasy is a mode most strongly associated with ritual as described in Harrison's theory. The following sections will consider how the novel deploys the Nietzsche's concepts of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Socratic to posit fantasy as a literary mode that gives expression to experience and emotion beyond the rationally knowable. The novel can furthermore be seen to illustrate that attempting to get rid of fantasy does not get rid of illusion, as illusion is built into the way we experience the world. Rather, doing away with fantasy means doing away with a mode of expressing vital aspects of the psyche, leaving us instead with the illusion of rationality.

### 5.1 Socratic rationality and the Dionysian sense of the tragic

[...] spurred on by its powerful illusion, science is rushing irresistibly to its limits, where the optimism essential to logic collapses. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points, and while it is as yet impossible to tell how the circle could ever be fully measured, the noble, gifted man [...] inevitably reaches that peripheral boundary, where he finds himself staring into the ineffable. If he sees here, to his dismay, how logic twists around itself and finally bites itself in the tail, there dawns a new form of knowledge, tragic knowledge which needs art as both protection and remedy, if we are to bear it.<sup>25</sup>

This passage from *The Birth of Tragedy* distils Nietzsche's perception of the limits of scientific knowledge and hints at a different way of 'knowing' beyond the rational and logical, a way that grows out of a mystical Dionysian loss of self. In his preface, 'An Attempt at Self-Criticism', added to *The Birth of Tragedy* fifteen years after its first publication, Nietzsche speculates over why 'those Greeks of the best, strongest, most courageous age' needed tragedy. He suggests that there may be such a thing as 'a pessimism of strength' and that cheerful Socratism was in fact a fearful 'flight from pessimism', leading to 'decline, fatigue, infection and the anarchical dissolution of the instincts' (3, 4). Dienstag points out how Nietzsche's concept of 'Dionysian pessimism' (briefly mentioned in *The Gay Science*) equates to the 'tragic knowledge' of the epigraph above, quoting Nietzsche's assertion that 'Pessimism is the consequence of knowledge of the absolute illogic of the world-order' (qtd. in Dienstag 926). As May points out in *Nietzsche and the Tragic Spirit*, in Nietzsche, the Dionysian stands for the unknowable (2), and it is this sense of the limits of knowledge that makes tragedy possible

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<sup>25</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* (74-75).

(4). Echoing this observation, Dienstag argues that in Nietzsche, '[t]ragedy is the outlet of mystic-pessimistic knowledge'; it grows out of 'the view of the world as something constantly in flux, constantly in the process of becoming and, thus, constantly in the process of destroying' (926; 927). The root of pessimism, Nietzsche wrote, is thus 'time-sickness [Zeit-Krankheit]' (qtd. in Dienstag 927). Nothing can be ascertained because everything is always changing.

As Dienstag notes, when writing *The Birth of Tragedy*, optimism and pessimism did not seem to Nietzsche to comprise two contrasting perspectives on the world; rather, pessimism is seen as an older way of life predating optimism (926). According to Nietzsche, the rise of the Socratic, with its optimistic belief that 'all the mysteries of the world could be known and explained' (Nietzsche 87), is what kills tragedy. Dienstag notes how, in contrast, philosophers before Socrates 'grasped the chaotic and disordered nature of the world and only attempted to cope with it insofar as that was possible' (962). Socrates, rather than Apollo, is, thus, 'the opponent of Dionysus' (64). Socrates famously refused to undergo the Eleusinian Mysteries – a matriarchal ritual, but as noted in previous chapters, associated with Dionysus – because they were not allowed to be spoken of and explained. Indeed, the root of the old Greek word for mystery, 'myein' (μύειν), literally means to close or shut, generally taken to mean the closing of the lips in a vow of secrecy which was taken as part of the rites, or to close the eyes, as only initiates were allowed to behold the mysteries.<sup>26</sup> This connection is also implied in the translation of the word 'myein' into 'initiare' in Latin (e.g. Burkert 37, 7). Socrates is thus, for Nietzsche (as well as for Harrison, who uses him as the key example of Olympian religion), 'the very embodiment of the non-mystic' (Nietzsche 66), the 'archetype of the theoretical optimist who, in his faith in the explicability of the nature of things, attributes the power of a panacea to knowledge and science, and sees error as the embodiment of evil' (74). One critic observes that 'Nietzsche finds Socratism to have developed, in opposition to the Dionysian Mysteries, a morality which directs humanity to be hostile to *life* on the basis that life defies understanding' (Murray 66). As May points out, Socrates was the first to seriously consider a future that might be better than the present, as Greek religion did not offer

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g. 'mystery, n.1'. OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. 28 May 2011  
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124644?rskey=hVqx17&result=26&isAdvanced=true>>

a compensatory other world (8). Thus, Nietzsche asks, might not the Socratic approach, with its insistence on the omnipotence of logic, be

nothing but fear, flight from pessimism? A subtle form of self-defence against – *the truth*? And, morally speaking, something like cowardice and falsehood? Amorally speaking, a piece of cunning? (*Birth of Tragedy*. ‘Attempt at Self-Criticism’ 1)

If so, Socrates’s optimism in fact masks a distaste for life, which made him view life as an illness that only death could cure, as Loeb argues (35, 36). Socratism thus degrades Dionysian pessimism which accepts the tragic unknowableness of life, and as a consequence it destroys the possibility of creating art that affirms life (e.g. Murray 66).

## **5.2 The Socratic banishing of the Dionysian tragic sense in *Lud-in-the-Mist***

Fairyland and all things faerie in the novel are characterised as touched in some way by the Dionysian spirit of intoxication, musical madness and ecstasy. At the beginning of the novel we are told that ‘madness, suicide, orgiastic dances, and wild doings under the moon’, clearly invoking Dionysian energies, are caused by eating fairy fruit (17). Duke Aubrey, under whose reign Dorimare was closely connected to Fairyland, is described as being possessed by a ‘laughing demon of destructiveness’; he is mad, cruel, licentious, but also a poet, and ‘would stand by the bedside of the dying, grave and compassionate as a priest’ (11). Thus, the religious and artistic profundity of a more solemn religious older age is suggested, but that older age, as in Harrison’s classicism, is bound up with barbarism.

Faerie magic again evokes a Dionysian atmosphere when two fairies, Portunus and Willy Wisp, play music – the song *Columbine*, which, as discussed in Section 3, is an early modern folk song about fairies – and teach a dance to the Crabapple Blossoms, the daughters of the Ludite burghers. The young ladies become, in the hands of the fairies, a crazed group of maenads winding ‘in and out, in and out of a labyrinth of dreams’ as the tune the fairies play grows wilder – ‘gay, but strange, and very terrifying’ – and the Duke himself is seen joining the dance (79-80). One of the crazed daughters describes the intoxication of the music as ‘[t]he horror of midday!’ (80), before running off with the rest of the Crabapple Blossoms all the way to Fairyland, echoing Harrison’s description of sirens as the Kers responsible for ‘the terrors of the midday sleep’, and ‘a haunting midday dream’ (*Prolegomena* 203).

Dionysian madness is embodied in the figures of ‘Mother Tibbs’ who is frequently described as ‘crazy’, speaks in what others take to be gibberish (57), and dances wildly whenever she hears music (74). Mother Tibbs speaks in snippets that suggest knowledge of

Fairyland, for example predicting as Ranulph sets off for the Gibberty farm that 'the little master's bound for the land where the eggs are all gold' (57), but is never listened to. Through this character, echoes may be heard of Nietzsche's comments on the dancers of St Vitus and St John's Dance, a medieval phenomenon involving large groups of people dancing to the point of exhaustion. Nietzsche relates how 'Dionysian revellers' caught up in the mania of St John's and St Vitus's Dance were generally considered to be affected with 'folk-diseases' and held in contempt by those convinced of their 'healthy-mindedness' who are in fact, he argues, 'corpse-like and ghostly' in contrast (*Birth of Tragedy* 3).

Echoing Nietzsche's narrative of the decline of the tragic age in ancient Greece, we are told at the beginning of the novel that with the banishment of the Duke and the fairies, 'what one can only call the tragic sense of life vanished from poetry and art' (12). Remnants of a more tragic past are shown, for example, in the 'tragic funereal statues of the Fields of Grammary' (14), and in the Romantic names of dishes that sound like 'a series of tragic sonnets' and which, we are told, the abovementioned anonymous antiquary could have used as evidence for the older order (27). The 'lumber of the past' filling the Chanticleers' attics from which the Note first rings out, furthermore, is described as having about it 'something tragic and a little sinister' (18). The current ruling elite of Dorimare are described as 'a set of indolent, self-indulgent, humorous gentlemen' with 'hearts [...] little touched to tragic issues' (17), in contrast to the supplanted Duke who, as mentioned above, is remembered by the country people, for all his cruelty, as 'grave and compassionate as a priest' (11). There is no space for poetry and visions in the 'sturdy common sense' worldview that has supplanted the older order, as such things spring from 'an ever-present sense of mortality' which would seem morbid to the new rulers, and, as we are told, '(t)here was certainly nothing morbid about the men of the revolution' (12).

Following the Nietzschean conceptualisation of tragedy and Dionysian pessimism, Fairyland, linked in the novel with a sense of the tragic, also points to the limits of rational understanding. Fairies and Fairyland are marked by a silence and an absence of representation which allows them to stand in for something beyond the knowable and sayable. The most explicit way in which Fairyland is made to stand in for the unrepresentable in the novel is, quite simply, that it is not represented. Michael Swanwick refers, somewhat disappointedly, to a 'strange emptiness or silence' at the heart of the novel. He notes, as well, how the fantasy writer Joanna Russ (whose 'The Zanzibar Cat' is a parody of *Lud-in-the-Mist*) says of Mirrlees's novel that she 'found the end unsatisfying [...] After promising us yes, you will be

able to see faery for yourself, faery is all-important the source of the story &c. when it comes right down to it you (or rather she) can't paint a picture of it' (qtd. in Swanwick 37). Rather than see this absence in any way as a weakness of the book, I would argue that it is crucial to the story Mirrlees is telling, as it is precisely Fairyland's unrepresentability that makes it stand for the mysterious and inarticulable in the novel.

The final chapter of the novel, 'The Initiate', explicitly relates this unrepresentability to the mystical experience of ritual, as Chanticleer plunges into the abyss upon reaching the border of Dorimare and Fairyland, and we are not told what happens in that abyss; he simply reappears, having retrieved Ranulph. His cryptic comment on what his experience taught him – 'that there is nothing to know' – can either be taken literally or as a hint of a cosmic mystical vision of the deepest secrets of the universe; we are not told. The novel thus invokes the old Greek root of the word 'mystery' – 'myein', the closing of the lips and eyes to preserve the sanctity of the Mysteries.

The silence surrounding Fairyland is amplified in a number of additional ways. One is that its inhabitants – that is, fairies and the dead (who may be the same thing in the novel, as they are in much folklore) – are colloquially known as 'the Silent People.' This silence is more a silence of rational speech rather than actual silence, however, as music and poetry are thought to be 'the language of the Silent People' (13), and it is also known that these beings are only able to speak in 'riddles and snatches of rhyme' (203). Upon being rescued from Fairyland and brought back to Dorimare, the experiences of the Crabapple Blossoms equally escape rational expression, as their accounts of what happened all differ; they feel 'as if they had awakened from an evil dream' and are haunted by a 'nameless fear' (264). This silence is also exemplified when Ranulph, having eaten fairy fruit, has difficulty expressing himself; Dame Marigold remembers how, 'if she offered him a second helping at dinner, he would clench his fist, and beads of perspiration would break out on his forehead, so great an effort did it require to answer Yes or No' (22). We are also told that Chanticleer, connected through hidden longings to Fairyland, is 'very sensitive to the silent things—stars, houses, trees' and

domestic objects (136), as these familiar things could, for him, at any point become strange (6).<sup>27</sup>

All things fairy are also forcibly silenced as they become taboo. As we are told at the beginning, the word itself ‘was never heard on polite lips’ (14) Fairy fruit is further shrouded in silence in that its very existence is eliminated from language as it becomes replaced in legislation with the word ‘silk.’ Renaming the threatening fruit keeps it at a safe distance, while the particular use of the word ‘silk’ may, as Rob Maslen has suggested, ‘symbolize the veil that the Luddite burghers have chosen to draw across their own eyes, a voluntary intensification of the mist from which their city takes its name’ (226).

The Note which haunts Nathaniel Chanticleer is a motif that further allows the silent voice of faerie to communicate nonverbally, and points to the mystery of Fairyland. It rings mainly through music, traditionally associated with Dionysus, specifically the song ‘Columbine’, alluding (as discussed in Section 4) to the world of fairies. It also rings once through a dream, and is heard by Chanticleer more poignantly than ever at the border of Fairyland, where he meets the long-dead Duke.

The novel’s Nietzschean argument that the tragic sense of life, bound up with ineffable knowledge and other aspects of the Dionysian, is an essential part of human existence is conveyed in Endymion Leer’s defence speech. Here he tells the Dorimarites that in their banishment of fairies and fairy fruit they have become ‘outcasts’ from the human tribe and have ‘forfeited [their] place on earth’ because of their rejection of what is both the curse and greatest privilege of being human. This, he conveys, is an initiation into individual secret Mysteries which cannot be spoken, a bitter-sweet plight which gives human beings their ‘restless, passionate, and tragic’ character. The Dionysian fairy fruit, ‘the juices of which

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<sup>27</sup> This potential of a sudden shift from the mundane to the strange echoes Mirrlees’s description of Romanticism in her unpublished essay on mythology. Here she writes: ‘The essential quality of real romantic art has always seemed to me the power of creating a country which is perfectly subject to Mr. Bullough’s “antimony” – viz. The minimum distance is exactly hit. For it is no phantastic country, it is just the pleasant places of the world we know with a glamour on them.’ The fantastic is thus always a hidden potential in the actual in Mirrlees’s Romanticism, a mere shift of perspective. This is an important aspect, also, of her antiquarianism. As she argues, of the magic of antiquarianism, in *A Fly in Amber*, ‘[n]ot only can it invest what is trivial, obscure, or tedious with the glamour of the past (or passing), but it can make the weird and outlandish grotesquely or gruesomely homely’ (111). This also echoes the gothic theme of homely settings becoming frightening. As Serena Trowbridge notes ‘It has become a truism about Gothic for the domestic home to become a place of terrors and threats, where safety is no longer assured’ (*Christina Rossetti’s Gothic* 14).

sometimes cause madness, and sometimes manliness’, is, we are polemically told, ‘the proper nourishment for the souls of man’ (236, 237). This passage also spells out the Keatsian argument behind the theme of melancholy, as the bitter-sweetness in Keats’s Romanticism, the acceptance of the coexistence of tragedy and romance, is affirmed. Keats’s negative capability, the ability to accept these contradictions and the mystery of life, is inherent in this defence of Fairyland. The next section considers the way in which Fairyland is in fact a symbol for the unconscious – making it a mystery of life that it is impossible not to accept.

### 5.3 Fairyland as the unconscious: ‘phantasy thinking’ and fantasy writing

The unborn work in the psyche of the artist is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature herself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the man who is its vehicle. The creative urge lives and grows in him like a tree in the earth from which it draws its nourishment. We would do well, therefore, to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche.<sup>28</sup>

I hope and believe you have got a live thing in you that will push art to be born.<sup>29</sup>

The first quotation above is taken from Jung’s essay ‘On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry’ (1922) in which he relates his theory of the unconscious to poetry. The following epigraph, from a letter to Mirrlees from Harrison, echoes Jung’s language which conceives of art as something dwelling deep within the psyche, striving for expression. This idea of art accords with Harrison’s theory of the ritual mentality as she describes it in her *Epilegomena*. As discussed in Section 2.1, in Harrison’s *Themis* this mentality is mainly projected onto the ‘savages’ studied in early ethnographical fieldwork, but in the *Epilegomena* she conceptualises this mentality as more universal, aligning it with Freud and Jung’s concepts of ‘dream and phantasy thinking’ and wish fulfilment. As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Epilegomena* is dedicated to Mirrlees, suggesting either her influence or at least that the book shows a strong affinity with Mirrlees’s views. This chapter has suggested that Mirrlees’s Fairyland stands for the source of ritual and myth; as we are told, it is the place where ‘what we look upon as symbols and figures actually exist and occur’. This source takes the form of

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<sup>28</sup> Jung, ‘On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry’ (159-160).

<sup>29</sup> Harrison, Letter to Mirrlees (HM papers 1/1/1).

the Dionysian revelry in mystery and intoxication – spiritual and physical – that is key to what Harrison describes as the ritual mentality. This section will consider how this framework is overlaid with the tropes of the conscious and unconscious.

The dichotomy of the conscious and unconscious mind can be seen to overlap with Dorimare and Fairyland. This is implied, for example, in the antiquary Endymion Leer's description – included in his list of fairy 'survivals' – of how a Dorimarite advertisement showing

a comic, fat little man menacing with a knife and fork an enormous cheese hanging in the sky like the moon, was really a sort of unconscious comic reprisal made against the action depicted in a very ancient Dorimarite design, wherein the moon itself pursued a frieze of tragic fugitives. (14)

Indeed, from a psychoanalytic perspective, all the survivals of faerie days – oaths, names and so on – can be seen to symbolise indirect manifestations of what is repressed and consigned to the unconscious, that is, Fairyland. The way fairy fruit is smuggled into Lud under the surface of the river flowing from Fairyland furthermore echoes lines in *Paris* which connect the river with dreams and the unconscious,<sup>30</sup> most strikingly the lines

Freud has dredged the river and, grinning horribly,  
waves his garbage in a glare of electricity.

As with these lines from *Paris*, the use of the river as an image for the psyche echoes Freud's use of words such as 'surface' and 'depth', 'submersion' and 'emersion' in his *Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>31</sup> Smuggling the fruit into Dorimare is, like the faerie survivals, suggestive of the way unconscious impulses, according to the psychoanalytic view, are 'smuggled' into conscious life indirectly through dreams, slips of the tongue and various patterns of neurosis.

The association of Fairyland with the unconscious is again implied towards the end of the novel as Nathaniel Chanticleer journeys to Fairyland, passing through the Elfin Marches, a space, it seems, of dreams, projections of childhood memories and emotions. The fair he suddenly finds himself at is completely silent, suggesting sleep. Mirrlees captures the seeming randomness of dreams in the way Chanticleer is shown to be slipping into a dreamlike state:

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<sup>30</sup> This imagery is discussed in Chapter 2, Sections 6 and 7.

<sup>31</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, the use of water as an image for the psyche shows an affinity with the Surrealists, who drew directly on Freud for this imagery (Aurora 1).

his mood becomes completely uncritical, ‘impervious to surprise’ and ‘the invisible cicerone of dreams, who is one’s other self’ whispers in his ear, making everything ‘immediately normal, even prosaic’ (244). Chanticleer also appears in this scene to regress into his childhood, a prominent feature of psychoanalytic therapies as well as a familiar theme of dreams. This happens as he hears songs from his youth, and remembers Hempie’s advice not to eat anything offered to him by strangers, when an old woman tries to sell him fairy fruit. Nathaniel knows, furthermore, that here everyone would hear whatever songs belonged to their own childhood. The Elfin Marches thus represent a universal space containing dreams and half-forgotten memories of childhood, a space very near to the actual repository of unconscious aspects of the self that dreams and childhood memories point to.<sup>32</sup> Nathaniel sees a weeping little boy riding round and round on a carousel and identifies with him, but as in a dream where a figure can shape-shift into different people, it is not clear here whether Nathaniel is seeing himself, Ranulph or both. There is more shape-shifting as a beggar made of stone turns into a four-footed animal named Portunus – the name of a fairy in the novel. Other recent elements from his real life are transfigured as well: he is aware he must use ‘the correct ritual formulary’ to summon this dog-fairy just as he had needed to use a secret password to get into the room where smuggled fairy fruit was being held (138), and a crowd of dancing figures turns into a tapestry flapping in the wind depicting these figures – an echo of the tapestries he found in the room containing fairy fruit (243-250). As mentioned above, the Note, connected to Fairyland, also appears in Chanticleer’s dreams, as well as when he reaches the dreamlike Elfin Marches, indicating that it is symbolic for him of something unconscious – unknown but powerful, frightening or perhaps an object of hidden desire.

The connection of Fairyland with the unconscious again explains why Fairyland cannot be represented in the novel, as, for Freud and Jung, what is unconscious is necessarily unknowable. Considering the intertextual frame of the novel that connects fantasy and folklore with Fairyland, connecting Fairyland with the unconscious establishes the already implicit link between the fantasy genre and unconscious fantasy.<sup>33</sup> Mirrlees’s depiction of Fairyland as

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<sup>32</sup> The name echoes, as well, Mirrlees’s description of the Church in Catholicism (following her conversion) as the ‘supernatural Marches between Heaven and Earth’ (see Section 4.3 in Chapter 1), tying in with the novel’s (and *Paris*’s) hints at an imagined recuperation of Catholicism.

<sup>33</sup> This idea in *Lud-in-the-Mist* anticipates the more recent work of the fantasy author and essayist Ursula LeGuin,

necessary to art thus also follows, to an extent, Freud's argument on the connection between art and the unconscious which he puts forward in his 1916 study on Leonardo da Vinci, as well as in his essay 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming' (1908). Here art and literature are explained as sublimations of unfulfilled personal desires. Mirrlees may, however, be closer to Jung's more positive view of the creative process. In the *Epilegomena*, Harrison, too, in the section where she incorporates both Freudian and Jungian ideas into her definition of myth, draws only on Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*, the work which famously caused the split between Jung and Freud. In this work, Jung disagrees with Freud's largely sexual definition of the unconscious, positing a much broader meaning. As mentioned earlier (Section 2.1), Harrison suggests that Jung's term 'libido' could easily be replaced with Bergson's *élan vital*, which echoes the translator Beatrice M. Hinkle's introduction to the 1917 edition of *Psychology of the Unconscious*. Hinkle comments that Jung 'saw in the term libido a concept of unknown nature, comparable to Bergson's *élan vital*, a hypothetical energy of life, which occupies itself not only in sexuality but in various physiological and psychological manifestations such as growth, development, hunger and all the human activities and interests' (xxvi).

In a later work, 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry' (1922), Jung describes what poetry would look like if it tapped into the unconscious, which is echoed in *Lud-in-the-Mist*. Here, he directly takes issue with what he sees as Freud's purely pathological view of creativity, claiming that 'art is not a disease' (156), and arguing that the creative process channels not only the personal unconscious but also a deeper, collective unconscious, synthesising these (perhaps contradictory) aspects of the self. He argues that with a 'poet who identifies with the creative process', who 'acquiesces from the start when the unconscious imperative begins to function',

we would have to be prepared for something suprapersonal that transcends our understanding to the same degree that the author's consciousness was in abeyance

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who writes that

The great fantasies, myths, and tales are indeed like dreams; they speak from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious--symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does: they short-circuit verbal reasoning, and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter. (62)

during the process of creation. We would expect a strangeness of form and content, thoughts that can only be apprehended intuitively, a language pregnant with meanings, and images that are true symbols because they are the best possible expressions for something unknown - bridges thrown out towards an unseen shore. (160)

This echoes Mirrlees's descriptions of gothic literature – beginning with Herder who, she claims, says a novel ought to be like a dream ('Gothic Dreams' 810) – and medieval supernatural ballads in which 'things just happen' ('The Ballad and the Ritual Dance'). Moreover, it captures her awareness of the need for symbols for things beyond the grasp of the conscious mind.

A reviewer of the *Lud-in-the-Mist*, Michael Dirda, has observed a further Jungian trope in the novel, namely that 'Jung maintained that the true purpose of middle age was the integration of all the varying, and sometimes unacknowledged, aspects of our personalities' (*barnesandnoble.com*). The protagonist Chanticleer can be seen to fit this description, rediscovering, over the course of the novel, the importance of embracing his secret longings.

This chapter has considered the way Fairyland in the novel is a symbol for the unconscious, the source of Dionysian ritual and primitive myth, an imaginatively spatialised representation of the ritual mentality within the landscape of the human psyche. The web of intertextual allusions to fantasy in literature that can be detected in the novel indicates that it is the function of this genre to engage with and express the creative impulses generated from this hidden area of the psyche. In the Nietzschean framework, the Apollonian power of image-making is needed for this, to give form to this dark matter. If, in the novel, Fairyland has been made taboo, the Dionysian has been banned, a question arises: how is the Apollonian force being harnessed in Dorimare? Nathaniel Chanticleer states that 'man cannot live without delusion' in his rant to his friend – the doggedly grounded and commonsensical Ambrose Honeysuckle (163), a man clearly in denial regarding the faerie heritage inherent in his name – about why such a thing as the law has been invented. In Chanticleer's opinion, the law is merely a substitute for fairy fruit, calling into question the binary opposition between fiction and fact. The following section will consider this idea through the Nietzschean framework, and examine how it contributes to Mirrlees's defence of the fantasy genre.

#### **5.4 'The Written Word is a Fairy, [...] speaking lying words to us in a feigned voice': illusion in *Lud-in-the-Mist***

In Mirrlees's unpublished essay on mythology she refers (as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 8.1) to the belief in the magical power of words among the ancients, echoing Harrison's

discussion of the *mythos* in ritual.<sup>34</sup> ‘Winged words’ as Homer calls them, were seen as ‘tiny living creatures, quivering with power’. She writes that ‘from this imaginary flock of winged words there grew a Daimon<sup>35</sup> light & winged like they who afterwards assumed the pompous dimensions of the Patron of Eloquence’. As daimons are born through ritual – the first step, according to Harrison, towards representation – this places language at a remove from reality, in that it is symbolically embodied by the figure of Hermes. Mirrlees leaves her readers with a reminder of this primitive sense of words as magical:

the Written Word is a Fairy, as mocking and elusive as Willy Wisp, speaking lying words to us in a feigned voice. So let all readers of books take warning! And with this final exhortation this book shall close. (273)

This echoes the sense of written language as magical – a living material to be wielded as a sacrament – discussed in relation to *Paris* in the previous chapter. It implies, moreover, the power of words to change reality; they are the vehicle of illusion.

In her mythology essay Mirrlees furthermore describes Hermes as the ‘daimon of the debatable land’ between living and dead, and ‘psychopompos [one who conducts souls to the netherworld]<sup>36</sup> and leader of dreams’. She thus draws attention to the perceived power of words, in primitive times, to communicate between the realm of the living and that of the dead and the chthonic potencies, through the magical figure of Hermes. As the ‘leader of dreams’ this figure perhaps implies that a language for this communication between realms can come out of dreams. As mentioned above, Fairyland in Mirrlees’s novel is conflated with the land of the dead; the implication, given these observations on Hermes in Mirrlees’s essay, is that words might possess the magical power to symbolically communicate the mysteries of Fairyland and everything it stands for. The novel’s intertextual frame implies that fantasy writing is the means of this hermetic communication – as does the title of the chapter in which Chanticleer visits Fairyland, ‘The Initiate’. The continuous trope of dreams in the novel

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3 on the holophrase in *Paris*.

<sup>35</sup> Here Mirrlees writes in a footnote that ‘When Hermes appears on vases as the “luck” of the place or the situation, I should imagine he was really the “lucky word” the word of good omen without which, to a suspicious people no undertaking is supposed to prosper. Cf Synge *Riders from the Sea*.’ Her reference to Synge here is to the passage in which Kathleen chides Maurya for sending Bartley out ‘with an unlucky word behind him’. The theme of the supernatural in the play has been commented on by for example Hull.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Garland (54).

indicates that dreams are key to this mode of expression. Linking fantasy to the figure of Hermes recalls E.M. Forster's comment regarding the fantasy genre in *Aspects of the Novel*: 'if one god must be invoked specially let us call upon Hermes – messenger, thief, and conductor of souls to a not too terrible hereafter' (105).

This function of Hermes as mediator between realms may be suggested by the role of a herm in the novel. Harrison describes how Hermes and Herakles were worshipped as herms, blocks of stone, gradually becoming humanised (*Themis* 365). Hermes is furthermore connected by Harrison with trees, which is echoed in the way the herm in *Lud-in-the-Mist* is 'half a man and half a tree' (270). The herm serves the function of connecting the realms of the living and the dead in the novel, as Chanticleer and his accomplice Hazel find the letter written by the murdered farmer underneath it, solving the mystery of his death. Chanticleer is told to dig under this herm through a riddle spoken by a fairy, which underlines the connection of the herm to the other realm of Fairyland. The herm is furthermore given a humanised aspect – like Hermes – as Chanticleer refers to him jokingly as 'Master Herm', adding 'he *does* look knowing!' (218).

This potential of words to communicate from the supernatural land of the dead, Fairyland, the unconscious, can be seen within the Nietzschean framework of the novel to require a meeting of the Dionysian forces – associated with Fairyland – and the Apollonian, that is, illusion. However, as Fairyland has been disowned in the novel, illusion is put to a different use, and is shown to be rife in Dorimare regardless of the banishment of the fairies. That the Apollonian, rather than the Dionysian, is the dominant force in Dorimare is hinted at by the name's hidden allusion to the Doric age, an era Nietzsche considers to have been especially hostile to Dionysus, referring to it as 'a continued encampment of the Apolline' (*Birth of Tragedy* 27). The theme of projection, illusion and the uncertainty of knowledge is foreshadowed in the characterisation of Chanticleer at the beginning of the novel, where we are warned of the perils of attempting to characterise anyone:

You should regard each meeting with a friend as a sitting he is unwittingly giving you for a portrait—a portrait that, probably, when you or he die, will still be unfinished.

Finally, she goes on, when the portrait is finished, it will be 'your *own* face that you are staring at in terror' (3-4 [emphasis in the original]). Chanticleer is described as having a tendency 'to believe that one could play with reality and give it what shape one chose' (26). Chanticleer, however, hears the Note and is henceforth 'a dreamer, who has never tasted fruit' (248) and his

dreams lead him to Fairyland. Illusion has more commonly in Dorimare taken the shape of 'legal fictions' which have simply replaced fairy fruit. The law is, the narrator tells us, 'a sort of magic, moulding reality into any shape it [chooses]' (13).

As mentioned in Section 4, banishing the Duke and fairies and replacing them with the law hints at a coded, fantastical restaging of the historical replacement of absolute rule with increased parliamentary power, that is, the Glorious Revolution. The concern in this period with eliminating feudalism in order to enhance commerce is echoed in the novel when we are told that, under the old system of Dukes, the gradually growing middle class 'had discovered—as it always does—that trade was seriously hampered by a ruler unchecked by a constitution, and by a ruthless, privileged class' (10). The depiction of the law in the novel could in this light be seen to comment on the pre-industrial Enlightenment project and its premises of reason and progress. While the cruelty and injustice of the old regime is highlighted at the start of the novel, the apparent democratic rule of law in the new system is likewise exposed as only an illusion. We are told that 'whereas only the reigning Duke and his priests had been allowed to partake of the fruit, the law was given freely to rich and poor alike'; but the law, like fairy, is 'delusion' and 'no one really believes it' (13-14). The law, for example, does not stop the family of the labourer Diggory Carp from being turned out of their home by their employers and being forced to '[tramp] the country, living from hand to mouth' during the great drought' (158).

The early capitalist legal system replacing the rule of the mad Duke Aubrey can be seen as a kind of rise of Socratic rationality, in Nietzschean terms. Feudalism is replaced with a more impersonal, calculated form of governance based on contracts and wages rather than unpredictable human relations. As the novel implies, the new system has its own internal logic of wealth generation and has no need for human interference: '[wealth] had become naturalised in Dorimare, and was now a hardy perennial, docilely renewing itself year after year, and needing no tending from the gardeners' (18). The fact that 'in the eye of the law, neither Fairyland nor fairy things existed' also indicates that this new regime means to do away with irrational, illogical illusions (13). We are told of the 'common sense' of the burgher-class Dorimarites (12, 85, 121), and that to the minds of the Dorimarites, an 'honest, clear-eyed' perspective can dispel fairy illusion (12). However, the illusory nature of the law implies that the image-making, illusory power of Apollo cannot be eradicated; as Chanticleer says, 'man cannot live without delusion', hinting at an inherent myth-making impulse which can take different forms. As the myth of faerie is being stamped out, the myth of the law has taken

its place. Thus, instead of being harnessed by the Dionysian force to present an image of the tragic, the Apollonian is used here by the Socratic drive to provide an illusion of progress and truth.

Law in the novel furthermore invokes the goddess Themis, title of Harrison's seminal study. Themis stands, Harrison explains, for the law in the Durkheimian sense; she is the personification of 'the herd-instinct, custom, convention slowly crystallized into Law and abstract Right' (*Themis* 485). From the Harrisonian perspective, the law in *Lud-in-the-Mist* does not represent a unified people; it does not care for all the people of Dorimare and therefore loses credibility. This is arguably how it becomes an illusion that nobody believes in. Instead of representing a unified collective conscience, here the law follows the individualistic logic of early capitalism. Indeed, this individualism – a lack of respect for the collective – may be why Chanticleer accuses Leer of having 'mishandled the sacred mysteries' (269), as Leer provides fairy fruit for individuals, without the collective sanction of the people. The reintegration of faerie at the end of the novel implies a possible symbiosis not only of the Apollonian and Dionysian – which is what, following the Nietzschean model, makes it possible for art to start 'creeping back into Dorimare' (272) – but also the reintegration of what was taboo, but psychologically needed, into the law.

As faerie is still a part of life in the countryside in the novel, and still exercises some power over even the practical burghers of Lud in the form of taboos – and no one fully believes the law that denounces the existence of fairies – the novel can be seen to depict a transitional stage, from an age in touch with the supernatural to an age where it is eradicated from the collective imagination. This sense of transition is also suggested in the title of the novel. 'Lud' could be read as alluding to the Luddite movement which opposed the replacement of traditional craft with factories brought by the Industrial Revolution. This opposition to industrialisation is, thus, in the imaginary time and place of the novel, still in the mist – yet to be concretely realised. The logic of the Enlightenment, of which industrialisation was a part, spelled the dissolution not only of older craft-based industry, but also, as the novel implies, a worldview that embraced the supernatural, the mysterious, and which generated folktales, myths that could express aspects of life that cannot be realistically or rationally accounted for. Echoing *Paris*'s ambivalence regarding a regeneration of Catholicism, the novel does not wholly endorse either the old or new system. While art does return to Dorimare at the end of the novel with the return of the Duke and re-legalisation of fairy fruit, we are not told how this meeting of old and new worlds will function. As in *Paris*, which does not show

the outcome of its imaginative invocation of pre-Catholic matriarchal religion, *Lud-in-the-Mist* highlights problems and possibilities. Regardless of whether the reintegration of Dorimare and Fairyland will be viable, the importance of acknowledging the mystery of the latter is clear.

With this evocation of a transition towards Enlightenment values, away from a more enchanted worldview allowing for mystery and the expression of hidden psychological impulses, Mirrlees can herself be seen as using the fantasy mode to express deep concerns about changes in her own world. While late Victorian Britain had embraced spiritualism, secret societies, and various forms of the occult, and while this search for alternative expressions of spirituality had found its way into literature,<sup>37</sup> such traditions were gradually ebbing away as canonising pronouncements on modernism rejected ‘vagueness’, what could not be treated directly. The next section considers how Mirrlees’s gesture, both in her research on Romanticism and in writing *Lud-in-the-Mist*, challenges some of the main assumptions of her literary peers.

## **6 The flight *from* fairyland: modernism’s quarrel with Romantic escapism**

The element of fantasy, or a seeming lack of grounding in what was seen as reality, constituted a major factor in the scepticism voiced by a number of influential modernists regarding their Romantic precursors. As Louise Blakeney Williams usefully explains in her *Modernism and the Ideology of History* (2002), after a brief neo-Romantic phase inspired by literary Symbolism in their early careers, writers like Pound, Lawrence and Hulme became uncomfortable, towards the end of the first decade of the century, with their “‘Romantic’ position’ and the way their art ‘suggested removal from the world’ (28). They rejected the ‘vague, sentimental and escapist’ style in which they found themselves writing. D.H. Lawrence, for example, expressed a wish to ‘avoid art that was “undecided, vague, suggestive” and which used esoteric symbols that “do not show what they stand for themselves”’ (28-29). Instead the new ideal consisted, as Lawrence says in 1908, of ‘level-headed, fair, unrelenting realism’; artists should, as Ford claimed, be ‘stern realists’ (qtd. in

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<sup>37</sup> See for example Louis.

Williams 30). As Williams writes, ‘Pound and Hulme admired poets who “attempt to reproduce exactly the thing which has been seen,” and poems in which “each *word* [is] ... an image seen”’ (30). Even Yeats – who had formerly considered the role of artists to be comparable with that of mystics, charged with the task of depicting a deeper reality beyond reason and material surfaces (24) – ‘regretted the fact that in the modern world “[t]he poet ... must sit apart in contemplative indolence playing with fragile things” and that poetry must “separate itself from life”’ (29). Already in 1888 he regretted what he saw as the escapism in his verse:

it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight...it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint – the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope some day to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge. (29)

Williams notes that increasingly after 1908, what Yeats and the other modernists in her grouping (Hulme, Pound, Ford, Lawrence) wanted was ‘a poetry of “utter simplicity” in which “everything [is] very hard and clear.”’

In his *Time and Western Man* Wyndham Lewis echoes this negative view of Romanticism as escapist. For him, the Romantic is

the opposite of the real. Romance is a thing that is in some sense non-existent. For instance, ‘romance’ is the reality of yesterday, or of tomorrow; or it is the reality of somewhere else. Romance is the great traditional enemy of the Present. (5)

Echoing this emphasis on real and not real, Eliot, in a *Criterion* article in 1923, disparages the Romantic writer for being ‘deficient or undeveloped in his ability to distinguish between fact and fancy, whereas the classicist, or adult mind, is thoroughly realist, without illusions, without day-dreams, without hope, without bitterness, and with an abundant resignation’ (qtd. in Donoghue 24).

This modernist view of fantasy as escapist has been commented on by Nicola Brown (among others) who refers to the consoling and relieving function of Victorian fantasy and notes that ‘[a]fter World War One it gradually became impossible to find consolation for the depredations of modernity in dreaming of fairyland’ (qtd. in Harris 22). This view of Victorian fantasy has, however, been complicated by Harris, for example, who considers how a number of Victorian folkloric narratives ‘represent focused articulations of concerns close to the Victorian heart, mind, and soul’ (35). He notes, for example, the writer Edith Nesbitt’s ‘metaphorical applications to her contemporary world’ (58), which echo Mirrlees’s use of fantasy. In the same vein Brian Attebery’s recent study on a selection of fantasy works, which

includes Mirrlees's, argues that fantasy does not have to be seen as 'an anachronistic alternative to Modernism but [can instead be viewed] as one of its important manifestations' (42). He goes on to consider his selection of works as examples of Eliot's mythic method, examining how they use myth to express vital spiritual meanings.

In line with this stance on modernist fantasy, this chapter has focused on how Mirrlees's research mines the Romantic tradition for its exploration of mystical experience, dreams and the unconscious, and its appreciation of symbolic, mythical expressions of the unknown – including fairy tales. In defiance of the verdict on Romanticism ringing out among forgers of the new modernist creed – 'there is no place for it in letters' (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* 31-32) – *Lud-in-the-Mist* locates itself within the Romantic tradition that Mirrlees traces, a tradition which can be seen as centring on fantasy. As this chapter has argued, fantasy for her does not constitute an escape from reality. While she would agree with Lewis that the term Romantic 'is very generally used to describe a "dreamer"' (*Time and Western Man* 5), for her this does not mean, as it does for Lewis, that dreams are divorced from reality, not revealing anything real. She would further agree with Lewis's paraphrasing of Pound's statement that 'the normal, the known and the visible, is what Romanticism is not. "Romance" is what is unusual, not normal, mysterious, not visible, perhaps not susceptible at all of visual treatment' (5). While this for Lewis damns Romanticism, Mirrlees, as this chapter has shown, sees value precisely in things that are 'not susceptible at all of visual treatment'. Mirrlees's novel can thus be read as a defence of fantasy against this hostility to the form among leading modernist lights, on the principle that there are experiences, desires and emotions beyond the sayable which can only be communicated through symbols, and that the fantasy mode provides a language in which to express encounters with the mysterious in life. In Nietzschean terms, rejecting the drive towards Fairyland is a Socratic 'flight from pessimism', an escape from life constituted by a refusal to accept its rationally unknowable elements, the musical madness that cannot be grasped by the explaining mind and which therefore inevitably colours human life with a sense of tragedy. At the same time the novel deconstructs the binary between realism and fantasy that appears so central to modernist dismissals of the genre, through its continuous theme of projection, illusion and the deception of language.

In writing a fantasy novel in this literary climate, Mirrlees herself parallels the antiquarian project carried out in *Lud-in-the-Mist* by Endymion Leer. Indeed, Mirrlees's gesture is linked in significant ways with the work of a writer who she describes as an antiquarian of folktales, capturing a dying worldview in his own country, Russia. Mirrlees's

essay on Alexei Michailovich Remizov was referred to in Chapter 3's discussion of Mirrlees's antiquarianism and its connection to her attitude towards the materiality of language. The next section will consider how Remizov may have inspired *Lud-in-the-Mist*.

## 7 Alexei Remizov's tales of 'old Russia': Mirrlees's model for mysterious, antiquarian fantasy?

Mirrlees's depiction of the gradual disappearance of fantasy in *Lud-in-the-Mist* bears a striking resemblance to the way she describes the work of the Russian writer and collector of fairy tales Alexey Remizov, with whom Harrison and Mirrlees collaborated on their translations of *Avvakum* (1924) and *Book of the Bear*, a collection of Russian fairy tales. The former is dedicated to Remizov while the latter includes four of his stories and devotes half of its preface to a discussion of his work.

The same year that *Lud-in-the-Mist* and *Book of the Bear* were published, Mirrlees also wrote her essay 'Some Aspects of the Art of Alexey Michailovich Remizov'. Here, she highlights certain features of Remizov's writing which show strong parallels with *Lud-in-the-Mist*. She specifically praises his ability to intimate the esoteric, mysterious and inexpressible. The most obvious instance of this is a passage nearly identical to one in *Lud-in-the-Mist* spoken by Endymion Leer, in which he defends supplying Dorimarites with fairy fruit because of its tragic but life-giving effect. These lines in the novel read:

Every man, worthy of the name, is an Initiate; but each one into different Mysteries. And some walk among our fellows with the pitying, slightly scornful smile of an adept among catechumens. And some are confiding and garrulous, and would so willingly impart their own unique secret - in vain! For though they shout it in the market-place, or whisper it in music and poetry, what they say is never the same as what they know, and they are like ghosts charged with a message of tremendous import who can only trail their chains and gibber. (236)

Apart from a few minor alterations in phrasing, the differences in the essay include the beginning of the first line – which instead reads 'Every man and woman' – perhaps changed in the novel for stylistic reasons (not fitting into the high, old fashioned style of Endymion Leer's pivotal speech). It may also not be something the character Leer would be likely to say, considering the treatment of women portrayed in the novel – part of the way in which Leer is said by Chanticleer to have 'mishandled the sacred mysteries' (269). A line is also added in the essay after the first two sentences, which spells out what the plot of the novel leaves implicit:

And we have no need to take a vow of secrecy; because we are incapable of revealing what we know.

Moreover, the essay again makes explicit what the novel implies in its coded literary allusions; instead of the novel's phrase 'some are confiding and garrulous', the essay reads 'writers are garrulous, confiding creatures'. Finally, the novel's line '(f)or though they shout it in the market-place, or whisper it in music and poetry, what they say is never the same as what they know' is echoed in the last sentence of Mirrlees's essay: 'Perhaps the measure of a writer's greatness is just the disparity between the things he says and the things he knows.' On the level of Mirrlees's argument about fantasy, this passage can thus be seen to promote a literary mode which acknowledges, if not foregrounds, the impossibility of expressing the mysterious.

The ability of a writer to intimate the mysterious is also praised in the lines preceding this passage in the essay, in which Mirrlees relates that 'reading is almost as hard an act as writing, especially if the books are by a sincere and talented writer; because he leaves so much unsaid.' This line follows her admission that in trying to describe Remizov, 'the tertium quid has completely evaded my pen' (underlining in the original). This recalls her essay 'Time and Gold',<sup>38</sup> in which she describes time as the symbol for

the fruit of no earthly tree, the treasure of no geological deposit, the tertium quid that mocks philosophers and scientists as much as us and which, try as we will, we cannot subsume under the established laws of nature and experience.

This context for Mirrlees's use of the term 'tertium quid' implies an intuitive, secret, incommunicable insight or vision gained from reading Remizov, echoing her own use of silence in *Lud-in-the-Mist*.

It is perhaps partly the mystery she perceives in Remizov himself that makes him central to her thinking on how what lies beyond language relates to literature and literary genres. As noted in Chapter 1, in Mirrlees's (undated) notes for Harrison's biography she conveys the spiritual significance that Russia had for her and Harrison:

Like Winckelmann with his Greeks, it was Russian life we fell in love with - a life which the War made as inaccessible as the Ossa and Pelion of centuries made Greece. The life of these rambling wooden country houses and the mushrooms and

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<sup>38</sup> This essay is discussed in Chapter 1, Section 4.2.

prostor [space/scope] and ‘dreamy woods’ and nightingales and веселост [gaiety].  
(Mirrlees papers 4/3/1)

Again, the connection between space – places to roam – and the spiritual fairyland central to Mirrlees’s Romanticism is indicated.

While in her essay on Remizov she writes that ‘a great deal of sentimental nonsense has been written about the Russians,’ she nonetheless maintains that ‘the fact remains that they are the most spiritual-minded of all people.’ Mirrlees applies to the Russians, who she calls a ‘race of pilgrims’, the scripture ‘(f)or they who say such things declare plainly that they seek a country’ (underlining in the original), and adds, also partly in a Biblical vein, ‘a house not made with hands, a land of ghosts and shadows.’ The first reference is to a scripture in Hebrews 11, a chapter dealing entirely with the virtue of faith, the belief in the unseen, and the plight of ‘strangers and pilgrims on the earth’, indicating a connection between Russians and a kind of mysticism that sets them apart as a people. In the opening paragraph of her essay, Mirrlees notes that ‘like most of his Russian contemporaries, [Remizov] is not a little influenced by the demonology of Madame Blavatsky’, invoking initiation into occult mysteries, as Helena Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, was one of the most prominent representatives of such ideas in the period. Mirrlees highlights these characteristics in Remizov by drawing attention to the fact that he is frequently described by his compatriots as quintessentially ‘Russian’ but notes that the meaning of this adjective has not yet fully crystallised, and even Russians themselves cannot define what they mean by it. She draws a parallel with the adjective ‘Shakespearian’ which is similarly indefinite but vaguely refers to ‘a particular aspect of English things - in fact, "the still small voice" of England, which, we flatter ourselves, none but natives can hear.’

Mirrlees discusses the way in which this sense of mystery in Remizov is sometimes brought about by his faculty for ‘exaltation’ in writing, a term she borrows from her friend and fellow champion of Romanticism, the critic Charles Du Bos,<sup>39</sup> which conveys the same propensity towards the mysterious in his writing. Mirrlees explains that exaltation is, according to Du Bos, ‘the source of all spirituality’ occupying a plane anterior to knowledge

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<sup>39</sup> Du Bos originally uses the term in reference to Proust, in the essay ‘Marcel Proust’ in his *Approximations* (1922).

and as such is not directly expressible in words. Her own metaphor for writing produced under the influence of exaltation is that it 'has more bouquet than body.' This idea is echoed in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, where the nature of Fairyland is not directly represented but rather intimated through a number of associations – ecstasy, intoxication, tragedy, the ancient past, dreams and repressed longings.

Chapter 3 considered Mirrlees's depiction of Remizov in this essay as an antiquarian writer; Mirrlees's discussion of this aspect of Remizov also serves to shed light on her use of fantasy. In the essay, she asks what drives Remizov to write folklore-inspired, anti-realist stories (which she describes as 'half fairy, half apocryphal') when most writers 'have no wish to tamper with life and the laws that govern it, but, springing aside to let the great thing roll past unimpeded [...] watch, fascinated, the laws of dynamics and physics in ruthless and magnificent play.'<sup>40</sup> She considers first one class of writers not adhering to this realist norm: 'some writers, it is true, crave for decorativeness'. As seen in Chapter 3, such a writer views life as a collection of objects which the writer, like a painter 'combines and rearranges according to his plastic needs': 'Life for the decorative writer is still-life', she writes, and refers to this style as 'rococo writing'.

Mirrlees can be seen to take a critical stance against this 'still-life', 'rococo' style in *Lud-in the-Mist*. As mentioned in Section 4, Dorimare is associated with rococo through a reference to Winckelmann's excavation of 'an old and solemn art' in eighteenth-century Rome, and this association connects, as well, with a description of Dorimare as picturesque. Ruskin's criticism of the picturesque as heartless can be read in the novel: for example, the prettiness of Lud does not extend to the poor of the countryside, such as the labourer Diggory Carp and his family; also, it stops Chanticleer from taking much needed action.<sup>41</sup> As troubles mount in the novel, Chanticleer's 'secret shadowy fears began to solidify—to find a real focus; and the focus was Ranulph' (106). His concern for his son contrasts with his earlier materialistic lack of real care for his son, regarding him 'more as an heirloom than as a son' (24), which implied

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<sup>40</sup> Another example, on the previous page, demonstrating Mirrlees's interest in the hidden emotional source of art is her analysis of how minor discomforts must be treated in a comic vein, which she refers to as 'one of the unwritten canons of literature.' 'It would be interesting', she continues, 'to trace the psychological origins of these canons - they are the secret arbiters of literary genres' (emphasis in the original); this, again, supports the idea that *Lud-in-the-Mist* is an examination of the psychological origins of fantasy writing.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Macarthur (127) for a discussion of Ruskin and the picturesque.

a view of life as a collection of objects. However, immediately after this emotional breakthrough, and feeling an impulse to rescue Ranulph from potential danger, Nathaniel is beset by a decadent mood that makes him wander about in graveyards reading epitaphs; he succumbs to ‘a lethargic nightmare of fatalism’ that deters him from going in search of his son. Instead he finds relief walking through the Fields of Grammary which give him ‘a foretaste of death—the state that will turn one into a sort of object of art [...] And the pleached alley brought him the peace of *still* life—life that neither moves nor suffers’. In this mood the narrator (from Nathaniel’s point of view) reflects that ‘[i]f life in *Lud-in-the-Mist* could always be like that there would be no need to die’ (106-108). The echoes of the fatalist decadence of Aestheticism,<sup>42</sup> as well as the tendency to treat life as still-life, resound in this passage.

However, as Mirrlees argues, Remizov is yet a different sort of writer: the antiquary. As discussed in Chapter 3, she sees in such writers a wistful attitude to the present that makes it seem as if it were already part of the past and ‘hence, static and solid - a thing that one can turn round in one’s hand and examine at one’s leisure’.<sup>43</sup> A writer of this sort may thus treat certain things in the world like objects; in Remizov’s case these are the contents of ‘man’s world - the fantastic world built out of dreams and tradition’, but not God’s world, which ‘is too solemn a place to be treated in this charming but frivolous manner.’ This is not the same as treating the present merely decoratively, Mirrlees argues, because (borrowing Browning’s phrase) ‘the learned eye is still the loving one.’ This affection comes from the true antiquary’s interest not in dead things – the past – but things that are dying, the present becoming past. The quest of this type of writer is to trace disappearing things back to their origins; he ‘tracks an old tune to a shepherd whistling it in the hidden valley where it was born, chases winged words with his net, listens to old wives’ tales, and hastens to catch the last faltered words of the dying gods.’ This antiquarian quest is suggested in *Lud-in-the-Mist* in the way it traces its own origins as a work of fantasy to the numerous tropes provided by the history of such

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<sup>42</sup> See for example (Denisoff 45, 54) for the link between fatalism and Aesthetic decadence.

<sup>43</sup> This tendency can also be seen in Mirrlees’s novel in Chanticleer’s ‘wistful yearning after the prosaic things he already possessed. It was as if he thought he had already lost what he was actually holding in his hand’ (6). Sure enough, the plot leads him to Fairyland, mystical repository of the origins of this antiquarian attitude, Nietzsche’s ‘time-sickness’.

writing. At the same time it traces the psychological origin of this mode of writing to what Harrison describes as the mentality belonging to primitive ritual.

That Mirrlees herself was employing this manner of treating ‘the fantastic world built out of dreams and tradition’ as being composed of solid objects she could hold in her hand is indicated in a letter to Ottoline Morrel regarding the novel:

It was also frightfully kind of you to pave the way for my publishing that thing (it so pleased me you liked it so much) in the Criterion. At first I was so excited, but on re-reading it I see that I simply couldn’t expect Eliot (apart from the fact that he would probably think it very silly & bad) as an Anglo-Catholic to accept it. After all, it plays, as if they were only coloured balls, with conceptions which to him must be the most solemn of spiritual realities – &, really, he couldn’t be expected to print it. But it was so dear of you to bother. (qtd. in Swanwick 47)

Another description of Remizov in her essay highlights this similarity in their styles even further. Here she relates how, in Remizov, the present is ‘made of a fabric woven out of a myriad separate brightly coloured little threads to the collecting of which Alexey Michailovich has brought the gusto of an amateur, in the weaving together of which he has found the amusement of a game.’ In the intertextual maze of fantasy writing in *Lud-in-the-Mist* Mirrlees weaves just such a tapestry herself. But in Mirrlees, as in Remizov, the ‘learned eye is still the loving one’; the amusing events and characters in the story are all threads that Mirrlees weaves into a symbolic tapestry, one which shows a deep concern with the disappearance, in her time, of an engagement with the mysterious and fantastic. Her comments on Remizov’s stories could also apply to literature closer to home: ‘the language in which they are written, the attitude to life that they express – though on the brink of labefaction, is still alive’.

Mirrlees' and Remizov's closeness on the literary scene may be sensed in the fact that, while many favourable notices of *Lud-in-the-Mist* were printed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the only review the novel received in the periodical was by Richard Denis Charques, a young scholar who also reviewed Remizov's ‘The Clock’ in the TLS two years earlier and went on to write critical pieces about Russia and the Soviet Union throughout his career. In this review Charques shows a depth of insight into Mirrlees’s aims in *Lud-in-the-Mist* by remarking, for example, on the ‘charm and gallantry’ with which the novel

supports the extra burden which modern fairy-tales have to bear. For they are expected to do more than nourish a starving sense of wonder; they are bound to set the real, tame, unmagical things of this world side by side with the toys and playthings of the imagination and to persuade us that the barrier between fact and fancy is entirely an affair of our own sweet will. If we choose to cross from the free

state of Dorimare to Fairyland there are only the Debatable Hills to be climbed, and we please only ourselves whether or not we make the journey. (Charques 26)

This description of the novel shows a sensitivity to some of its central aspects: the fact that it is for adults, and the idea that the mundane can suddenly become strange and fantastic. Mirrlees' admiration for Remizov's Russianness and her almost occultist response to his work appears to have been shared by this critic. This comes out as he ends the abovementioned review of 'The Clock' with this note about one of Remizov's other stories:

'A White Heart' is written with a directness and simplicity that belong to an older or, perhaps, a more distant consciousness than we boast. It is difficult to withhold wonder at the genius of the Russian mind. (683)

The 'older', 'more distant consciousness' echoes the primitivist, Orientalist view of Russia that Mirrlees and Harrison shared.<sup>44</sup> As shown in Chapter 1, Section 5.6, Harrison describes Russia in Bergsonian terms that recall her descriptions of primitive Greek ritual.

Mirrlees's concern with the place of the mysterious and incommunicable in literature may be further illuminated by her friendship and artistic affinity with Charles Du Bos. In a letter to Mirrlees two years after her conversion to Catholicism (four years after his own), Du Bos, referring to Mirrlees's letter discussing Keats's *Letters*, rejoices in how 'the correspondence of Keats has done with you what, to my mind, it is meant to do, that is to establish, in the deepest way, the relation between poetry and mysticism' (Mirrlees papers 2/2/3). Du Bos, while suspicious of the Romantic-classical dichotomy, nonetheless confesses to being a 'romantique impenitent', as Angelo Bertocci notes (30), and is credited with having dealt some powerful blows to the neo-classical creed, represented in France by Charles Maurras and in England by T.S. Eliot. This creed 'attempted to link seventeenth-century literature alone with spirituality and religion' and sever the moderns from their Romantic literary heritage, as Peyre writes in a review of a study on Du Bos by Bertocci (527). Du Bos's admiration for the English Romantic poets sprang from the quality of spirituality he felt in their work, from which he drew the conclusion that Romanticism is not something that integrates specific religious values, but rather itself operates in a way that can be understood as religious ('Le Romantisme n'intègre pas les valeurs religieuses, il opère religieusement')

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<sup>44</sup> A widely popular view, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 5.6.

[Bertocci 30]). This definition of religion as a mode of action rather than a set of beliefs is very close to Harrison's location of religion within the ritual act rather than in theology, and as with Harrison, Bergson appears to be the basis for this idea in Du Bos. Du Bos's use of the term 'exaltation' – an experience which is the rationally inexpressible source of spirituality, which "occupies a plane anterior to knowledge' and is at one with the 'sens de la vie' itself – relies as heavily on Bergson's notion of *durée* as on Keats' 'top of sovereignty' (Bertocci 8-9). Du Bos' belief in a "natural" spirituality, in the religious sense, manifest in so-called secular thought and expression' (22) led him to believe 'that Plotinus, Eckhart and the line that through Novalis reaches forward to Stefan George and Simmel constitute the religion from which there is no reason whatsoever that [he] should ever feel excluded' (8) Unfortunately (but perhaps inevitably) the critical exploration of this form of spirituality intended to make up the second part of his *Du Spiritue dans l'ordre litteraire* – to be titled simply *De la spiritualite naturelle* – remained unwritten (22).

Du Bos's quest, which resembles Harrison's call for a new religion that is necessarily atheist and non-theological,<sup>45</sup> ultimately failed; he converted to Catholicism two years before Mirrlees herself. However, both writers continued to investigate these ideas. After her conversion, Mirrlees considered it (as Du Bos did) the role of Catholic poetry to provide a literary engagement with the unseen (Unpublished essay on theology, Mirrlees Papers 6/5/3), but considering her output after this,<sup>46</sup> her quest appears to have been an instance of what may be recorded in literary history as an impossible, doomed, but perhaps necessary modernist experiment that failed. This suggests that after converting to an established, theological religion she could no longer produce writing that expressed the transitional, liminal quality of ritual; 'certainty and satisfaction', Harrison writes, are not the driving forces of ritual. They may bring comfort, but art born of ritual must arise out of 'longing and desire'.

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.5.3 for my discussion of this.

<sup>46</sup> The biography of Robert Cotton has its share of literary flair, but nonetheless could not be described as literature, and the collection of poems entitled *Moods and Tensions*, while dealing with the theme of religion, has none of the innovativeness that inspired *Paris*, which, as the previous two chapters argued, engages with mysticism on the level of form.

## 8 Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that *Lud-in-the-Mist* can be read as a self-conscious meta-fantasy about the nature of fantasy writing itself, strongly echoing both Mirrlees's writing on Romanticism and Harrison's later writing on myth. Mirrlees's own research into literary history highlights a strand of Romanticism that emphasises dreams, the unconscious, the mysterious and supernatural. The novel places itself within this tradition not only through its chosen literary mode but also through a complex intertextual web of allusions to works of literature employing the fantasy mode, as well as to the lived tradition of fantasy in folklore.

The origin for this mode, as Mirrlees writes in her literary-historical research, is ritual. In the *Epilegomena* – dedicated to Mirrlees – Harrison fleshes out this idea, joining her theory of a ritual mentality to the Freudian and Jungian ideas of a myth-making, 'dream and phantasy thinking' unconscious. *Lud-in-the-Mist* shows fantasy-writing, through a metonymic association with Fairyland, as a mode that harnesses this dimension of consciousness. The novel implies that fantasy enables literature to point to the unknowable, that which lies beyond the limits of conscious reason, and which can only be felt on the same mythical, even mystical, level of consciousness that creates fantasy. The figure of Hermes comes into focus in Mirrlees's writing about the creation by the 'first romantics', in ancient Greece, of a 'Land of Heart's Desires', and plays an important part in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, highlighting the hermetic quality of the language of fantasy – it is, Mirrlees implies, the unconscious speaking to the unconscious (anticipating this definition by the fantasy writer Ursula LeGuin fifty years on).

Through direct associations of Fairyland with ritual and the unconscious, and through the use of the Nietzschean frame underlying Harrison's metahistory of ancient Greece, Mirrlees almost polemically makes a case for fantasy writing as a potential way of exercising the ritual mode in novel form. In doing this, she rebuts certain modernist arguments that dismiss 'flights into fairyland' as escapist, as the fairyland must be built to express the inexpressible, and language, the mercurial, magic substance that it is, cannot be wielded to convey 'reality' even if that is its aim. It creates worlds in any case, whether that is Fairyland or 'The World-in-Law' as the novel calls it (161,163), and attempting to bend it to suit only the purposes of rationality – the Socratic harnessing the image-making power of the Apollonian – misses out on a vital aspect of human experience.

Echoing the antiquarian theme in the novel – played out through Endymion Leer and Chanticleer – Mirrlees's defence of fantasy can be seen as a gesture of collecting and preserving snippets of literature and lore that represent, for her, a sense of spirituality in

literature that she perhaps felt was disappearing in an increasingly materialistic culture. The imaginary historical frame of the novel, which points on one level to the shift from feudalism to capitalism, indicates that this may have been a major concern. Perhaps in her intimation of the magical, unspoken sublime at the centre of the novel, and its rich history alluded to throughout, she also hoped to sound a Note in the minds of her readers, to reawaken their taste for fantasy.

Apart from her dialogue with modern materialistic culture, and with a strain of writing during a period sceptical of fantasy, this chapter suggested that Mirrlees may on a more personal level be in dialogue with Harrison. As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 3.5.3), for all of Harrison's emotional engagement with ritual, she could not, it seems, shake off the rationalism that she says was essential to her generation's iconoclastic quest. As such, the unknown was for her, in Mirrlees's view, 'always becoming the known'.<sup>47</sup> Ritual became art, and mysticism gave way to rationality. Although she observed and hoped for a return to ritual both in art and in religion, in Mirrlees's view she could not allow this return in herself. *Lud-in-the-Mist* was perhaps an attempt to highlight to Harrison the possibility of things beyond rational understanding, things that will never be known but nonetheless exist and can be discovered and felt in art.

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<sup>47</sup> See above in Section 2.3.

## Concluding remarks

This thesis has examined the work of Hope Mirrlees through the overarching framework of Jane Ellen Harrison's ritual theory of art. As academic scholarship is just beginning to situate Mirrlees historically as more than just a footnote to the tangled narrative of literary modernism, the focus here has been to highlight a prominent aspect of her work which has not yet received in-depth attention; the larger aim has been to extend the ongoing conversation revising inherited versions of this narrative. This methodology has enabled an investigation into a variety of ways in which Mirrlees's work uses Harrison's ritual theory as a framework through which to engage with central cultural and aesthetic concerns of the period. Chapter 2 examined the way Mirrlees – like Pound and Eliot – explores primitive regenerative ritual as a potential idiom for exploring alternative spiritual energies and values. Unlike Pound or Eliot, however – and more similarly to the work of H.D. and Mary Butts – Mirrlees's model for this ritual is Harrison's feminist revisionist classicism, making a strong cultural statement on the corruption of Catholicism in a patriarchal world. Chapter 4 considered the way in which Mirrlees connects Harrison's ritual theory to the genre – or tropes and themes constitutive of – fantasy. In defence of a literary tradition often disparaged by influential shapers of the modernist canon, and only beginning to receive serious attention even today, Mirrlees makes the psychological origin of fantasy writing synonymous with the psychological, religious origin of myth and ritual.

This project considered, furthermore, how *Paris* and *Lud-in-the-Mist* deploy a performative aesthetic drawing on Harrison's definitions of religious ceremonial both thematically but also as a structuring device. Chapter 2 examined the way in which *Paris* enacts a ritual performance on the level of myth, or story. This is executed in its progression from night to day, death to life, in its engagement with the tropes of archaic myth as it carries out its journey through the city and in its wish for a primitive, magical utterance to express the emotion felt about the end of the War. Chapter 3 complemented this reading with an analysis of the concrete performance of the typographical and other bibliographic elements of the poem; here I argued that Mirrlees's emphasis on spatial, tangible signification realises the integration of speech with act that is central to Harrison's description of ritual. The opportunity was taken here to highlight Mirrlees's unique position in the history of the book as a result of this gesture; her integration of spatial and temporal aspects typifies a turning point at which

the signifying ability of the materiality of texts – according to McGann’s research into the Renaissance of Printing – began to be realised. The ritual themes and performance of the poem, I argued, highlights an intersection between a recovery of body and space in book-making and a similar emphasis in Harrison’s theory of ritual.

Chapter 4 highlighted *Lud-in-the-Mist*’s similarly performative aesthetic, in that it enacts its argument about fantasy partly by being, itself, written in this mode. Moreover, it takes the emphasis on performative language in the previous two chapters a step further by pointing to the fickleness of language – how it serves as a vehicle of illusion rather than fact – and the way in which stories made up out of language are inescapably ‘the yarn with which we weave our picture of the world’ (*Lud-in-the-Mist* 49). Again, language creates, it performs, rather than represents. Furthermore, the novel points to the function of fantasy as symbolically expressing vital spiritual truths, unconscious fears and mystical experience. Its own function, as a fantasy novel, could be to express a fear of a loss of connection to myth and the spiritual in literature, as well as a statement of political discontent; the novel criticises the soulless materialism of capitalism and hints at a devaluing of women within this system.

Mirrlees’s antiquarianism is key to the performativity of her texts, and was traced in Chapter 3 to central arguments in Harrison’s theory. Mirrlees’s conception of ‘antiquarian magic’ involves a mystical restoration of the past and preservation of the present, which both *Paris* and *Lud-in-the-Mist* perform. Both texts imaginatively restore a stratum of the past that fills a need not met in the present: in *Paris*, ancient matriarchal myth and ritual is invoked; in *Lud-in-the-Mist* the fairy past is brought into the present for the citizens of Mirrlees’s imagined country, and a sense of the fantastic and mystical is potentially restored to readers living in the disenchanted modern world. Like Alexei Remizov, whose influence is felt in the novel, Mirrlees is at the same time preserving a literary tradition that may be dying. *Paris*, similarly preserves a moment in history, and points to its own material production as a relic of that historical moment – and may thus bring a sudden mystical, tangible sense of the past to future generations of readers. Harrison’s influence on Mirrlees’s antiquarianism thus demonstrates the way in which, as Fiske observes, Harrison’s work ‘was valuable in shaping alternate forms of knowing that allowed for a sense of historical, emotional, and moral continuity so desperately lacking after World War I’ (‘From Ritual to the Archaic in Modernism: Frazer, Harrison, Freud, and the Persistence of Myth’ 184-185). Mirrlees’s antiquarianism points to such an alternative form of knowing.

With Harrison's emphasis on embodied performance, process and immediacy in her theory, and Mirrlees's innovative translation of this into a performative aesthetic in her texts, the work of both women point to what Johanna Drucker refers to (as mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 5.1) as the early twentieth-century 'theme of materiality, the self-conscious attention to the formal means of production in literature and the visual arts (as well as music, dance, theatre, and film, it could be added)'; all these different uses of materiality in art, she argues, are connected in their insistence on 'the capacity of works to claim the status of being rather than representing' (10). Harrison's theory was briefly considered as a potential tool for a multidisciplinary investigation into this theme, which presents a promising object for future scholarly enquiry. A recent study on the modern development of solo performance across different art forms includes Harrison in a multidisciplinary investigation of this sort,<sup>1</sup> but much more could be done. Harrison's connection to developments in the performing arts is underresearched and – considering the close link between ritual and drama – presents a particularly intriguing starting point. Such an investigation could, in addition to examining a broad range of experiments in the early twentieth century, consider the different directions in which the turn to embodiment and performativity in the arts has led, and if/how such developments can be seen to build on the implications of Harrison's theory and the return to ritual she announces. This raises a broader question of whether a return to ritual could be a lens through which to view current aesthetic trends, particularly in the performing arts; are materiality, embodiment and performativity – and even a kind of mysticism looking again to notions of the primitive – a focus in current research and practice as a result of dropping out of favour and then needing to be re-excavated, just as they were in Harrison and Mirrlees's time? This thesis has shown how Harrison's theory and her archaeological, interdisciplinary practice interconnect; could the lens of her theory and practice be focused on the recent 'return to the archive'? Harrison's quarrel with linguistics-based classicism and current debates between materialist historicism and poststructural theory present an intriguing parallel and the further implications of this, in light of Harrison's theory of religion, could be investigated. Furthermore, it could be asked, what is the significance of academic research on Harrison proliferating over the past two and a half decades – particularly among feminist textual

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<sup>1</sup> See Preston.

scholars? Such questions could provide a starting point for further analysis – for which this thesis could prove a useful methodological tool.

The approach taken to Mirrlees's work in this thesis inevitably also raises questions which it has been beyond the scope of this project to pursue. Firstly, Mirrlees's novels *Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists* and *The Counterplot* could, as mentioned in the Introduction, have been part of this study, but as I have had to be selective in order to prioritise in-depth textual analysis, they have been excluded. Future research could extend the investigation in this thesis to a consideration of these novels. Both novels consider the conflict between life and art and trace the process of ritual through which they are connected. *The Counterplot* is especially concerned with the process and psychological function of artistic creation, which lends itself to analysis within a Harrisonian framework. Mirrlees's use of the genre of historical fiction – or historical fantasy – in *Madeleine* invites a potentially fruitful analysis of how ritual is connected to the form of the novel. The complex connections she weaves between seventeenth-century (primarily French) philosophical and aesthetic trends – Jansenism, Cartesianism and the précieuses – and the fate of her (anti-)heroine reveal an intricately considered historical and psychological application of Harrison's theory. Secondly, the close relationship between Harrison and Mirrlees is a fundamental premise for the investigation done here, but this relationship itself is not examined. This study may provide a potentially useful tool for research with this focus. Thirdly, Mirrlees's extensive research – published and unpublished – into the history of Romanticism constitutes a rich source for research on changing attitudes to, and varying versions of, Romanticism. Her connection of Romanticism to antiquarianism could also be more closely examined and potentially contribute to the understanding of the historical relationship between these two fields, as well as the history of aesthetics more broadly.

This thesis has occasionally noted similarities between Mirrlees's project and others of the period; notably, Mary Butts, Pound, H.D. and Eliot draw on anthropological and classical frameworks in ways that parallel Mirrlees's work. Comparative studies investigating such connections stand to throw into sharper relief, for example, the occult and ethnographic interests of similarly neglected women writers, as well as typographical experiments found in the work of other modernist and avant-garde poets. The politics of *Paris* and *Lud-in-the-Mist* have also been overshadowed in the focus on ritual in this thesis, and call for more critical attention. A celtic theme in Mirrlees's work has been alluded to in my readings – with reference to the 'ghosts of king fishers' in *Paris* and elements of celtic folklore in *Lud-in-the-*

*Mist. The Counterplot* also includes allusions to Scotland – a major character in the novel speaks with heavy Scottish inflections – which draws further attention to Mirrlees’s own Scottish heritage, and suggests another potentially fruitful direction for future research on Mirrlees. In making the intersection of Harrison’s and Mirrlees’s work the focus of this project, much has inevitably been left out about both Mirrlees and Harrison as individual writers and thinkers. The hope is that examining their work with this focus in mind has resulted in insights that reveal both women as important intellectual and literary figures of their time worthy of more attention.

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