



<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>

Theses Digitisation:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/research/enlighten/theses/digitisation/>

This is a digitised version of the original print thesis.

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlighten: Theses

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>
research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk

Representations of Middle-Class Single Women in the Novel from the Mid-Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century

By
Fiona Ross

A Thesis Submitted as a Partial Fulfilment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Under the Supervision of Dorothy McMillan

Department of English Literature
Faculty of Arts

University of Glasgow
United Kingdom

January 1996

ProQuest Number: 10390939

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10390939

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Theris
10498
Copy 2



Declaration.

I declare that the research carried out for the doctoral thesis titled, 'Representations of Middle-Class Single Women in the Novel from the Mid-Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century', is my own.

Signatures

The Author:

Fiona Ross

The Supervisor:

Dorothy McMillan

Department of English Literature
University of Glasgow
United Kingdom

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dorothy McMillan, for her generous support, kindness and the energy and time that she devoted to this project. Without Dorothy's help I would never have completed this thesis. I owe an enormous debt to my parents, Alastair and Moira, for their love, encouragement and cheques. I would also like to thank Bill McGhee for giving me the courage to study English Literature at University. Thanks must go to Malcolm and to my lovely friends for their warmth, enthusiasm and optimism. I apologise to my daughter, Roisin, for having spent the first eleven months of her life writing this thesis.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Elsie Gordon, Jimmy Turner, Olive Bucket and Alex Ross.

ABSTRACT

The aims of this thesis are two-fold: to uncover the history of the middle-class single women in the feminist movement from the mid-nineteenth century up to the early twentieth century; and to analyse representations of single women in novels of the same period. The history of the middle-class women's movement in the nineteenth century is to a large extent the history of the single woman.

I have consulted major archives of feminist material and identified key discourses relating to female singleness. My sources include private papers, published tracts, biographies and feminist analyses of leading feminist figures, unpublished articles and sketches for articles. I have also consulted a number of periodicals paying particular attention to those directed at a female audience.

The key issues and concepts which emerged have enabled the charting of changing ideologies of femininity. I try to show how women derived their identities from the cultural discourses available to them but also how they interrogated the discourses in the process of self-definition.

I discuss how issues of female self-construction are fictionalised. These concerns crossed into fiction and were expressed through modes of female heroic action, the making of the heroine, plot lines and narrative devices and strategies. Some writers re-formulated existing literary models in an attempt to re-present the single woman in the novel. Plot structures and narrative forms were, to some extent, necessarily reinvented by the demands of such representation. Fiction engaged with cultural debates and female singleness was increasingly recognised as a forced or voluntary exclusion from the history of marriage. Consequently singleness challenged narratives of matrimony and heterosexual union. The thesis also examines the rationale for the relationship between contexts and narratives and concludes that narratives are embedded within contexts that inevitably affected them, however indirectly.

The thesis, then, is structured around the main phases of feminist activity within the period. The analysis begins with the 'superfluous woman' debate of the mid-nineteenth century and the fictive versions and social options which are available for spinsters at this time. It then moves on to the 'militant celibacy' of the suffragettes and shows how this interacts with the figure of the 'New Woman' of the *fin-de-siècle*. This section of the thesis also includes a discussion of areas of cultural controversy such as sexual anarchy, marriage and the politicisation of spinsterhood through communities of women. Neither the idea of 'militant celibacy' nor the politicisation of the middle-class spinster have hitherto been fully examined in accounts of the British women's movement.

The final section of the thesis analyses the impact of the discourses generated by the new 'science' of sexology on modern and post-World War I writing. It traces the formation of 'lesbian' identity and settles the point at which the political emphasis of celibacy begins to decline. Some further discussion follows of the relationship between mothers and their spinster daughters in fiction and finally the thesis moves on to a discussion of the sororal bond in the early fiction of Barbara Pym. My thesis covers a range of writers including Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, James, Gissing, Clemence Dane, Radclyffe Hall, May Sinclair and Barbara Pym.

Representations of Middle-Class Single Women in the Novel from the Mid-Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century

Fiona Ross

Table of Contents

Title Page

Declaration

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Table of Contents

Introduction.....1-31

Methodology.....5-10

The Use of 'Patriarchy'.....10-11

Overview of Fiction.....11-16

Historical Background.....16-31

Chapter One: Dry Sticks, Old Flames and What About the Ashes? Some Cautionary Tales for Single Women in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Novel.....32-125

Men's Umbrellas and Awkward Hands: the Spinster

as Honorary Hero in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.....55-65

'Fair Gladiators': the Rise of the Working Single Woman in *Villette*.....65-104

Elizabeth Gaskell and the Amazons in *Cranford*.....104-123

Chapter 2: The Virtues of Honest Trade in Margaret Oliphant's <i>Kirsteen</i>.....	126-154
Chapter 3: Maiden Aunt Turns Suitor: Spinsters and the Sex War in <i>The Bostonians</i>.....	155-194
Chapter 4: Sexual Anarchy and the "'green bay-tree" of Political Spinsterhood in Gissing's <i>The Odd Women</i>.....	195-235
Chapter 5: "'You'll die of hunger in the end'": Lesbian Vampires and Heterosexuality in Clemence Dane's <i>Regiment of Women</i>.....	236-278
Chapter 6: 'Miss M' comes out: Self-Identity and Maternity in the Fiction of Radclyffe Hall and May Sinclair.....	279-328
The Single Woman and Lesbian Identity in <i>The Well of Loneliness</i> and <i>The Unlit Lamp</i>	293-313
Singleness and the Self in the Struggle with Maternity in <i>Mary Olivier</i>	313- 328
Chapter 7: The Loving Mirror: Spinsterhood and the Sororal Bond in Barbara Pym's <i>Some Tame Gazelle</i>.....	329-347
Epilogue.....	348-352
Bibliography.....	353-380

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the range of ways of representing the middle-class celibate woman in the novel from the mid-nineteenth to the early decades of the twentieth century and analyses cultural responses to female singleness. I examine representation in both fiction and political and social debate. I pay attention to the perspectives provided by the testimonies of real middle-class single women, to discover how they understood their non-marital status. Hence much of my primary research is based on the letters, private papers, and archives of nineteenth-century women's organisations.

The thesis traces the responses of middle-class single women to singleness. It begins at the point when single women ceased to be relatively unthinkingly immersed in their singleness, continues through periods of feminist agitation when central feminist discourses draw upon the political and economic status of single women and seek to alter the social implications of singleness, and finally moves towards an analysis of the conditions in which female singleness is again presented as an essentially private issue.¹

Changing cultural and narrative representations of single women must be seen within the wider development of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century British feminist movement. The thesis provides a topography of public feminism. It charts the early development of the debate generated by the mid-nineteenth century crisis over the plight of 'surplus' women. This debate extended at the turn-of-the-century into a direct challenge to heterosexual union through the promotion of 'militant celibacy' by the militant suffragette movement. Throughout the thesis I use a middle-class model of women's position in society, which assumes that to enter paid work will be liberating for women. This assumption cannot necessarily be derived from a working-class model of women's social status. And, of course, many feminist theorists would deny that paid work ever was the key to women's liberation.

My approach involves an examination of the social base of the novel: the emergence of feminist consciousness among middle-class women and the resultant implications for narrative representations of celibate middle-class single women. In

¹ By my use of the term 'discourse' I intend an aggregate of beliefs, ideas and distinct terms through which cultural groups organise, comprehend and even determine the focus of their attentions.

a study which bears some similarity to this thesis, Dorothy Yost Deegan's *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (1975), Deegan does set a precedent for this kind of approach when she makes similar connections between fictional representations of spinsters and feminism. Deegan points out that Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) is the first notable American novel in which a single woman is a central character, and notes that significantly enough 'it was published in 1851, at a time when the Feminist Movement was gathering momentum under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony.'²

The topic of single women was a controversial one for both Victorians and Edwardians and is central to cultural debate in nineteenth-century society hence likely to be central to the novel, the dominant popular genre of the period. Pauline Nestor puts it thus:

[An] inclination to privilege the insights offered by literature is particularly marked in regard to the nineteenth century when the popularity of fiction made it perhaps the most potent form of social commentary. The spread of literacy, the repeated connections in literary reviews between novels and public morality [...] all attest to the profound relevance of fiction at this time and suggest its capacity not merely to reflect, but to amplify and deepen contemporary debate.³

This thesis accordingly attempts to locate narratives which elaborate or subvert currently dominant representations of single women. I attempt, without, I hope, losing sight of the fictionality of fiction to trace how the compulsive nature of heterosexual plotting is responded to in these narratives. I suggest that to make the figure of the single woman central in narratives necessarily alters traditional structures, prescribing courses other than those which assume that textual fulfilment and completion are confirmed by heterosexual fulfilment in marriage.

When the pivotal figure in a narrative is a single woman this means that an entirely new set of narrative strategies must be employed to support such a representation. Expectations about the aesthetic modes through which narrative inscribes female life may have to shift. A refashioning of narrative modes will alter the narrative dynamic. Old modes die hard, and in many narratives the spinster is surrounded by the butt-ends of heterosexual romance. In narratives which are most directly shaped around and channelled towards heterosexual marital union the spinster often is glimpsed only in passing, her gloomy tones supplying a backdrop

² Dorothy Yost Deegan, *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), p. 41.

³ Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities. Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 2-3.

against which the bright aura of contented Victorian motherhood may shine. The use of spinster figures in many novels may also serve specific literary functions -- one of the most obvious being that such figures help to generate plot and provoke narrative, although I suggest that this use is never pure or unmediated by culture.

I argue that the treatment of the single woman offers the most comprehensive sets of representation of middle-class female autonomy in later nineteenth century fiction and therefore, that an examination of the changing cultural meanings of middle-class female singleness is necessary to an understanding of nineteenth and early twentieth century fictional discourses of female power. Female singleness is also central to the motivating discourses of the militant suffragette movement, discourses which allowed middle-class feminist women access to radical new ways of interpreting their gender.

Throughout, but particularly with reference to the experience of female singleness as understood by many late nineteenth and early twentieth-century feminists, I have used the term 'militant celibacy'. The interpretation of celibacy becomes an issue of sexual politics in the suffragette era. As Linda Gordon observes, 'it is true that at the end of the nineteenth century an increasing number of feminists [...] still a relatively small group [...] were choosing not to marry or become mothers'.⁴ The thesis examines readings of celibacy provided both by militant suffragettes and by several fictional narratives of the late nineteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth century middle-class single women often chose to define their cultural position through terms drawn from the grammar of family life, although it was central to John Stuart Mill's case for enfranchisement that women should be able to exercise power directly and responsibly as citizens and not merely as members of families. Suffragette moves to promote 'militant celibacy' constitute, in part, an endeavour to locate female singleness within the area of cultural politics. If women are heterosexual and yet unmarried and/or non-reproductive, it comes to matter whether or not childlessness and celibacy are chosen. 'Militant celibacy' is then a politically-based attempt to address this problem. The point at which singleness is chosen is the point at which it ceases to be the product of romantic and marital frustration, it is the point too when independence becomes a necessity.

What I have termed 'militant celibacy' emerged as a personal and political practice and was expressed through a strand of feminist discourse which urged women to refuse sexual relations with men as part of a strategy for altering male sexual behaviour. The thesis views this aspect of the developing sexual politics of

⁴ Linda Gordon, 'Voluntary Motherhood; The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States', *Clio's Consciousness Raised. New Perspectives on the History of Women* edited by Lois Banner and Mary Hartman, (London: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 54-71, (p. 66).

the nineteenth-century women's movement as the ultimate expression and confluence of all the discourses which approach the issue of the cultural status of the middle-class single women; familial and sexual relations emerge as a site of battle. Celibacy was often regarded as a first step to independence by militant suffragettes and has still not been accorded its full significance among the range of political objectives of the nineteenth century women's movement.

Since the majority of middle-class single women were, of course, non-reproductive, their status in discourses which depended on theories of biological essentialism was necessarily low. The differences which many Victorians distinguished between men and women were frequently asserted through biology, centring upon women's reproductive capacity. Celibate single women thus often reluctantly challenged biological explanations for the cultural status of women, in that they visibly denied the notion that all women possess maternal instincts or that women are naturally heterosexual. The diverse roles which middle-class single women occupied in society featured as a preliminary challenge to the fixity of a biological model of gender difference. What also becomes apparent is that reproduction alone cannot be read as the only basis for the oppression of women within culture.

The nineteenth century feminist reappropriation of the terms used to describe singleness attempted to deconstruct patriarchal language and to form uniquely feminine discourses with new and positive meanings for women. Language, then, is the site of a struggle over meaning and is deemed an essential feature of genuine political change. The social and political consequences of language are defined and contested. Representations of single women are traversed by language in which codes operate and meanings are produced. A contributor to *The Vote* commented in 1911:

... how much longer will women suffer themselves to live under the disability of having to put 'Mrs' or 'Miss' before their names, so that the world in general may know whether they are some man's property or still on sale, while men are always 'Mr'?⁵

⁵ Anonymous, *The Vote* (18 February 1911), p. 207, quoted in Les Garner, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 32.

Methodology

The thesis is not determined by a single methodology, and I have used a variety of critical approaches, taking advantage of the acceptability of pluralism in feminist criticism. The contextual readings of the thesis are partly intended to share in a more general project to break down the academic segregation and conceptual isolation of literature. The thesis hopes to approach the formative context of the 'moment' of literary texts. At its most basic level (and perhaps this is still its most effective level), feminist literary criticism is perpetually engaged in the task which Elaine Showalter describes as seeing 'meaning in what has previously been empty space':

The orthodox plot recedes, and another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint. Yet the other plot, the other images are still there; sometimes they are the only ones we can see. Sometimes the images are engaged in such complex vibration that we can barely bring one into focus before it collapses under the domination of the other.⁶

The impetus for other studies which deal solely or partially with single women has tended to come from an enormous variety of approaches: psychological models of gender; mythology pertaining to spinsters; and sociological work on single women. There is still, however, room for the fruitful extension of such work, which often contains pointed analyses of the position of middle-class single women but fails to trace a systematic pattern or, if relying at all on literary models, fail to discriminate between novels of different eras, so that crucial differences are erased. Francoise Basch devotes a large section of her book, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67* (1974), to an analysis of the middle-class Victorian single women and work. This provides an excellent introduction to the cultural placement of the middle-class spinster, but it is limited to the thirty-year period Basch treats.⁷ Martha Vicinus points out the need for an extended examination of cultural representations of single women:

Much has been written about the Victorian prostitute as a mirror image of the ideal Victorian lady, but scholars have neglected the division between the single woman and the mother (the role of wife was clearly subordinate in this mythology). Since genteel single women could be neither mothers nor prostitutes, they were forced to re-define themselves in terms beyond those of the nuclear family. If the prostitute symbolized the extremes of

⁶ Elaine Showalter, 'Literary Criticism', *Signs* 1 (1975-1976), 435-460, (p. 435).

⁷ Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).

unbridled passion and evil in woman, the spinster had thrust upon her absolute purity and goodness. She was supposed to remain virginal and utterly self-sacrificing for all who needed her. Single women transformed this passive role into one of active spirituality and passionate social service. Celibacy, within the context of loving friendships, became a vital and empowering ideal. Women did not reject the Victorian myths but reinterpreted them.⁸

Extended studies of the Victorian middle-class single woman do exist but tend to be portrait organised rather than analysing historically shifting versions of gender and class. Nor do such studies fully explore the connections between the middle-class single woman and feminist issues.

As a prelude to the examination of fictional texts I attempt for the relevant period to reconstruct the contexts of Victorian and Edwardian debate surrounding the 'woman question' and the figure of the middle-class spinster. I have tried also to examine the fictional narratives against appropriate biographical information about their creators. I do not imagine that relationships among texts, contexts and biographies are straightforward but do contend that they are always in some sense illuminating. An analysis of the connections between the experience of fiction and the experience of life need not promote a reading practice that concludes literature is a 'reflection' of 'reality'. Various questions surround fiction as a signifying practice; a text can be the site of gratification and enjoyment, it can both resist and serve dominant ideologies, and the exact role of the author in relation to the text and the terms of engagement between the text and other discourses are difficult to determine. As a cultural practice fiction is caught in the cross-currents of discourse.

Clearly in literary studies there is a need for more complex understandings of the relationships among writers, narrators and readers and the diverse contexts within which all of these function. The answer in terms of critical practice seems to point towards generosity, that is to say a recognition that the more enlightening information we bring to bear on a literary text the richer our understanding of it will be. And the richer our understanding of the text, the wider will be our sympathetic comprehension of the conditions of its production.

By admitting the reader as well as the author as an interpretative source for the text, it is possible to make claims for the text without suggesting that these are definitive. This type of approach has further led to a need to address the question of how middle-class Victorian and Edwardian women read fiction. Kate Flint's recent

⁸ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 5.

work on the woman reader usefully clarifies the issues which are embedded in reading practices :

Victorian and Edwardian women readers formed a variety of reading communities according to class, and to religious and political allegiances, including allegiances to the growing women's movement itself [...] one should note, however, there was a prevalent, though not ubiquitous assumption that the woman reader was invariably heterosexual, and that romance, marriage, and maternity were not just motivating factors in her life, but could be relied upon to provide captivating features of a fictional plot [...] What forms of identification were available [...] for those women who overtly or unconsciously resisted such social models?⁹

In *Old Mr. Tredgold* (1896), Margaret Oliphant attests to the diverse tastes of the female upper and middle-class reading population of the village of Sliplin:

Lady Jane [...] had her own particular box from Mudie's and command of the magazines [...] at first hand; but then she read very little, having the Mudie books chiefly for her governess, and glancing only at some topic of the day, some great lady's predilections on Society and its depravity, or some fad which happened to be on the surface for the moment, and which everyone was expected to be able to discuss. Whereas the Sliplin ladies read all the books, vying with each other who should get them first, and were great in the *Nineteenth Century* and the *Fortnightly*, and all the more weighty periodicals. They were members of mutual improvement societies, and of correspondence classes [...] Some of them studied logic and other appalling subjects through the latter means, and many of them wrote modest little essays and chronicles of their reading for the press.¹⁰

A shifting relationship exists between both text and writer and text and reader. The issue is determined not only through a gynocritical model of how women choose to represent their own experience, but also through which representations prove acceptable to women readers. Flint observes:

The awareness of Victorians and Edwardians of that discrete category, 'the woman reader', and the hypotheses about her special characteristics, as well as her presumed needs and interests, affected the composition, distribution, and marketing of literature.¹¹

⁹ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 43.

¹⁰ Margaret Oliphant, *Old Mr. Tredgold* (1896), (London: Longmans and Green, 1898), p. 210.

¹¹ Flint, p. 13.

Alison Light, in her article on women readers and romance fiction, also makes the following point about the shadowy borders of literary discourse and exactly what it offers its audience, as readers and more specifically as women readers:

We need to balance an understanding of fictions as restatements (however mediated) of a social reality, with a closer examination of how literary texts might function in our lives as imaginative constructions and interpretations. It is this meshing of the questions of pleasure, fantasy and language which literary culture takes up so profoundly and which makes it so uniquely important to women. Subjectivity -- the ways in which we come to express and define our concepts of our selves -- then seems crucial to any analysis of the activity of reading. Far from being 'inward-looking' in the dismissive sense of being somehow separate from the realities of the state or the marketplace, subjectivity can be recognized as the place where the operations of power and the possibilities of resistance are also played out.¹²

Both these analyses direct us towards the need to determine the position of the woman reader and the function of fiction in women's lives, and highlight the ways in which those lives themselves affect reading practice.

Any account of the reading practices of women must recognise the heterogeneity of female readers, that reading is a social practice which is never passive, and that the reader is part of the construction of meaning and a determinant in the production of meanings. Victorian novels were, as Sally Mitchell suggests, 'the recreational reading of the middle-class',¹³ and Victorian women were, in part, socialised through what they read. Mona Caird described the situation of her sex: 'We [women] are not governed by armies and police, we are governed by ideas.'¹⁴ Textual representations could mobilise central definitions of womanhood and were easily attached to dominant discourses on questions of female reproduction, marriage and the middle-class Victorian women, and the issues which surrounded the superfluity of non-marrying women. Social meanings were attached to biological difference and these meanings were the site of fierce battles and diverse interpretations. These struggles often led to the production of more differentiated cultural meanings. Cultural groups also operated as interpretative communities in the construction of oppositional readings of texts, and so signification as social process goes in both directions. The struggle for the redefinition of meanings of words is often a political one. As I have said there is no uncomplicated relationship

¹² Alison Light 'Returning to Manderley' -- Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class', *British Feminist Thought*, pp. 325-44, (p. 327).

¹³ Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel. Chastity, Class and Women's Reading* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1981), p. 45.

¹⁴ Mona Caird, 'A Defence of the so-called "Wild Women"', *Nineteenth Century* 31 (May 1892), 811-29, (p. 829).

between representations and the lives they are supposed to represent. Nor is the connection between the representations of journalism and the public platform and those of the novel one which is free from difficulty. In an article on the need for an independent feminist press Christabel Pankhurst is angered by the 'boycott and misrepresentation' of feminist issues in the press. She argues the case that a regular independent press will enable feminist women to control the production of meanings:

The W. S. P. U. is the advance-guard of new womanhood, and therefore it is in the SUFFRAGETTE, the organ of the W. S. P. U., that the public must read if they would be fully informed of the present and future meaning of the woman's movement.¹⁵

It is certainly the case that the novel offered middle-class Victorian women readers a range of competing subject positions. The positions which novels construct are at least part of the larger battle to determine the social practice of femininity. The issue of the construction of gender identity was also first raised in the nineteenth century. Thus Victorian discourses of femininity bear centrally on comprehension. These issues converge, in the form of literary discourse as, in Louis Althusser's terms, a site within which we represent to ourselves our 'lived' experience' of our material conditions of existence:

When we speak of ideology we should know that ideology slides into all human activity, that it is identical with the 'lived' experience of human existence itself: that is why the form in which we are 'made to see' ideology in great novels has as its content the 'lived' experiences of individuals. This 'lived' experience is not a *given*, given by a pure 'reality', but the spontaneous 'lived experience' of ideology in its peculiar relationship to the real.¹⁶

The positions women find accessible or desirable, or the choices they repel, are bound into the whole process of women structuring their selves; selves which are, simultaneously, structured by ideology.

I would support a notion of gender as socially produced, through language and through the interaction of different discourses and discursive processes. Representations of female singleness received detail, inflection and currency in the novel, and narrative representations produced a rich variety of approaches to the life experience and meaning of the figure of the celibate middle-class single woman.

¹⁵ Christabel Pankhurst, 'An Independent Press', *The Suffragette* (17 April 1914), 5, (p. 5).

¹⁶ Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to Andre Daspre', *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 205.

These approaches in turn informed perception and were certainly cited by spinsters as opportunities for the interpretation of the choices that faced them. Narratives which move beyond the familiar circles of heroine's lives expose women readers to alternative ways of constructing the meaning of their experience.

The Use of 'Patriarchy'

The term 'patriarchy' as it is used throughout this thesis is intended to refer to any set of power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. Such a power relationship reassembles itself in various forms; for instance in the Victorian concept of 'separate spheres' which was used to justify the sexual division of labour or in cultural interpretations of women's relationship to reproduction. Social meaning is repeatedly attached to biological sexual difference. I would not suggest that patriarchal structures are the single determining means of women's oppression, but patriarchy remains a powerful concept for any theorisation of the oppression of women. I am also aware that it is important to take into account the historical specificity of any particular organisation of gender relations and hope that I have used the term 'patriarchy' with a sense of its constructedness and diversity. Catharine MacKinnon provides an effective definition of patriarchy:

Under the rubric of feminism, woman's situation has been explained as a consequence of biology or of reproduction and mothering, social organizations of biology; as caused by the marriage law or, as extensions, by the patriarchal family, becoming society as a 'patriarchy'; or as caused by artificial gender roles and their attendant attitudes.¹⁷

Of course, the structures of patriarchy are not independent of other forms of power relation such as race and class. I have temporarily prioritised patriarchy for the purposes of my analysis, choosing to analyse singleness as both socially organised and critically structured by gender inequality. But I recognise that gender, race and class are interrelated in enormously complex ways. Nor is patriarchy trans-historical or fixed and monolithic. According to Sylvia Walby, the main difficulty with many theories of patriarchy is that they utilise a simple base-superstructure model of causal relations, a difficulty which can be tackled by theorising more than one causal base. In *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990) Walby theorises Western patriarchy as composed of

¹⁷ Catharine MacKinnon, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory', *Signs* 7, 3 (1982), 515-44, (p. 529).

six structures as opposed to one and theorises the different patriarchal forms that are produced as a consequence of their different expression. Walby suggests that the six institutional structures which comprise a system of patriarchy are paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state. Walby's emphasis upon the need for a diverse concept of patriarchy avoids the problems of 'universality', as Walby writes:

... the concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness, and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination, and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class and ethnic group.¹⁸

Walby finds considerable change in the 'degree and form' of patriarchy in Britain in the one hundred and fifty years that she covers. In what Walby calls 'private patriarchy' the dominant structure is household production, while for 'public patriarchy' the dominant structures are employment and the state. Walby finds that a partial shift from private to public patriarchy has occurred:

Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. The household does not cease to be a patriarchal structure in the public form, but it is no longer the chief site. In private patriarchy the expropriation of women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household, while in the public form it is a more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy the principle patriarchal strategy is exclusionary; in the public it is segregationist and subordinating.¹⁹

Overview of Fiction

The novels covered in this thesis are arranged in a roughly chronological order from the mid-nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth. Within these narratives the figure of the single woman is usually involved in a degree of self-invention within the fiction which contains her; she enters new territory and develops a mode of existence which is often at odds with the terms used to make a heroine of her married sister. Marriage plots were, of course, part of the foundations of the Victorian novel. Marriage is usually the reward for triumphant female

¹⁸ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 2.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

endeavour. In narratives of the single woman work and friendship replace the marital goal. Lee Edwards observes:

If marriage is the traditional 'happy ending', and death its only, and unsatisfactory, alternative, novelists must devise ways to render happiness without them. If it is necessary to choose between marriage (or death) and happiness, they must determine both the resolution and its grounds. Can the structure of marriage be changed in fiction, in order to suggest the possibility of and necessity for a corresponding change in life? Can the author imagine another form of human affiliation that would not impose the same restraints?²⁰

In many texts the hazards which face the single woman and which she must try to resolve effectively often mean that she transgresses the limits of her sphere. In Wilkie Collins' novel *The Woman in White* (1860) the spinster, Marian Halcombe, functions as a temporary substitute for the hero in his absence, and thus, at specific points in the narrative, the history of Marian's adventures resembles that commonly found within male heroic stories. The central adventure of Marian's life is not that of finding a mate. In other Victorian narratives the spinster's voyages across Scotland and England in search of a vocation are imagined in colonial terms and couched in metaphors of exploration.

In many Victorian narratives the figure of the spinster is eclipsed by that of the mother, but the spinster is also a sort of reverse image of the wedded heroine and by means of her very isolation contests the fixity of women's destiny. Narratives which centre upon the life experience of the middle-class spinster seem to resist closure and offer the reader no final point of rest. Without conjugal bliss to complete female life or confirm the heroic status of the central female character, how can the novel end? Thus the narrative position of the figure of the single woman is unstable; what she represents is insecure because the questions she raises cannot easily be resolved. The stories offered by the life of the spinster can be imagined to evolve in different directions after the narrative concludes and the onus of continuation is shifted to the reader who must imagine perpetual singleness.

Often those writers who chose the figure of the spinster as narrator or heroine attempt to normalise the figure of single woman through preserving the defining features of the heterosexual plot, but seek to confirm her heroic status through that other constituent of the Victorian female character: self-renunciation. Thus we find in many Victorian narratives, which touch glancingly on the spinster's life or which centre upon the spinster, a vast array of feckless male lovers who prefer a pair of

²⁰ Lee R. Edwards, *Psyche as Hero. Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Conneticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), p. 27-8.

bright eyes or the flirtatious rustle of a petticoat to the assurances of homely love. We also encounter lovers who die in shipwrecks and in wars or who vanish in the dustier recesses of the Empire. In Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* (1853) Lucy Snowe finds that singleness separates her from society in all sorts of unhappy ways. But her singleness does eventually pay; being unwed means she can assert economic independence. The contrast between Lucy Snowe and other mid-century spinster figures such as Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1861) or Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White* lies in Lucy's successful entry to the labour market.

In the novels of Dickens and Wilkie Collins the figure of the spinster is repeatedly vanquished, silenced and confined. Nevertheless, all these earlier texts and in particular narratives such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) or *Villette* traverse the unmapped territories of female singleness and attempt to structure narratives around many of the issues raised through the loose, free-flowing protests of mid-nineteenth century feminist discourse.

At the turn-of-the-century we more frequently encounter narratives within which militantly feminist middle-class spinsters increasingly compete with their best friend's lover, usually a conservative anti-feminist who wants to steal the best friend from the feminist cause. We also find spinsters resisting the offers of lovers who represent the allure of heterosexual union. In these narratives the middle-class single women's protest is mediated by overtly political discourses and narrative shapes are accordingly transformed.

In *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* Caroline Helstone and Lucy Snowe refer directly to the lives of the few other spinsters they encounter in order to discern a meaningful mode of spinsterhood, but in later texts far more accessible and diverse modes of spinsterhood present themselves. Thus there is a gradual shift in narrative focus between the writers of mid-century and later nineteenth-century novelists such as George Gissing and Henry James. The central spinster figures in both Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) and James's *The Bostonians* (1886) are far more rarely seen in directly private and domestic contexts.

Figures such as Rhoda Nunn and Olive Chancellor step out into full public view and are visible on the political platforms from which men had formerly governed, administered and legislated. For all James's ironic deferrals and humorous discretion in *The Bostonians* what he presents us with are the enlarged political implications of the figure of the single woman. Both Rhoda Nunn and Olive Chancellor have links with the counter-type of the single woman as an allegorical warrior maiden produced by 'militant celibate' feminist discourse.

Margaret Oliphant's novel *Kirsteen* (1890) bears a greater resemblance to mid-nineteenth century narratives. Single woman Kirsteen is progressively more isolated through the course of the novel. She seeks solace through supporting her family but her efforts are met only with rejection and scorn. Her one true love is never restored to her. Thus her singleness is both a curse and a blessing; it allows her to work for a living and fashion her own independence but it also means that she is excluded from the common joy of family ties.

Inadequate or airless marriages become a regular feature of the 'New Woman' fiction of the late nineteenth century. 'New Woman' fiction explores the possibility of equal sexual relations, taking on board the question of 'free' love and the experience of women in corrupt marriages. I have largely avoided the more formulaic of the 'New Woman' novels but the more complex narrative of *The Odd Women* does use the spinster to facilitate a focus on corrupt heterosexual union. It is not that celibacy is invariably presented as the final feminist response to heterosexual union: in *The Odd Women* Rhoda Nunn wants to transform heterosexual unions rather than subdue them. She regards her celibacy as a temporary measure in the passage towards a new form of heterosexual union.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the feminist spinster is given unwelcome new life as a militant martyr in narratives such as Mrs Humphry Ward's *Delia Blanchflower* (1917). The figure of Gertrude Marvell, militant spinster, is unambiguously presented as a hysterical and barren virago. Mrs Humphrey Ward's anti-feminism is apparent in this representation. The reader is invited to respond antipathetically to both Gertrude and the militant feminism which she represents. Clemence Dane's novel *Regiment of Women*, also published in 1917, presents spinster teacher Clare Hartill as pathological. Clare's profession as a teacher in a single-sex school enables the extension of the attack to separatist institutions as breeding places for perversity. The single women of these texts are either repressed or deprived: they have not chosen their lives freely.

The search for alternative communities for single women obviously intersects with issues of female friendship. Until about 1910 there was a widespread acceptance of passionate attachments between women, and although this was accompanied by some negative criticism of female friendships, there was little overt recognition that such attachments could possess any sexual aspect.²¹ Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) changed all that.

²¹ For further information on responses to female friendships see Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981) and Martha Vicinus, 'Sexuality and Power', *Feminist Studies* 8, 1 (1982), 134-56.

But there was also perhaps a political agenda. It is hardly coincidental that the 'slur' of lesbianism occurred at the high point of public feminist activity and during the bloodiest phase of the 'sex war', when spinster feminists presented their most public challenge to heterosexual relations and when the practice of 'militant celibacy' had taken some hold over feminism. Martha Vicinus points out: 'historically the lesbian appears to have replaced the prostitute as the symbol of woman's pollution of the body politic; her status mirrors social attitudes toward women's sexuality and power'.²² Close examination reveals the figure of the militant spinster as a transitional representation of female autonomy and power across a range of narratives. And this figure is then partially subsumed within the figure of the lesbian through sexological discourses. The 'militant celibacy' of the feminist spinster becomes the lesbian's refusal of heterosexuality (although, ironically enough in *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen Gordon repeatedly defers to the standards of heterosexual life). A political objection can, then, be cynically reinterpreted as a 'sexual preference', until much later such political objections reemerge in the form of lesbian critiques of heterosexuality.

In Radclyffe Hall's earlier novel *The Unlit Lamp* (1924) an offer of marriage is no threat to Joan Ogden's identity: the claims of her mother are far more threatening. May Sinclair makes a similar point about the threat presented to the spinster by the forces of orthodox maternity in *Mary Olivier* (1919). Relationships with men do have some effect upon the heroine's life, but not to the same degree as the relationship between mother and daughter. In texts such as these celibacy is no longer taken as the benchmark of independence, in part perhaps because women now have increased access to birth control.

In the early twentieth-century we encounter spinsters in fiction who have taken their best friends as their lovers or who prefer books or the idealism of unfulfilled romance to the material reality of a husband. Through the early writing of Barbara Pym I examine the final outcrops of resistant female communities, although I would suggest that such resistance comes from the continuing narrative unorthodoxy of centring the mode of narration around the preoccupations of single women. The sense of direct cultural threat embodied by the figure of the middle-class spinster is considerably reduced by the time that Pym publishes the completed form of *Some Tame Gazelle* in 1950. The situation of the Bede sisters in *Some Tame Gazelle* is not necessarily perceived as unorthodox as the political implications of communities of single women have diminished.

Representations of the single woman have thus shifted from dusty dependency and unhappy solitude to militancy and arson to re-emerge in the warm

²² 'Sexuality and Power', p. 151.

humorous communities and sisterhoods presented in Barbara Pym's fiction. Despite this, unfortunate spinsters in Pym's fiction still find that life offers no more than lonely liaisons beneath the moon with corrupt lovers or the cultivation of the paternal vicar's garden, which is circumscribed by the same four walls that surrounded Ruskin's garden. Nor are Barbara Pym's single women troubled by the profound political dilemmas which affected Olive Chancellor's relationship with the world but remain characterised by a sense of their own marginality to heterosexual life. Nor do the single women of Pym offer a critique of the patriarchy like their militantly celibate forebears, but rather conduct local investigations into the heart. However, despite these very different representational strategies, Pym's spinsters still possess heroic stature.

Historical Background

The term 'spinster' was originally appended to the names of women to denote their occupation but from the seventeenth century onwards was used as a legal designation for an unmarried woman. Social transformations were accompanied by the industrial revolution, through which the industrial bourgeoisie emerged as the dominant class. Industrialisation had an impact on the construction of gender roles. Developments in economic systems clearly affected the economic position of women. Working-class women were directed into production as they provided a source of cheap labour while their middle-class counterparts were increasingly to be confined within the home and excluded from production.

The status of the family as a self-sufficient economic unit declined, and with that decline capitalism devalued women's role in production. The self-contained and independent households which existed prior to the eighteenth-century had required the labour of unmarried women. But as trade expanded, Frederick Engels observes, rising manufacture transformed 'tools into machines, work-rooms into factories.'²³ Commercial production replaced activities such as spinning, weaving and brewing and the importance and usefulness of middle-class female labour diminished. The rural working population 'were robbed of their trade by the introduction of machinery', Engels notes, 'and obliged to look about them in the towns for work.'²⁴ Men entered traditionally female spheres of employment, and, as members of what

²³ Frederick Engels, 'Introduction', *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Panther, 1976), p. 51.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 38.

Virginia Woolf ironically describes as 'the protected sex', middle-class women were denied access to new forms of labour and the collective workplace.²⁵ The forms of work available to middle-class women were limited to rudimentary education or the consumer industries. Middle-class wives thus tended to remain economically dependent on their husbands, and single women on their grumbling relatives.

Catherine Hall's article, on the changing experience of the family in the industrial revolution, notes that the physical separation between work and home had wide-ranging effects on the sexual division of work within the family and in the delineation of male and female separate spheres:

Many traders in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century combined production and distribution; the butcher killed and cut his meat, the baker baked and sold his bread, the candlestickmaker produced his metal goods as well as retailing them. This combination of production and distribution, based on a large household which utilized the labour of all family members, was in decline at least in the large town by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶

An expanding population and the growth of waged labour outside the home significantly altered the interdependent relationship between husband and wife. As the home was no longer central to production it became, ideally, a domestic haven of peace and tranquillity. Women's place in the home, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes it, was a prescribed female role 'bounded by kitchen and nursery, overlaid with piety and purity, and crowned with subservience'.²⁷ Thus one can partly trace the beginnings of the concept of separate spheres for men and women. Even female intellect mirrored women's ancillary status, as one Victorian woman describes it:

It is not given to woman to see, to grasp, things in their wholeness, to behold them in affinity, in relation. Not one of the keys which has unlocked the mighty synthesis of creation has been turned by her hand. In imaginative strength she has proved deficient; she unfolds no new heaven, she breaks into no new world. She discovers, invents, creates nothing. In her whole nature we trace a passivity, a tendency to work upon that which she receives, to quicken, to foster, to develop.²⁸

²⁵ *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929), p. 61.

²⁶ Catherine Hall, 'The butcher, the baker, the candlestickmaker: the shop and the family in the Industrial Revolution', *The Changing Experience of Women* edited by Elizabeth Whitelegg et al (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 2-16, (p. 9-10).

²⁷ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct. Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 13.

²⁸ Dora Greenwell, 'Our Single Women', *North British Review* (February 1862), 62-88, (p. 72-3).

Sheila Rowbotham writes that 'out of domestic isolation, the extreme control of middle-class men over their wives and daughters, and the impoverished dependence of unmarried women, came the first movement of feminists'.²⁹

The Evangelical movement was conservative in matters of sexuality and also had enormous influence on the formation of Victorian society and bourgeois ideology. Barbara Taylor describes one of its effects: 'The intense sentimentalization of the home which reached its peak in the mid-century had its beginnings in the promotion of a 'domestic religion centred around the "moral influence" of the wife and mother'.³⁰ Sexual conservatism was not necessarily the expected outcome of evangelical ideology, Taylor continues, but signified the political ascendancy of a specific means of interpretation of the Protestant moral code. Evangelicals tended to oppose any concept of women's equality with middle-class men, but on their ideology of 'separate spheres' and women's moral mission it was nevertheless possible to construct a different set of arguments for female emancipation. The argument that women's rights should be extended often took as its basis the idea that their special qualities could be brought to bear on the state. The Victorian matron ideally exercised influence rather than power. She also provided, in her general deportment, a model of selfless righteousness. This mode of femininity was valorised, and the notion of middle-class woman's 'influence' dwelt not only in the Victorian home, but also lingered in the roomier corridors of society. As spinster feminist Frances Power Cobbe argued in *Duties of Women* in 1881, it was precisely because 'womanly' virtues were lacking in the state that women must assiduously demand greater political rights, amongst which she included the vote for women.³¹

It becomes apparent that the dominant representations of middle-class femininity which circulated in the nineteenth century proved to be so durable because they were self-fulfilling. Many Victorian middle-class women did consent to cultural constructions of their womanhood, having unconsciously invested in such constructions, grafting them onto the material of their identities. Solid as such constructions appeared, they were still subject to fatigue, and the social and ideological contradictions that arose were exploited most effectively by those feminists who were organised for change and who sought to re-examine discriminatory social policies. It became increasingly apparent that single women

²⁹ Sheila Rowbotham, 'The trouble with 'patriarchy'', *No Turning Back. Writing from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), pp. 72-78, (p. 76). For further information on the beginnings of feminist agitation for reform see Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973).

³⁰ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 14.

³¹ Frances Power Cobbe, *Duties of Women* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881).

could not fulfil the set of expectations of femininity. Somewhat ironically, the spinster despite her apparent possession of the 'naturally' feminine qualities of the middle-class woman such as selflessness and emotionalism, was not fitted for many of the specific social tasks assigned to middle-class women, primarily the functions of maternity and wifehood. Popular cultural responses to female singleness are typified in the popularity and character of the Victorian card game 'Old Maid'. The rules of the game mean that no player can win, there being only a loser, the 'Old Maid' left unpartnered at the end. Sarah Stickney Ellis writes of the situation of the middle-class woman at mid-century:

... [her] whole life, from the cradle to the grave, is one of feeling rather than of action; whose highest duty is so often to suffer, and be still; whose deepest enjoyments are all relative; who has nothing, and is nothing, of herself; whose experience, if unparticipated, is a total blank; yet, whose world of interest is as wide as the realm of humanity [...] For woman, who, in her inexhaustible sympathies can live only in the existence of another.³²

The general exclusion of women from public life meant that they appeared not to be suited for it, to be anomalous in a public context. And yet the spinster was, to some extent, forced to seek access to the labour market and to public life.

The anomalous position of middle-class spinsters meant that they had a significant impact upon feminist discourse from around the mid-nineteenth-century onwards. The significance of their singleness altered within the larger body of central Victorian and Edwardian discourses. The terms of the production of cultural meaning shifted.

Dora Greenwell comments on the proliferation of articles offering advice to, manuals outlining the appropriate behaviour of, and novels pleading the case for, single women:

If in the multitude of counsellors there is safety, how blest must be the security of single women! [...] [they] must surely feel a little alarmed at discovering how much is expected from them -- at finding themselves looked upon as a hitherto Unclaimed Dividend, which society is at length bent upon realizing.³³

Indeed, so popular was the 'plight' of the distressed single woman that its imitation could provide rich pickings for those who sought to take advantage of sympathetic sections of the public. Dinah Mulock Craik humorously recounts an occasion on

³² Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England* (London: Fisher, 1852), p. 161.

³³ 'Our Single Women', p. 62.

which an imposter, masquerading as a decayed gentlewoman, planted herself in the centre of a friend's drawing room, and demanded financial assistance by loudly declaring 'Madam, I *hum* a decayed gentlewoman!'³⁴

But the singleness of the spinster was regarded as an imperfection since female success was still largely measured in terms of a woman's marital status. Hence the mid-century debate began over the nature of single women's lives. They seemed to be lives which evaded classification and could be located in cultural space only with great difficulty. Carol Smart refers to the rise of the new mid-century 'science of social investigation and statistics':

Basic statistics on births, deaths and marriages began to be collected in the early nineteenth century. But in the latter half of the century trends become discernible. Put another way, this scientific discourse produced a new subject amenable to regulation, namely populations. Only once statistics on infanticide, abortion, infant mortality and so on became available, could both the pressure for reform be exercised and the necessary precision for specifying culprits and victims be deployed.³⁵

The availability of new sets of population statistics obviously highlighted the 'surplus' of single women at mid-century.

This thesis then attempts to contribute towards a fuller understanding of the feminism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century women's movement, which reveals fresh perspectives on sexuality and reproduction. A preoccupation with women's marital status is intimately linked to assumptions about biological function and also to the way in which culture constructs femininity. Maternity was a site of contradiction for the middle-class spinster. It was the central element in the depiction or regulation of femininity and at the same time stood as a reference point for concepts of female value and power. Women's physiology was regarded as the determining feature of their experiences, in other words, gender was the expression of women's reproductive characteristics, and gender in turn determined women's social position. Ann Douglas Wood notes in her study of the clinical treatments available to women in Victorian America that 'Self-sacrifice and altruism on a spiritual level, and child-bearing and housework on a more practical one, constituted healthy femininity in the eyes of most nineteenth-century Americans'.³⁶ Maternity

³⁴ Dinah Mulock Craik, *Plain Speaking* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1882), p. 118.

³⁵ Carol Smart, 'Disruptive bodies and unruly sex: the regulation of reproduction and sexuality in the nineteenth century', *Regulating Womanhood. Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 12.

³⁶ Ann Douglas Wood 'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America', *Clio's Consciousness Raised. New Perspectives on the History of Women*, pp. 1-22, (p. 8). Wood also notes that a causal relationship is implied

provided women with domestic work and, more generally, placed women socially. Furthermore, it could be argued that marriage makes women hostages to patriarchal values. If, as Judith Lowder Newton writes, 'the middle-class woman was urged to become identified by her services to others, in particular to men', then we may well ask how this affects the single woman, outlawed by her unused and rusting biology from maternal service, excluded by her squint nose or unattractive manners from the side of a husband, and driven by fear of penury into a defining dependency in the Victorian home or driven into penury by a refusal of that home? How could she serve? Was Sunday School enough? What kind of work could she do? Was any kind of love and society possible? And lying in the shadow of these considerations was the possibility that her abilities and interests, her sense of discontent and solitude, would provoke an articulate anger. Having nothing other than the self for consolation, the single woman would turn to self-definition and seek company in feminist schemes. The fortified celibacy of the middle-class Victorian spinster could have a political edge.

Middle-class nineteenth century feminism occurred in a variety of political contexts and within several reforming campaigns. Feminism was produced through numerous positions, strategies and allegiances. But despite this diversity it is evident that the superfluous women debate of the eighteen-fifties and sixties, with which this thesis begins, functioned as a centralising issue which yoked together in shared purpose the first middle-class feminist institutions and debates. The Langham Place group, the first feminist presses such as the *English Woman's Review* or *Women and Work* and the major commentators on feminism used the plight of the middle-class surplus woman to illustrate feminist concerns about the circumscribed sphere of women and the need for new employments. Early feminist theorising included an attempt to theorise female singleness. The celibacy that was at first regarded as a penalty for the middle-class woman came to represent a mode of autonomy, a departure for women from the dependencies of heterosexual marital union, and a radical choice which was to sexually politicise the position of the spinster.

Mid-century saw the emergence of an autonomous but heterogeneous women's movement that was founded upon a liberal equal rights tradition and

between 'proper' femininity and the ability to reproduce. In her autobiography Margaret Oliphant recalls the sense of trepidation she experienced when an acquaintance told her 'of many babies whom she had lost through some defective valve in the heart, which she said was somehow connected with too much mental work on the part of the mother, -- a foolish thing, I should think, yet the same thing occurred twice to myself. It alarmed and saddened me terribly'. From Margaret Oliphant, *Autobiography*, edited by Elizabeth Jay, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 40.

organised around a series of reform campaigns.³⁷ As universal male suffrage was not yet realised, the largely middle-class feminist movement did not seek universal female suffrage. Hope for the mass of single women did not, then, always rest with agitation for the suffrage. To focus feminist agitation for the vote on the admission to the franchise of property-owning women, such as middle-class widows and spinsters, seemed more sensible as this equalled the male case. Many spinster feminists felt that it was pointless to seek the franchise for their married counterparts, as the married woman was viewed as subject to her husband's will, and thus to grant her the vote could be tantamount to giving the married man a double vote. However, the consensus was that all women would eventually become voters.

Nor did the apparently egalitarian principles of the women's movement eradicate class difference. All women were equal but some were more equal than others. The predicament of the forerunners of female independence often lay in the choice of which class or classes of women ought to be appealed to for support. The rights of women to diverse employments, the vote, equality in heterosexual union, and to property was not always asserted in an uncomplicated manner.

Male and female conservative commentators felt threatened by feminist agitation. W. R. Greg writes rather sourly of female reformers that they:

... endeavour to make women independent of men; to multiply and facilitate their employments; to enable them to earn a separate and ample subsistence by competing with the hardier sex in those careers and occupations hitherto set apart for that sex alone; to induct them generally into avocations, not only as interesting and beneficent, and therefore *appropriate*, but specially and definitely as *lucrative*; to surround single life for them with so smooth an entrance, and such a pleasant, ornamented, comfortable path, that marriage shall almost come to be regarded, not as their most honourable function and especial calling, but merely as one of the many ways open to them, and competing on equal terms with other ways for their cold and philosophic choice.³⁸

Even Dinah Mulock Craik provides insight into contemporary definitions of independence in *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1858) when she writes that singleness '[has] become tacitly suggestive of hoydenishness, coarseness, strong-mindedness, down to the lowest depth of bloomerism, cigarette-smoking, and

³⁷ Agitation for the suffrage dates from 1865 when leading middle-class feminists began to raise the issue. It was also in this year that John Stuart Mill included the issue in his election address as M. P. for Westminster. The first women's suffrage committees were founded later in this decade.

³⁸ W. R. Greg, 'Why Are Women Redundant?', *Literary and Social Judgements* (London: Trubner, 1868), pp. 336-79, (pp. 369-70).

talking slang'.³⁹ Mid-century commentator 'Tabitha Glum' humorously suggested the social rearrangement of single women's lives. Spinsters should band together to form their own communities, according to Glum, and she advocates the establishment of lay convents of single women:

Methinks I see it -- a modern temple of vesta, without its tell-tale fires -- square, rectangular, simple, airy, isolated -- chaste as Diana and quiet as the grave -- the frescoed walls commemorating the legend of Saint Ursula and her eleven thousand -- the sacrifice of Jephtha's daughter -- Elizabeth Carter translating Epictetus -- Harriet Martineau revising the criminal code.⁴⁰

On a more serious level, such lives seemed to require some form of social rearrangement. Barbara Taylor writes of the category of 'odd women', in which she includes poverty-stricken married women separated from their spouses:

From their fragmentary self-descriptions most appear to have come from petit bourgeois backgrounds [...] but the conventional class label fails to convey the displaced, ambiguous quality of their lives. Outside traditional women's roles, thrust into an unwomanly independence, [they] soon found themselves living right at the edge of bourgeois gentility, at the point where gruelling work and poverty blurred the line between themselves and the lower orders.⁴¹

The anti-suffragists derived many of their objections from the Victorian ideology of 'separate spheres', which they used to claim that female enfranchisement and feminist public agitation would sexualise politics and unsex women, blur the proper boundaries between the sexes and destabilise the natural complementarity of man and woman upon which a balanced and ordered society depended.

Central to feminist debate at mid-century was a discussion of the fate of the 'surplus woman'. Should she emigrate or was polygamy the answer? Advice came from every quarter of middle-class Victorian society, as single woman Anne Thackeray humorously records in her essay on 'Toilers and Spinsters' (1874):

There are a score of books written for [the spinster's] benefit with which they doubtless wile away their monotonous hours. Old maids, spinsters,

³⁹ Dinah Mulock Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858), p. 22-3.

⁴⁰ 'Tabitha Glum', 'A Bemoanment from Bath; Or, Poor Old Maids' *Blackwood's Magazine* (February 1844), 199-201, (p. 201).

⁴¹ Taylor, pp. 72-3.

the solitary, broken-hearted women of England, have quite a little literature of their own, which is not certainly cheering to our forlorn spirits [...] There are Sunsets of spinster life, Moans of old maids, Words to the wasted, Lives for the lonely, without number [...] urging the despondent to hide their sufferings away in their own hearts, to show no sign, to gulp their bitter draught, to cheer, tend, console others in their need, although unspeakably gloomy themselves.⁴²

According to Thackeray, any privation endured by the spinster was for want of an adequate income; 'it is the want of money, and not of husbands' which is the spinster's cause for complaint.⁴³ Spinster Mary Taylor regarded the work available to middle-class women as nightmarish, and considered the employment opportunities which presented themselves to her on emigrating to New Zealand as a qualified improvement, as she informs a fellow spinster:

The new world will be no Paradise, but still much better than the nightmare. Am I not right in all this? [...] Or am I shooting in the dark? What in the world keeps you? [...] You could get your living here at any of the trades I have mentioned, which you would only die of in England [...] Why not come here then and be happy?⁴⁴

Florence Nightingale herself was a semi-invalid, deprived of her desired occupation as a nurse until she found autonomy among the sick-beds of Scutari. As a middle-class single woman constrained by familial ties from any proper outlet for her vocational ambitions Nightingale could, according to Lytton Strachey, think of 'nothing but how to satisfy that singular craving of hers to be *doing* something'.⁴⁵ As Strachey observes, the 'difficulties in her path were great' as it was 'an almost unimaginable thing in those days for a woman of means to make her own way in the world and to live in independence'.⁴⁶ Nightingale rejected a suitor on the grounds that marital relations could not possibly allow her any active outlet for her energies:

I have an intellectual nature which requires satisfaction, and that would find it in him. I have a passional nature which requires satisfaction, and

⁴² Anne Thackeray, 'Toilers and Spinsters', *Toilers and Spinsters and Other Essays* (London: Smith and Elder, 1874), 1-34, (pp. 1-2).

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Mary Taylor to Ellen Nussey (9 February 1849), quoted in A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen. Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 82, from C. K. Shorter, *The Brontës: Life and Letters*, 2 vols, (London, 1908), pp. 80-1.

⁴⁵ Lytton Strachey, 'Florence Nightingale', in *Eminent Victorians* (London: Penguin, 1975), 111-61, (p. 112).

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 113.

that would find it in him. I have a moral, an active nature which requires satisfaction, and that would not find it in his life.⁴⁷

Single women such as Nightingale sought to become creative rather than affective selves. Similarly, in *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) Margaret Oliphant stresses the need for worthwhile female occupations: 'When a woman has an active mind, and still does not care for parish work, it is a little hard for her to find a "sphere"':

... the ripe female intelligence, not having the natural resource of a nursery and a husband to manage, turns inwards, and begins to 'make a protest' against the existing order of society, and to call the world to account for giving it no due occupation -- and to consume itself.⁴⁸

For nineteenth-century middle-class women most work performed outside the home took a philanthropic form. In the burst of philanthropic activity which occurred at mid-century, reform became part of the remit of the 'woman's sphere'. Charitable or educational interests were open to interpretation as an embellishment of women's familial duties; the milky and soothing hand of middle-class feminine compassion reached out a little further. Women could humanise public life.

Philanthropy and voluntary social work among the needy and vulnerable were acceptable as semi-public extensions of women's 'natural' abilities as carers. The notion of any profit being won from this other than that of emotional fulfilment was shameful. Middle-class women, and particularly single ones, were the unacknowledged welfare state of Victorian Britain. 'Tabitha Glum' describes middle-class single women as a 'holy army of martyrs', who, 'from the throne to the hospital [...] unharrassed by the cares of private life, [have] been found most fruitful in public virtue.'⁴⁹ According to Glum, spinsters were keen to do dutiful work and should be enabled to exercise their skills on philanthropic projects:

In Bath, Brighton and other spinster colonies of this island, the demand for such work would be prodigious, The sale of canary-birds and poodles might suffer a temporary depression in consequence; but this is comparatively unimportant. ('BB', 201)

Rosalind Marshall observes that 'the *joie de vivre* of the eighteenth century was replaced by a gloomy sentimentality, and women turned [...] from dancing and

⁴⁷ quoted in 'Florence Nightingale', p. 115. No other reference given.

⁴⁸ Margaret Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 395.

⁴⁹ 'A Bemoanment from Bath; Or, Poor Old Maids', p. 201.

the theatre to doing good works'.⁵⁰ Delegations of Faith, Hope and Charity step-picking through the destitute slums and lost souls of working-class Victorian Britain fitted well with idealisations of the moral influence of middle-class female virtue and, more pertinently, with the notion that single women ought to be philanthropic 'stand-bys' in times of community need. Dinah Mulock Craik suggests that the single woman could find 'her work lying very near at hand [...] some faulty household quietly to remodel, some child to teach, or parent to watch over'. Or she could extend 'her service' to the sites of public philanthropy since 'hardly one of its charities and duties can be done so thoroughly as by a wise and tender woman's hand'.⁵¹ The transformation of Victorian charitable enterprise was, in part, undertaken by schemes run by spinsters such as Mary Carpenter's 'ragged schools' or Dorothy Pattison's reform of hospital care for the working-classes. One Victorian reviewer testifies to the profusion of philanthropic spinsters:

Which of us cannot call to mind among our personal acquaintance at least one maidenly figure whose ministry extended beyond the home circle? Most of these workers live and die unheard of by the great world; and the fragrance of their charitable actions [...] is breathed only by the few.⁵²

There was much mid-century discussion about the possibility of organising single women into Protestant or secular sisterhoods, forming an army for the Church from what Frances Power Cobbe calls the 'lady guerillas of philanthropy'.⁵³ Women's creative impulses were to be expressed through the appropriate channels.

Philanthropy was, in many ways, a status occupation for middle-class women, as philanthropic activity constituted both a public declaration of selflessness and was financially non-profitable. Obviously it provided its participants with no real access to the salaried professions, but yet what emerges is a semi-professional configuration of the life of the emotions. Although philanthropy encouraged women to remain amateurs, it was fundamental to the promotion of social reforms. Despite its cooperation with the edict against professionalism, philanthropy did allow spinsters access to the process of social reform. Martha Vicinus makes the point that although Victorian men may have controlled philanthropic activity in the sense that it was they who manned the boards and finances of charitable organisations, they did not work with the same commitment to causes as single women. Single women

⁵⁰ Rosalind K. Marshall, *Virgins and Viragoes: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 251.

⁵¹ *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*, p. 15.

⁵² William Arthur, 'Female Philanthropists', *London Quarterly Review* (October 1881), 49-81, (p. 50).

⁵³ Frances Power Cobbe, 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?', *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1862), 594-610, (p. 594).

were, effectively, the 'unpaid foundation of the social service system'.⁵⁴ Charitable work allowed spinsters to be free from the control of investigating relatives and supervisory companions. The enormous growth of women's involvement in philanthropic activity created an organising force which existed in manageable units. Heretical longings for work outside the home may have been quelled by regular doses of religion and restraint, and yet an attendant emphasis upon self-improvement allowed women entry to areas of unpaid work.

The participation of the single woman in a host of reforming movements in the nineteenth century was made to derive its legitimacy from her unmarried state. The cultural construction of spinsterhood possessed a diverse constellation of attributes, many of which were accorded enormous symbolic significance and were underpinned by an idea of the spinster's thwarted female biology. In the symbolic register the significance accruing to spinsterhood lay in its sterility, its humble usefulness and its poignant disappointments. However, such responses to female singleness were often at odds with the complexity of lived spinsterhood.

For it was often a sense of their own earlier ineffectiveness that motivated a number of later women towards militancy. Against the notion of the disappointed or frustrated spinster the radical celibates of the militant suffragette movement were later effectively to justify their non-marital status and use it to provide a moral base from which to form an effective critique of male sexuality. In her work on Victorian spinsters Rosemary Auchmuty evokes a causal relationship between militancy and spinsterhood, and her views can be supported by the testimony of many militant suffragettes.⁵⁵ Lady Constance Lytton, a spinster who was first attracted to militant suffragism when she was thirty-nine, writes of herself as having been:

One of that numerous gang of upper-class, leisured-class spinsters, unemployed, unpropertied, unendowed, uneducated [...] economically dependent entirely upon others [...] A maiming subserviency is so conditional to their very existence that it becomes an aim in itself, an ideal. Driven through life with blinkers on, they are unresentful of the bridle.⁵⁶

Indeed many militant suffragettes went on to justify their singleness by the contention that the position of women could only be improved in society by maintaining a stalwart class of celibate women. Feminists such as Christabel Pankhurst and Cicely Hamilton regarded spinsterhood as both a political necessity and sign of discontent with the subjection and commodification of women through

⁵⁴ *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, pp. 22-3.

⁵⁵ Rosemary Auchmuty, 'Victorian Spinsters' (unpublished doctoral thesis: Australian National University, 1975).

⁵⁶ quoted in E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement* (London: Virago, 1972), p. 332.

heterosexual union. Marriage was not so much a career *for* women as it was a trade *in* women.

Analysts of nineteenth-century feminism who associate liberation with sexual liberation tend to underestimate the radicalism of much nineteenth-century feminism. Kathleen Blake suggests that 'for [such commentators] more ascetic means less radical'⁵⁷ Blake notes that such studies view middle-class Victorian spinsters as little more than victims of Victorian sexual norms and wrongly assume that spinsterish celibacy is a customary trait of Victorianism. However, the stance realised through the practice of celibacy was, as we shall see, as often as not progressive rather than conservative. It further represents a significant area of sexual confrontation between men and women. Linda Gordon discusses the limited sexual choices available to many women:

... 'sex-hating' women were not just misinformed, or priggish, or neurotic. They were often responding rationally to their material reality. Denied the possibility of recognizing and expressing their own sexual needs, denied even the knowledge of sexual possibilities other than those dictated by the rhythms of male orgasm, they had only two choices: passive and usually pleasureless submission, with high risk of undesirable consequences, or rebellious refusal.⁵⁸

The campaign which mobilised around the effort to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts of the eighteen-sixties, also provides a framework for an analysis of feminist responses to male sexual behaviour. The formidable feminist campaign against the Acts mobilised debate over sexual questions. Public discourse on prostitution and venereal disease and the implications of these for the construction of male sexual identity generated new definitions of middle-class female sexuality. Feminists reworked the ideal of women's moral purity in both the domestic and public worlds. The official suffragette response to male sexual corruption is most fully outlined in Christabel Pankhurst's tract *The Great Scourge* (1913) which highlights the effects of hereditary syphilis. Pankhurst used statistics which were misleading, but which were derived from the standard texts of the medical profession. Judith Walkowitz argues that:

... intense anger at male sexual license undoubtedly contributed to the militancy of the Edwardian suffragists. The violent extraparliamentary activities of the Women's Social and Political Union reflected not only

⁵⁷ Kathleen Blake, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), p. 106.

⁵⁸ 'Voluntary Motherhood; The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States', p. 62.

frustration at women's limited political gains over the past forty-five years between 1865 and 1910 or even the 'irrational' character of the politics of the time. The acts of arson, window breaking, and tearing up of golf links were part of a real sex war, whose explicit political precedent may be traced to the campaign against the C. D. acts.⁵⁹

The figure of the 'New Woman' in *fin-de-siècle* fiction was often used to explore social constraints on feminine sexuality, and thus helped to make public discussion of femininity and female sexuality possible. The rebellions of the 'New Woman' were generally outside any organisational grouping, and displayed few strongly marked political alliances. 'New Woman' fiction did tend, however, to associate women's emancipation and sexual emancipation. The movement for 'free love' (by which is meant voluntary unions outside marriage rather than promiscuity or unfettered sexual exploration) centred on the *Freewoman* journal. The *Freewoman* was edited by Dora Marsden who had briefly been a member of the W. S. P. U. Sexual radicals, guided by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter or Stella Browne, did offer a challenge to the 'militant celibacy' which informed much W. S. P. U. discourse on female sexuality. However, the challenge presented by 'free love' discourse was mitigated by a reliance upon definitions of female sexuality which were drawn largely from heterosexual male models. Much of the journalism found in the *Freewoman* combined with sexological models of 'normal' female sexuality in the move to discredit the spinster's life as barren and prudish. The cutting edge which 'militant celibacy' gave to feminist critiques of male sexuality and the double standard was ultimately lost.

The sexual politics of *The Freewoman* are best represented in Stella Browne's comments in 1912 that 'sexual experience is the right of every human being not hopelessly afflicted in mind or body and should be entirely a matter of free choice and personal preference, untainted by bargain or compulsion'.⁶⁰ An article by Helen MacDonald and W. A. MacDonald which appeared in *The Freewoman* in 1912 renames the single woman the 'New Maid' and outlines new strategies of co-operation through which the single woman can approach heterosexual relations. This 'New Maid' would find herself:

... face to face with the sanctions of pure passion alone in her sex dealings with men [...] She acquires the freedom [...] to consult, in the bestowal or refusal of her person, the requirements of her own development, and no longer grows up in the belief that she exists to supply the sex needs of men

⁵⁹ Judith Wakowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 255.

⁶⁰ Stella Browne, *The Freewoman* (21 March 1912), p. 354.

at their own valuation without submitting them to her own mental analysis and institutions. By this discovery the New Maid *finds herself*, and thus sets in motion a rush of vital energy -- an enlarged experience of the joy of life.⁶¹

Sexual liberation emerges as a feminist goal in the early decades of the twentieth-century, and feminist approaches to female sexuality were polarised around the defence of sexual pleasure.

In the early decades of the twentieth-century the spinster became a pathological type. The emphasis shifts from economic to psychological explanations of single women's lapse from social orthodoxy, and correlations are made between female singleness and psychological deviance. Arguments based upon biological reductionism concentrate upon what are deemed to be the biological exigencies of single women. Winifred Holtby complains of such approaches to spinsterhood in 1934:

Freudian psychology has sanctioned the extreme veneration of sex. The followers of D. H. Lawrence have taught us to venerate the instinct, emotion, and the intuitive vitality of the senses and to pity virgins for being unacquainted with a wide, deep and fundamentally important range of intuitive and sensual experience [...] twentieth-century morality teaches [single women] that the retention of virginity dooms them to the horror of insanity [...] Thus, even when all their appetites for intimacy, power, passion and devotion are well satisfied, they must keep on asking themselves: 'What am I missing? [...] Am I growing embittered, narrow, prudish? [...] At the moment, life seems very pleasant; but I am an incomplete, frustrated virgin woman. Therefore some time, somewhere, pain and regret will overwhelm me. The psychologists, novelists, lecturers and journalists all tell me so. I live under the shadow of a curse.'⁶²

David Mitchell, commenting on the events of 'Black Friday' when suffragettes and police clashed during a demonstration at Westminster on 18 November, 1910, makes an explicit connection between the supposed sexual frustrations of militant spinsters and the physical nature of their conflicts with the police:

Christabel's oft-repeated taunt that the suffrage agitation could be ended by giving women what they wanted was unfortunately open to various interpretations, and the provocativeness of the maiden warriors gave some men a splendid excuse to wage their own class -- and sex -- war. As the campaign lengthened and tempers shortened, near (and sometimes actual)

⁶¹ Helen Macdonald and W. A. MacDonald, 'The New Order', *The Freewoman* (30 May 1912), 29-32.

⁶² Winifred Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilization* (London: John Lane, 1934), p. 132.

rape became a hazard of the tussles in Parliament Square [...] Hooligans, and occasionally policemen, fell gleefully upon prostrate forms from sheltered backgrounds. Wasn't this, they argued, what these women *really* wanted? [...] Perhaps in some cases, and in a deeply unconscious way, it was.⁶³

Anti-feminist responses to the militant spinsters often attempt to rework the feminist objections of the spinster. Ironically her resistance and protest becomes suspect on two very different fronts: her dissatisfaction with cultural norms lies in the non-fulfilment of her sexual drives or in her lack of 'normal' sexual drives. She is either unable to accommodate her femininity or she wants to be a man. Whichever aberrant status she is accorded is the penalty for her difference.

Thus it can be seen that the figure of the middle-class celibate spinster is implicated in the way in which suffrage organisations identified the oppression of women and the solutions they proposed. The inclusion of the figure of the middle-class celibate single woman changes the common topography of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century women's movement, and enables us to construct a very different historical landscape. The spinster contested the meaning of femininity, in that her resistance to marriage implies that there is no universal 'womanliness', but rather that the status of this concept is an issue of social ordering of sexual difference and division. In this sense the figure of the spinster stands out in staunch and full audacity. Middle-class single women were uniquely poised at the juncture between domestic and public life. The singleness of such women, while having no inherent meaning, possesses enormous cultural resonance because it uncovers gaps in the social ideology of reproduction and production. Betty Miller notes the gathering indifference of women towards the feminist aspirations which fired the suffragettes:

If on coming down with a First from Oxford or Cambridge she has successfully navigated the dreaded straits wherein lurk the Scylla of Shorthand and the Charybdis of Typewriting, more often than not, these days, it will be found that it is by no means into a nunnery that the newly-fledged Graduate has chosen to retreat, but, on the contrary, into a nursery.⁶⁴

The sexual politics of 'militant celibacy' and the challenge this represented to paradigms of conduct in heterosexual relations was replaced by a form of equal rights feminism and new strategies for heterosexual cooperation.

⁶³ David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977), p. 160.

⁶⁴ Betty Miller 'Amazons and Afterwards' *The Twentieth Century* 164 (August 1958), 126-35, (p. 127).

CHAPTER ONE

Dry Sticks, Old Flames and What About the Ashes? Some Cautionary Tales for Single Women in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Novel

At mid-century, if a middle-class Victorian woman had walked down King Street in Bloomsbury she could, for a subscription of a guinea a year, have borrowed a copy of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) or *Villette* (1853) from Mudie's Select Library.¹ She might have read with new hope in the self-help manual *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1858) of 'this curious phase of social history, when marriage is apparently ceasing to become the common lot, and happy marriage the most uncommon lot of all' or could have passed Dorothea Beale walking to Queen's College, Harley Street, the first college for governesses.² The flight from maternity was taking wing, and W. R. Greg, Manchester businessman and journalist, groans that:

... there is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which [...] is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong.³

Victorian women faced a crisis in the affairs of their sex; a crisis compounded by social and cultural change. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 had shaken the Victorian idyll of the home and had proved it to be at least in part unstable, as the Act allowed an enlarged possibility for divorce and separation.

¹ Sally Mitchell notes that Mudie's Select Library began lending books in 1842 at the charge of one guinea for a year's subscription, and that its clients were allowed to borrow one volume at a time. For further information see Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel. Chastity, Class and Women's Reading* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1981).

² Dinah Mulock Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858), p. 34. Dorothea Beale was the principal of the Cheltenham Ladies College, and attended Queen's College in the eighteen-forties. She is mainly associated, along with her colleague Frances Mary Buss, with their work at the North London Collegiate School for Ladies, which Buss established in 1850. Both women were spinsters and refused several offers of marriage throughout their lives, feeling that their far greater mission lay with the improvement of female education. For further information on Beale and Buss see Josephine Kamm, *How Different from Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London: The Bodley Head, 1958).

³ William Rathbone Greg, 'Why are Women Redundant?' (1862), *Literary and Social Judgements* (London: Trubner, 1868), pp. 336-79, (p. 339).

Frances Power Cobbe pugnaciously observed that single celibacy was becoming more attractive to women:

The 'old maid' of 1861 is an exceedingly cheerful personage, running about untrammelled by husband or children [...] She has not fewer duties than other women, only more diffused ones.⁴

The certainty of such happiness for the spinster, Cobbe claims, and the 'demonstrated danger of being inexpressibly miserable should she choose either an unfaithful or a cruel husband' will ensure the increasing rarity of marriage.⁵ Feminist commentator Annie Besant presents an extended critique of the institution of marriage, pointing out that a husband could legally act as his wife's gaoler, that the law did not admit as crimes domestic violence or rape within marriage, and that marriage systematically disadvantaged women:

If in a railway accident a married woman has her leg broken, she cannot sue the railway company for damages; she is not a damaged person; in the eye of the law, she is a piece of damaged *property*, and the compensation is to be made to her owner.⁶

In direct contrast to this, as Besant was quick to point out, was the situation of the middle-class single woman, who possessed the same legal rights and property rights as her male counterpart. 'Unmarried women,' states Besant, 'suffer under comparatively few disabilities [for] it is marriage which brings with it the weight of injustice and of legal degradation.'⁷ Martha Vicinus observes that discontent with the female share of life was also voiced among Owenite and anti-slavery women, spreading throughout middle-class society during the eighteen-fifties.⁸ These groups agitated for the political equality of women, economic liberation and marital reform. Institutions including marriage seemed to only perpetuate the subjection of woman to man and the transformation of society demanded not only new economic systems but the reform of existing institutions. In 1866 Lydia Becker formed the first long-term female suffrage organisation and in 1868 the National Society for Women

⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, 'Celibacy v. Marriage', *Essays on the Pursuits of Women*, (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863), pp. 38-57, (p. 52).

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶ Annie Besant, *Marriage as it was, as it is, and as it should be: a plea for reform* (London: Freethought Publishing, 1879), p. 11.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸ For further information see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 12 and Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973).

Suffrage came into being, following John Stuart Mill's failed attempt to introduce a women's suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill of 1867.

Single women like Frances Power Cobbe campaigned for higher matrimonial standards, speaking out against domestic violence which Cobbe calls wife-torture and thus extending the feminist debate across social class. Cobbe's article, 'Wife Torture in England', appeared in the *Contemporary Review* in 1878, and helped to change Parliamentary legislation on domestic violence.⁹ Citing examples, statistics and all other information available to her, Cobbe links domestic violence to economic deprivation and prevailing masculinities, and writes with compassion of 'the lot of a married woman, whose locality is the "kicking district" of Liverpool,' and whose existence is 'simply a duration of suffering and subjection to injury and savage treatment'.¹⁰

It was so often impressed upon middle-class women that to fulfil their 'natural' destiny they must marry that feminist Mary Taylor (who was a close friend of Charlotte Brontë) was motivated to argue that 'the first duty in the matter is for every woman to protect herself from the danger of being forced to marry'.¹¹ Women do not contract marriage for pleasure, alleges Taylor, but instead 'adopt a set of duties towards them [men] and are paid for doing them'.¹² By removing from women's reach the option of profitable singleness, marriage becomes her inevitable destiny which she hurries into for shelter from the threat of penury. Marriage is, according to Taylor, then cynically reconstituted as her natural destiny because of the alacrity with which she seeks it. According to spinster feminists like Taylor the single status could prove enabling and should be cherished as it allowed women to campaign for various rights in the public domain, without the restrictions of husband or family, and to criticise those who withheld such rights, without the fear of reprisal which so often silenced their married sisters. Taylor comments:

It is a frequent remark that women become possessed of all manner of heroic qualities in extremity; the explanation probably being that only in unusual circumstances have they the liberty or motive sufficient to call forth their ability.¹³

⁹ Cobbe proposed the passage of a bill which would protect wives from abusive husbands and the Parliamentary response resulted in the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878. For further information see Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt, "'A Husband is a Beating Animal': Frances Power Cobbe Confronts the Wife-Abuse Problem in Victorian England", *International Journal of Women's Studies* 6 (1983), 99-118.

¹⁰ Frances Power Cobbe, 'Wife-Torture in England,' *Contemporary Review*, 32 (1878), 55-87, (p. 59).

¹¹ Mary Taylor, 'Marriage', *The First Duty of Women. A Series of Articles Reprinted from The Victoria Magazine, 1865 to 1870* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1870), p. 209.

¹² Mary Taylor, 'Marriage', *The Victoria Magazine* (January 1868), 194-203, (pp. 194, 195).

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 197.

Rosemary Auchmuty points out that in the Victorian period single women 'almost alone of all women were not bound by the ties of potential motherhood'.¹⁴ The visibility of middle-class spinsters increased as their work moved from the home to the public sphere and feminist concerns were increasingly identified as the province of the spinster: a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* refers to feminism as an 'Old Maids' Association'.¹⁵ Eliza Lynn Linton, writing in 1870, dryly identifies the figure of the spinster with mid-century feminist agitation:

This branch [spinsters] of the sect [feminism] suddenly blossomed out about fifteen years or so ago. It would be invidious to mention the names of the leaders; but many of us can remember how all at once appeared a small number of epicene-looking women, with cropped hair mostly parted at the side; turned-down linen collars and small black ties; cloth jackets cut like a man's [...] these women could scarcely be distinguished from beardless youths of twenty. They were all unmarried women [and] wished they had been born men, and yet they thought men great brutes. The main object of these women is [...] to find practical work and the means of self-support for those of their own sex who have no male creatures at hand to keep them.¹⁶

Single woman L. F. March Phillipps found that she could borrow courage from the example set by leading feminist reformers and single women who were choosing their own work with talent and energy:

... without such leaders to open the way for us, and to teach us how to follow it, we of the rank and file could never have hoped, probably should never have wished to escape from the weight of a purely artificial custom, 'heavy as death, and deep almost as life,' which would bind us down to an easy, useless existence.¹⁷

The rebellious potential of female celibacy was understood by some anti-feminist commentators, and often their writing on the subject of single women was not only intended as a piece of advice to spinsters, but also as a way of dispelling the radicalism associated with singleness. W. R. Greg writes: 'Celibacy, when it

¹⁴ Rosemary Auchmuty, 'Victorian Spinsters' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1975), p. 8.

¹⁵ *Blackwood's Magazine*, 105 (1868), p. 460, cited by Eugenia Palmegiano, 'Feminist Propaganda in the eighteen-fifties and eighteen-sixties', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 11 (1971), 5-8, (p. 5).

¹⁶ Eliza Lynn Linton, *Ourselves. A Series of Essays on Women* (London: G. Routledge, 1870), pp. 42-5.

¹⁷ L. F. March Phillipps, *My Life and What Shall I Do With It?* (London: Longman, 1860), p. 8.

transcends [...] limits, and becomes anything but exceptional, is one of the surest and most menacing symptoms of something gravely and radically wrong.¹⁸

Rosemary Auchmuty describes the situation of mid-century Victorian feminism:

For one Josephine Butler, there were fifty philanthropic spinsters; Mrs. Garrett Anderson stood for many years alongside Elizabeth Blackwell, Sophia Jex-Blake and other unmarried pioneer doctors; Dame Millicent Fawcett took over the leadership of the suffrage movement only after the death of Miss Lydia Becker.¹⁹

One such pioneering spinster was Florence Nightingale. In 1856 Florence Nightingale and a small group of nurses returned from the Crimea where they had spent two years working at the front. Harriet Martineau welcomed Nightingale's efforts and claimed that she and her 'disciples' had 'inaugurated a new period in the history of working-women'.²⁰ Martha Vicinus interprets Nightingale's expedition as a 'public triumph for single women that echoed over the next half-century, liberating, shaping, and confining ambitious women'.²¹ Nightingale had herself experienced the dulling inertia of feminine submissiveness forced upon the unmarried daughter within the middle-class Victorian home. She describes this in *Cassandra* (1852):

We have nothing to do which raises us [...] we can never command any regular leisure or solitude [...] With what labour women have toiled to break down all individual and independent life, in order to fit themselves for this social and domestic existence, thinking it right! And when they have killed themselves to do it, they have awakened (too late) to think it wrong [...] What these suffer [...] from the want of work no one can tell. The accumulation of nervous energy, which has had nothing to do during the day, makes them feel every night, when they go to bed, as if they were going mad; and they are obliged to lie long in bed [...] to let it evaporate and keep it down.²²

Periodical literature reflected the dichotomy of interests in Victorian Society -- it tended to be male-dominated and while articles of male authorship mulled over imperialism, serpent charming in Cairo, trade-routes to China and what Palmer saw in Tel-El-Kebir, articles on women's issues began to infiltrate the pages, discussing

¹⁸ 'Why are Women Redundant?', p. 307.

¹⁹ 'Victorian Spinsters', p. 9.

²⁰ Harriet Martineau, untitled review, *The Edinburgh Review* (April 1859), 293-336, (p. 331).

²¹ Vicinus, p. 20.

²² Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra* reprinted in Ray Strachey, *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1978), pp. 395-418, (pp. 408-9).

with increasing momentum the civil rights of women, the need for vocation and alternative feminisms. One reviewer cites different models of female singleness found outside Britain and uses these alternative interpretations of the capabilities of the spinster to argue against the essentialism embodied in popular Victorian constructions of femininity. Modesty and weakness were artificial restraints, used to confine the potential force of active celibacy, and the reviewer quotes a rather fantastic account found in a British Blue-Book of an 'Amazon' force of spinsters who were encountered on an 1863 expedition in Africa. This body of five thousand spinsters work for the king's army and are:

... remarkably well-limbed and strong, armed with muskets, swords, gigantic razors for cutting off heads, bows and arrows, blunderbusses [...] their large war-drum was conspicuous, hung round with skulls.

These Amazons do no domestic work, are lifelong virgins, and are noted for their ferocity in combat, always preferring death to surrender.²³

The documentation of new and foreign modes of spinsterhood goes along with increasing debate about what constitutes femininity. In her article, 'The Final Cause of Woman', Frances Power Cobbe challenges current theory about women:

Of all the theories current concerning women, none is more curious than the theory that it is needful to make a theory about them [...] We have nothing to do but to make round holes, and women will grow round to fill them; or square holes, and they will become square. Men grow like trees, and the most we can do is to lop or clip them. But women run in moulds, like candles, and we can make them long-threes or short-sixes, whichever we please.²⁴

No real woman fits into theories about women:

They would have been very stiff *corsets* indeed which could have compressed Catharine of Russia into Hannah More, or George Sand into the authoress of the 'Heir of Redclyffe;' or which would have turned out Mary Carpenter as a 'Girl of the Period.'²⁵

Cobbe posits two 'orders' or types by means of which middle-class women are conceived: the first type is based on the belief that woman's aim is in 'the service

²³ Frances P. Verney, 'The Powers of Women, and How to Use Them', *The Contemporary Review* 14 (July 1870), 521-39, (p. 524).

²⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, 'The Final Cause of Woman', *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, edited by Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869), 1-26, (pp. 1-2).

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

she can render to Man'; this she calls, 'Woman, considered as an Adjective'; the second type considers woman as 'created for some end proper to herself'; this she calls, 'Woman, considered as a Noun'.²⁶ Feminist spinsters were most interested in the notion of 'Woman, considered as a Noun'.

In 1844 Catherine Gore, using the pseudonym of 'Tabitha Glum', complains about an inundation of advice literature for women, citing Sarah Ellis's set of advice manuals. Is there 'no end to these chartered documentations of the sex!' asks Glum, such 'sermonizing [is] thrown, like a wet blanket, over [one's] shoulders'.²⁷ Glum attributes these sermons to fear of the increasing success of women in the public arena, 'now competing with the rougher sex for the laurels of renown' ('BB', 199). Glum describes herself as a 'lone woman' but does not herself claim that singleness is a blessed state:

Everybody knows that Great Britain is the very fatherland of old maids [...] In Catholic countries, the superfluous daughters of the country are disposed of in convents and *beguinages*, just as in Turkey and China they are, still more humanely, drowned. In certain provinces of the east, pigs are expressly kept, to be turned into the streets at daybreak, for the purpose of devouring the female infants exposed during the night -- thus benevolently securing them from the after torments of single 'blessedness'. ('BB', 200)

By the mid-century women were publishing their own material through the first women-controlled presses. The 'Ladies of Langham Place' launched *The Englishwoman's Journal*, the first women's periodical concerned primarily with women's issues and advertising women's work. The *Kettledrum Magazine*, which first appeared in 1869 exemplifies the wit of the new feminist discourses.²⁸ The full title of the periodical, 'Kettledrum and Women's World' contains an ironic reference to the chief signifiers of 'Woman's Kingdom', the tea-table and tea-kettle. The magazine plays with the relationship between the private and the public:

The natural dominion which women possess over the tea-pot, gives us the right of discussing all particulars concerning tea. Its growth, manufacture, the taxes it pays on importation, our connection with the Celestial Empire, our amiable English custom of supplying the tea growers with opium in exchange for their invigorating herb, our noble behaviour in going to war

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁷ 'Tabitha Glum', 'A Bewailment from Bath: Or, Poor Old Maids' *Blackwood's Magazine* (February 1844), 199-201, (p. 199).

²⁸ *Kettledrum Magazine* was to combine with *Woman's World* magazine, and both formed a new monthly magazine called *Now-A-Days*. *Kettledrum* itself ran only for about six months in 1869.

with the Chinese, when that government was unreasonable enough to object to this arrangement.²⁹

The feminists who were involved in the production of *Kettledrum Magazine*, including Josephine Butler and Jessie Boucherett, used it as a vehicle to break down the isolation of women in the private sphere. The steam emanating from the tea-kettle enabled them to consider pure water supplies and the glint of its metal to scrutinise mining. The accompanying cream introduced agricultural affairs. The sugar basin pointed to the question of the West Indian colonies, free and slave-grown sugar and the emancipation of negro slaves, while the table-cloth begged discussion of the spinning and weaving industries. The clatter of the cups and saucers demanded a discussion of ceramic ware and porcelain painting and this led to technical education and the employment of women.³⁰

Feminist agitation focused mainly on access to higher education and increased respect for working women as prerequisites of improved employment opportunities. But feminist activity was also active within 'the woman's sphere' aiming at the improvement of other lives, rather than being self-seeking. Dorothea Beale, one of the foremost reformers of female education, justifies her spinsterhood and vocation in precisely these terms:

I say all women ought not to marry, their heart, their whole being is amply satisfied by a life like mine, or that of a sick nurse, or a hundred other things in which they can live for others and minister to others' needs.³¹

Folded beneath womanly compassion is the potential for wider professions for women: one can almost envisage the Oxbridge female graduate hiding beneath the skirts of the diminutive female teacher, or the formidable shadow of Florence Nightingale stalking the gentle 'sick nurse'. Conversely dominant Victorian patriarchal ideology attempted to inhibit the reform of female education by insisting on a causal relation between education and the absence of maternal instinct, representing female rationality as the enemy of womanly instinct.

However, initiatives to improve the educational status of women were not limited to the reform of schools or colleges, but can also be found in feminist initiatives to reform the training for work available to women and the drive to revise the concept of what constitutes women's work. An early step to address the

²⁹ Anonymous, 'Kettledrum', *Kettledrum Magazine* (January 1869), p. 1.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 1.

³¹ quoted in Josephine Kamm, *How Different from Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London: The Bodley Head, 1958), p. 36, from the Cheltenham Ladies' College Archives, no fuller reference given.

difficulties faced by middle-class women seeking employment was the launching, in 1859-60, by Jessie Boucherett, Barbara Bodichon and Adelaide Proctor, of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, which aimed to help women to engage freely in diverse occupations. Its methods were pragmatic: recognising that women often lacked anything other than the most superficial training, the society offered a book-keeping class and its activities concentrated on a specific field -- the printing industry.³²

The scarcity of choice for the mid-century single woman left two options for the middle-class woman: to live at home on a small income or to earn a pittance amongst the growing ranks of working women. Mary Poovey writes of the period following the eighteen-thirties:

The bank failures of that decade combined with the discrepancy between the numbers of marriageable women and men and the late marriage age to drive more middle-class spinsters, widows, and daughters of respectable bankrupts into work outside the home. At the same time that the economic pressure to work increased, the range of activities considered socially acceptable for middle-class women decreased; whereas in the 1790s, middle-class women had worked as jailors, plumbers, butchers, farmers, seedsmen, tailors, and saddlers, by the 1840s and 1850s, dressmaking, millinery, and teaching far outstripped all other occupational activities.³³

Only limited occupations were available for middle class women apart from governessing, needlework and writing: writing was not an option for the majority of women, needlework and governessing were poorly paid and governessing was oversupplied. And so independence, forced or chosen, left many women unable to support themselves on their low wages. The 'age of steam', writes Bessie Rayner Parkes, has been accompanied by 'the withdrawal of women from the life of the household, and the suction of them by hundreds of thousands into the vortex of industrial life'.³⁴ Since it was assumed that such women would be semi-dependents in a family, they were normally paid a wage insufficient for comfortable independence. Bessie Rayner Parkes observes that the destitution suffered by the middle-class single woman is due to the new 'responsibility of being their own breadwinners'.³⁵

³² For further information see Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred, Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965).

³³ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments. The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1988), pp. 126-7.

³⁴ Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Essays on Woman's Work* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865), pp. 19-20.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

For the middle classes, different kinds of labour were gendered, being the province of one sex or the other. Alleged female incapacity provided the excuse for disproportionately low wages where wages were actually paid. Middle-class women themselves often experienced a sense of shame about accepting any wage at all for their labour, payment being a material recognition of their fall from gentility. Emily Faithfull bitterly resented schemes to pay ladies privately in order to avoid wounding their sensibilities:

... as if that which is a source of honest pride in a man would be a degradation to a woman. Is not the labourer worthy of her hire? Is it less dignified to receive the wages of industry than the unwilling or even willing bounty of friends and relations?³⁶

Yet many spinsters sought no more from their employers than board and lodgings, in return for which they would do any kind of middle-class work. Anne Thackeray recalls reading a 'dismal list' of single women seeking work at the offices of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women:

Miss A., aged 30, daughter of a West Indian merchant, reduced to poverty by his failure: highly educated, but not trained to anything. Just out of hospital. Wants situation as nursemaid, without salary.

Miss B., aged 30. Father speculated, and ruined the family, which is now dependent on her. He is now old, and she has a sister dying.

Miss C., aged 50. Willing to do *anything*.³⁷

Furthermore, middle-class feminists had no illusions about the grim conditions of employment endured by their working-class sisters. In an article entitled 'What Are Women Doing?', which appeared in the *English Woman's Journal* in 1861, one contributor notes that:

... whatever mill, yard, factory or workshop you enter, you will find the women in the lowest, the dirtiest, and the unhealthiest departments. The reason is simple. The manager of a business naturally asks who will do the inferior work at the lowest rate, and as women's labour is the cheapest, it falls as a matter of course to their share.³⁸

³⁶ Emily Faithfull, *On Some Drawbacks Connected with the Present Employment of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1862), p. 7.

³⁷ Anne Thackeray, 'Toilers and Spinners', *Toilers and Spinners and Other Essays* (London: Smith and Elder, 1874), p. 14.

³⁸ Anonymous, 'What Are Women Doing?', *English Woman's Journal* 7 (1 March 1861), 51-3, (p. 53).

Working-class women had to work for a pittance as unskilled labourers, in environments which were often injurious to their health. They were also denied any access to the sort of training and apprenticeship in various skills which working-class men received. In an 1863 review of working-class female labour, Emily Faithfull catalogues various employments: women employed as brickmakers, walking barefoot in wet clay for much of their shift and at times walking in galoshes over pipes so hot that they destroyed shoe leather; or women working in the cotton industry as waste cleaners, which involved passing the sweepings of the mill through machinery in the process of cleaning, and which created an atmosphere so stiflingly dusty that the women were compelled to work with their mouths and nostrils partially filled with rags and cotton. Faithfull presents the two extremes of women's relationship to work: the misery of such working-class women's employment and the despondency generated amongst middle-class women due to their enforced idleness.³⁹

The feminist response was a practical one -- women must find or create new areas of work and as early as 1857 Barbara Bodichon urged women to take pride in profitable labour:

We may give our labour, our work, our money, where we think right; but it is as well to exchange them sometimes for money, to be sure we are as valuable as we think [...] To make all work done for money honourable is what we should strive for.⁴⁰

The *Kettledrum Magazine* listed in 1869 a hopeful range of women's professions at that time including glass engraving, ivory carving, ladies' hair-dressing, electroplating, photography, hospital nursing, dispensing and law-copying.

All too often, however, women's familial experience continued into other areas of social existence, the societal dislocations which industrialisation had produced appeared in new forms and discrimination against women continued in the public domain, rationalised by their supposed necessary connection with marriage and domesticity. Such bias colluded, in a middle-class context, with the perceived loss of caste resultant upon paid employment.

The mid-century marks the publicisation of the problems of the middle-class single women with a surge of contemporary debate over the appropriate alleviation of their difficulties. Proposed solutions included polygamy, a welfare system designed specifically for spinsters, emigration, a tax on bachelors over the age of

³⁹ Emily Faithfull, 'Unfit Employments in Which Women are Engaged', *The Victoria Magazine* II (November-April 1863), 65-73.

⁴⁰ Barbara Bodichon, *Women and Work* (London: Bosworth and Harrison, 1857).

twenty-one, and the formation of Protestant or secular convents for spinsters. Debate was stimulated by the population census of 1851, the first which had examined the conjugal state of its participants. The census found that there was an excess female population. There were 405,000 more women than men and so, as the Registrar-General explained, 'Out of every 100 females of twenty years of age and upwards [...] thirty are spinsters'. In England and Wales in 1851 1,248,000 women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried out of a total of less than 3,000,000.⁴¹ This was described as an 'excess' or 'surplus' of women -- the word choice indicating the alarm of many commentators, and interpretations of the report provide us with a clarification of attitudes towards spinsters.⁴²

Emigration to the colonies was proposed as a practical remedy for the anomaly, and W. R. Greg became the chief proponent of this view. In his article 'Why are Women Redundant', which first appeared in the *National Review* in 1862, he rather glibly suggests that emigration will provide single women with longed-for marital opportunities while solving all sorts of social problems:

We must restore by an emigration of women that natural proportion between the sexes in the old country and in the new ones, which was disturbed by an emigration of men, and the disturbance of which has wrought so much mischief in both lands.⁴³

Greg sees women as civilisers and urges them to emigrate to civilise male colonists. However, in this respect, Greg's view of female emigration does not radically differ from the views held by the feminist Maria S. Rye who suggests that:

... if the vice and immorality on either side of the Atlantic is ever to be uprooted, it must be by some further extension of emigration [...] by an influx into the colonies of a body of women infinitely superior by birth, by education, and by taste, to the hordes of wild uneducated creatures we have hitherto sent abroad.⁴⁴

Despite Greg's persuasions the Female Middle-Class Emigration Society, which was launched in May 1862, proved to have a minimal effect on the body of

⁴¹ Figures cited in 'Why are Women Redundant?', *National Review* (1862), p. 347, and may well be taken from *The Census of Great Britain in 1851* (London: Longman, 1854).

⁴² Pat Jalland outlines the reasons the demographic imbalance which created a large unmarried female population: higher male mortality rates; male emigration (three males emigrated to every one female); and an increasing tendency amongst middle and upper-class males to postpone marriage until a sufficient income level could be reached. For further information see Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 255.

⁴³ 'Why Are Women Redundant?', p. 351.

⁴⁴ Maria S. Rye, *Emigration of Educated Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1861), p. 12.

middle-class single women.⁴⁵ The objects of the Society's philanthropy did not usually wish to leave home for the colonies; genteel poverty and a single existence in England seemed preferable to an unknown fate in the wilds of Australia, Canada or New Zealand.⁴⁶

The feminist view, on the other hand, was articulated by the ubiquitous Miss Cobbe in her article 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?' (1862), Jessie Boucherett in an article, 'How to Provide for Superfluous Women' (1869), and by Emily Faithfull and Mary Taylor, all of whom attempted to dispel the aura of anomaly or failure surrounding the expanding class of single women. They argued that although thirty percent of women in England may be unmarried, emigration was no solution. Indeed, Jessie Boucherett had the audacity to propose that men should emigrate and so leave vacant a whole range of jobs which women could fill.⁴⁷ Boucherett also points out that in other countries the problems of the single woman remain problems even if the numbers of the sexes are equal. The sufferings of single women are a result of their poverty, not their lack of a husband. Boucherett cites the cultural placement of the middle-class spinster in France, or in the United States and Australia in both of which the number of men exceeds the number of women. 'It comes to this', an exasperated Boucherett concludes, 'that unless Heaven should send a new planet alongside for us to export our superfluous women to, we must make up our minds to keep them at home'.⁴⁸ Efforts to promote the emigration of spinsters would be better directed towards improving the situation of spinsters by allowing them to enter the professions which would make marriage no longer necessary. Mary Taylor takes issue with the terms of the debate, arguing that to call single women redundant 'a man must believe that marriage is the proper and only cure for

⁴⁵ The Female Middle-Class Emigration Society was founded by single woman Maria S. Rye, who had, prior to the inception of the society, successfully sent middle-class women to Sydney, Melbourne and Natal. This initial success prompted Miss Rye to appeal to the public for funds to establish a permanent scheme for emigration. Public subscriptions of over £500 were raised and with this capital the Society was founded. An office was established at Portugal Street in London, an address which the society shared with the offices of the *English Woman's Journal*. The society provided interest free loans, repayable over a few years, to enable women to emigrate. In an attempt to ensure the success of her venture Maria Rye even went to the extent of sailing to New Zealand in autumn 1862, with the first party of single women sent out by the society. On this occasion Miss Rye sought first-hand knowledge of the country and to establish a network of local helpers to receive and settle the society's emigrants.

⁴⁶ For an extended analysis of middle-class female emigration see A. J. Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen. Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).

⁴⁷ Jessie Boucherett, 'How to Provide for Superfluous Women', *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture* edited by Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869), pp. 27-48, (p. 34).

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 31.

feminine poverty'. She concludes that Greg may be attempting 'to force women into matrimony who prefer a single life.'⁴⁹

'Transportation or starvation to all old maids' is all that Greg's reasoning offers the spinster, claims Frances Power Cobbe, and she challenges the central tenet of his argument that marriage is the right and true path for all women:

... to make it a woman's *interest* to marry, to force her, by barring out every means of self-support and all fairly remunerative labour, to look to marriage as her sole chance of competency, is to drive her into [...] sinful and unhappy marriage [...] it is only on the standing-ground of a happy and independent celibacy that a woman can really make a free choice on marriage. To secure this standing-ground, a pursuit is more needful than a pecuniary competence, for a life without aim or object is one which [...] goads a woman into accepting any chance of a change.⁵⁰

Slumbering, as Cobbe describes it, in the vessel of ennui on the dead sea of idleness, the middle-class spinster now woke to find the waters of life 'rippled by a hundred currents from all quarters of heaven'.⁵¹

The conventions which surrounded notions of middle-class femininity meant that women usually received no appropriate or efficient training for work since marriage was deemed to be the only fully appropriate expression of middle-class female life, and by the time that it became apparent that no suitor was going to come calling on Gwendolen or Jane, she was too old to train effectively and there seemed little that she could do to improve her situation. Society failed to accommodate those middle-class women whose lives differed from their expected destinies as wives and mothers. Their singleness was viewed largely as a breakdown of what they were supposed to be; 'paying the rent' effectively unsexed a woman, and even some of the most outspoken feminists agreed that female singleness was alien to the constitution of woman's nature.

Throughout the early decades of the nineteenth-century then, conservative responses to the spinster had emphasised that marriage and not employment was the site of cultural change in women's lives, and had often adopted that line that to make middle-class married women feel the importance of their station, their marital duties must be understood as of the utmost importance to domestic life. The married woman must receive every accolade: eulogies and tracts were to be composed in her honour, she was made of the stuff of heroines when she practised her angelic duties

⁴⁹ Mary Taylor, 'Redundant Women', *The First Duty of Women. A Series of Articles Reprinted from The Victoria Magazine, 1865-1870* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1870), pp. 27, 31.

⁵⁰ Frances Power Cobbe, 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?', *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1862), 594-610, (pp. 599, 595-7).

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 608.

in the home. But by 1865 feminist commentators are clear that what actually happens is other, such cultural prescriptions fail to take into account any notion that some 'lonely exiles' may be unable to enact such wifely duties or to enjoy whatever benefits may result from such orthodoxy:

[Conservative commentators] have grown up in the faith that home was woman's kingdom, babies her subjects, and love her sceptre. But they have never stayed to examine the possibilities of her being debarred from such happiness; they have never counted the lonely exiles from all these feminine joys, who stand outside the charmed circle -- unwooded, unwedded, poor, helpless, alone.⁵²

Writers such as Dora Greenwell appealed against: 'that jealousy, inherent in the British mind, of allowing a woman's thoughts and feelings to run in any other channel [...] than that which convention has hallowed out as their appropriate one'.⁵³ A number of mid-Victorian feminists insisted that the spinster's life need be no less happy than that of her married counterpart:

What possible reason can there be to prevent unmarried [...] people from being happy (or unhappy), according to their circumstances [...] Are unmarried people shut out from all theatres, concerts, picture-galleries, parks and gardens? [...] Are they locked up all the summer time, and only let out when an east wind is blowing? [...] Does Mudie refuse their subscriptions? [...] If a lady has had three husbands, could she do more? May not spinsters [...] give their opinions on every subject [...] climb up craters, publish their experiences, tame horses, wear pork-pie hats, write articles in the *Saturday Review*? They have gone out to battle in top-boots, danced on the tight-rope, taken up the Italian cause and harangued the multitudes [...] They have crossed the seas in shoals, been brave as men when their courage came to be tried [...] What is it that is to render life to them only one long regret?⁵⁴

It was still the case that women found much more difficulty than men in establishing a relationship between private and public life. The questions facing middle-class single women who sought positions in the public world of employment were represented by one commentator as of the most fundamental kind: 'where is the world? how are they to get into it? what shall they do when they are there worth doing?'⁵⁵ There seemed to be no social bearings that the middle-class single woman who sought to work could refer to. This differs entirely from the middle-class man's

⁵² Anonymous, 'Woman's Crusade', *Kettledrum Magazine* (1869), p. 88.

⁵³ Dora Greenwell, 'Our Single Women', *North British Review* (February 1862), 62-88, (p. 67).

⁵⁴ 'Toilers and Spinsters', p. 3-4.

⁵⁵ *My Life and What Shall I Do With It?*, p. 9.

relation to employment; his mode of employment was often the key to his social character, as one writer comments in 1856:

To do a certain work each man was born. It is the noble duty of each man, in youth, to learn his own particular work; and steadily and earnestly to pursue that work, whatever it may be [...] with zeal enough to satisfy his conscience and his God.⁵⁶

Evidently a different set of criteria is in operation in this description of male employment, which seems so assuredly to place and fix the middle-class man socially located in the public sphere in a matrix of employment within which his cultural status is assured. And yet the advice implicit within it parallels many of the directives addressed to the middle-class woman in popular Victorian homilies: both sexes are 'born' into a set of duties, the sexual division of their various labours is mandated by divine authority, and the active conscience of each individual must ensure that those labours are channelled towards some wider social good and benefit, rather than being of a self-seeking character.

Although single women possessed the legal privilege of retaining their own earnings, these were often only sufficient to ensure a depressing indigence. Very few institutions made retirement provisions and employees had to save for their pensions and invest in small insurance companies. The middle-classes were at the mercy of the innumerable accidents of commercial and professional life. The loss of a father could force large numbers of penniless and poorly educated women to try to find some means of earning a living. Bessie Rayner Parkes sums up the pressures to work in this way:

Probably every reader has a female relative or intimate friend whom trade-failures, the exigencies of a numerous household, or the early death of a husband or father, has compelled to this course; it is the experience of every family.⁵⁷

At the same time the middle-class spinster was restrained by Victorian notions of respectability from leaving home or engaging in trades accessible to some single working-class women -- for example the domestic servant industry relied almost exclusively on unmarried working-class women. Such nice social distinctions, however, failed to take into account the real material needs of middle-class spinsters. Harriet Martineau comments in the *Edinburgh Review* that in 1851 a third of women

⁵⁶ William Fulford, 'The Work of Young Men in the Present Age', *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (September 1856), 558-64, (p. 559).

⁵⁷ *Essays on Woman's Work*, p. 76.

over the age of twenty, of both middle and working class, were reliant on their own labour to support themselves and any dependants: this percentage increased in the second half of the nineteenth-century. Since middle-class spinsters were reluctant to engage in work regarded as the province of working-class single women, they were forced into a narrow set of professional occupations and fierce competition arose for even the most poorly-paid positions. Martineau cites examples from one of the Reports of the Governesses Benevolent Institution:

On a recent occasion, there were one hundred and twenty candidates for three annuities of twenty pounds each. [...] Of these, ninety-nine were unmarried; and, out of this number, fourteen had incomes of, or above, twenty pounds [...] twenty-three had incomes varying from one pound to seventeen pounds; and eighty-three had absolutely *nothing*. It will be recollected that all these ladies are above fifty years of age; and, of the utterly destitute, forty-nine were above sixty.⁵⁸

Popular novels of mid-century, frequently written by women, normally implied that all women, by their very nature, desired the one career of marriage. Even the youthful Jane is in a sense preparing for her eventual marriage in *Jane Eyre* (1847) when she tells Helen Burns that "if others don't love me, I would rather die than live -- I cannot bear to be solitary and hated."⁵⁹

In the world of the mid-century novel alternatives for the heroines to a middle-class femininity located in domesticity are rare and often arise from, or result in, disaster. The fictional message seems to be that marriage is the preferred expression of women's desire and that its alternatives are dissident, hence hopeless and self-punishing. In many narratives lonely governesses or improbable dressmakers work because of financial necessity and would joyfully exchange a wage for a wedding ring. The woman who desired or loved outside marriage suffered rigorous social and emotional penalties. The few heroines who stayed single had usually been wounded in love or sacrificed themselves to domestic duties. Even though Lucy Snowe in *Villette* (1853) finds the freedom to work desirable, her employment remains the gift of her lover. Spinster figures in the novel are rarely given the freedom to write their own stories.

In an era loud with voices, the Victorian novel became the main fictional type and proved itself both remarkable and mundane. Amy Cruse puts it thus:

The public reads and re-reads old favourites in tattered covers and devours by dozens new volumes from the circulating library. Many of these, too,

⁵⁸ untitled review, *The Edinburgh Review*, pp. 335, 330.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847), (repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 70.

are probably great books, but certainly not all. There are some that have no tincture of the quality that confers immortality or even of that which promises long life. Yet their contacts are many and close. Their lives, though short, are active and potent. From the point of view of their readers they are as important as those which take the higher rank.⁶⁰

Taken as a whole, Victorian novelists provided their middle-class readers with representations of culture which are neither free from the pressures of that culture nor slavishly mimetic and uncritically approving. They may be understood as imaginative approximations of the experience of contemporary culture. It is on these terms that narrative fiction can stand as a type of evidence of the structure of a culture. Of course any analysis of representations must also take into account what Victorians expected from their books. Mid-Victorian novel theory, according to Walter Kendrick, demanded of the realistic novel that it be the novel of character, rather than incident, and within this distinction exists a bias for character, as opposed to plot:

Plot was commonly figured as a chain or a road, while character was a drawing or a portrait. There is no way in which these two characters can be conveniently combined [...] The matter is further complicated by a strong tendency to attribute the whole value of a novel to its painting of character portraits and to regard the linking together of plot as a merely mechanical business. Plot was a vehicle, and the worth of the novel resided in what it conveyed, not in the conveyance [...] The [emphasis on] character painting implies that there is a structure in the real world which preexists and governs its fictional representation [...] For mid-Victorian critics and realistic novelists, the value of fiction depended on its cultivation of what the real world already contained. The language of which the fictional text is made and even the fact that it is a text should efface themselves before the illusion that what it represents is real.⁶¹

W. R. Greg, in an article on women novelists written for the *National Review* in 1859, is in no doubt about the importance of the novel in Victorian culture, and expresses his concern about what he perceives as an unwholesome lack of distance between fiction and life:

It is not easy to over-estimate the importance of novels, whether we regard the influence they exercise upon an age, or the indications they afford of its characteristic tendencies and features. They come, indeed, under the denomination of 'light literature'; but this literature is effective by reason

⁶⁰ Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Books* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 14.

⁶¹ Walter Kendrick, 'The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32 (1977-78), 18-35, (pp. 20-1).

of its very lightness: it spreads, penetrates, and permeates, where weightier matter would lie merely on the outside of the mind [...] Novels are like soup or jelly; they may be drunk off at a draught or swallowed whole, certain of being easily and rapidly absorbed into the system. We incline to think that a far larger number of persons receive the bias of their course and the complexion of their character from reading novels than from hearing sermons.⁶²

Greg fears particularly for the female reader as 'novels constitute a principal part of the reading of women':

... who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily aroused and whose estimates are more easily influenced than ours, while at the same time the correctness of their feelings and the justice of their estimates are matters of the most special and preeminent concern.⁶³

Greg is perhaps mistaken about women's approach to reading, and his belief that middle-class women are less likely to censure what they read and are more likely to self-identify with fictional representations of femininity. Women readers will not necessarily identify with the central or subsidiary female characters in novels nor will they necessarily passively consume fiction. Female readers then as now responded rationally, not just emotionally, to fiction and even indifferent novels may have stimulated rather than dulled judgment. But a belief in the affective power of representations on women is constant throughout Victorian literary criticism and a strong sense pervades criticism that fiction can significantly affect the lives of its female readers -- so much so that the reader may become the fiction that she reads.

Many Victorian commentators insist that although literary characters may be different from real people, they must remain in a relationship with real people which corresponds to the expectations of the reader. James Ashcroft Noble writes in 1895:

Pleasure is the end of all art, and in the art of fiction the means to that end is representation -- the representation of human life as it mirrors itself on the mind of the artist [...] the pleasure given by any representation of a familiar object [...] consists largely in our recognition of resemblance in the representation to the thing represented.⁶⁴

⁶² William Rathbone Greg, 'False Morality of Lady Novelists', *National Review* 8 (1859), 144-66, (pp. 144-6).

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 145-6.

⁶⁴ James Ashcroft Noble, 'The Fiction of Sexuality', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 490-8, (pp. 492-3).

Measured against the perceived reality of experience, literary representations of single women often proved convincing and provoked excited reaction from their middle-class readers. Francis Jacox gets very cross about the pointless flirtations of Glorvina O'Dowd in *Vanity Fair* and calls for benign representations of spinsters, another reviewer advises her readers to avoid befriending Jane Eyre, while even Dora Greenwell wonders if the society of Cranford is a vanishing reality.⁶⁵

Bessie Rayner Parkes observed that mid-century fiction depicted far more husbandless and lone heroines than ever before:

Take up a book of a hundred years ago, and where do you find the woman struggling alone? Here and there a 'young gentlewoman' is companion or maid to a great lady and ends by making a splendid match. But take up a novel of the present day, and you are pretty sure to find traces of the new feature in our society, even if the heroine be not fox-like Becky Sharpe, or a passionate and yet austere Jane Eyre.⁶⁶

Similarly Margaret Oliphant notes a new type of mid-century heroine and suggests that Charlotte Brontë is responsible for her conception and Elizabeth Gaskell for her continued existence. Oliphant humorously rallies the guileless hero who plays opposite her:

Do you think that young lady is an angelic being, young gentleman? Do you compare her to roses and lilies, and stars and sunbeams, in your deluded imagination [...] Unhappy youth! She is a fair gladiator -- she is not an angel [...] And this new Bellona steps forth in armour, throws down her glove, and defies you -- to conquer her if you can.⁶⁷

This description is remarkable for the combative terms which Oliphant employs; this new heroine wears armour to shield herself from the glancing blows of romance, marital union is reconstituted as a style of invasion -- the heroine must be conquered before she is kissed -- and the primary position she occupies in the narrative is adversarial, she is a gladiator complete with weaponry to fight the hero. Furthermore, a reversal is suggested in that it is the male hero and reader who idealise the heroine. Oliphant is aware that these gender shifts are enormously significant:

⁶⁵ Francis Jacox, 'Of Old Maids', *Bentley's Miscellany* 45 (March 1859), 344-355, (pp. 345-6), Elizabeth Rigby, 'Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre and the Governesses' Benevolent Institution -- Report for 1847', *The Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1848), 153-185, Dora Greenwell, 'Our Single Women', *North British Review* (February 1862), 62-88.

⁶⁶ *Essays on Woman's Work*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ Margaret Oliphant, 'Modern Novelists -- Great and Small', *Blackwood's Magazine* 77 (May 1855), 554-568, (p. 558).

Here is your true revolution. France is but one of the Western Powers; women is the half of the world. Talk of a balance of power which may be adjusted by taking a Crimea, or fighting a dozen battles -- here is a battle which must always be going forward -- a balance of power only to be decided by single combat, deadly and uncompromising, where the combatants, so far from being guided by the old punctilios of the duello, make no secret of their ferocity, but throw sly javelins at each other, instead of shaking hands before they begin.⁶⁸

Throughout the nineteenth century then there were roughly two kinds of story about spinsters -- the first supported the traditional domestic setting and encouraged single women in the virtues that made for respectability there; other perhaps more subversive narratives questioned patriarchal conventions and developed a more imaginative world for single woman sending spinsters on journeys of self realisation.

In the first type of story the regulation of femininity had very specific limits, as defined by a middle-class family structure. At worst spinsters were crudely caricatured. Eliza Cook writes in her *Journal* in 1850 about popular caricatures of the spinster:

If you happen to see an engraving of an old sour-faced lady in close companionship with a pug dog, two cats and a parrot, you may be sure that it is meant for an old maid. If you happen to hear of an ancient dame who occupies her whole time in scandalizing and damaging the fair fame of her neighbours, be certain that the story is fated to end with the circumstance that she is an old maid. If you read of a prude, who is so squeamish that she cannot bear to hear of the slightest friendship between the sexes, you may at once make up your mind that she belongs to the sisterhood of old maids.⁶⁹

Permissible spinsterhood, on the other hand, tended to be confined to good-hearted aunts and sisters, often dry sticks of women who take refuge in small things, and are obsessed by detail. Such spinsters usually combine high moral tone with regret that they have missed out on a husband and children. Dora Greenwell, writing in 1862 of the transition of representations of the spinster in fiction from 'withered prude' to goodly aunt, recognises that although some social good may come from the new figure of the 'dovelike' spinster, her qualities could rapidly become cloying:

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 558.

⁶⁹ Eliza Cook, 'Old Maids', *Eliza Cook's Journal* 3 (26 October 1850), p. 403, quoted in Kathleen Hickok, 'The Spinster in Victoria's England: Changing Attitudes in Popular Poetry by Women', *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, 3 (1981), 119-31, (p. 122).

They have, it is true, gained much both socially and aesthetically in passing from the traditional type [...] to that which must be familiar to all readers of modern fiction, -- the gentle, dovelike Old Maid [...] who is supposed to have some tender secret buried in her heart, some letter or lock of hair shut within a secret drawer, but who, ever serene and cheerful, flits in and out between the scenes, listening, consoling, cheering, at all times ready to take up a little of existence at second hand [...] single women [...] have done nothing to merit such a destiny; and [...] there might be safety [...] in falling back upon old-fashioned crustiness and angularity.⁷⁰

Often the loss of a lover is considered the definitive event in the fictional single woman's past. She is a resultant amalgam of physical oddity and fantasy (private dreams, the past, an old flame). Anne Thackeray's monologue sends up this sad spinster:

'Oh, alas, alas! what a sad, dull, solitary, useless, unhappy, unoccupied life is mine! I can only see a tombstone at the end of my path, and willows and cypresses on either side, and flowers, all dead and faded, crumbling beneath my feet; and my only companions are memories, and hair ornaments, and ghosts, prosy, stupid old ghosts, who go on saying the same things over and over and over again, and twaddling about all the years that are gone away for ever.'⁷¹

However, this type of spinster is sometimes shown as putting pressure on the lives of others. When this happens she is always put in her place. But even within these restricted representations, it can be seen that indirect complaint against the lot of the middle-class spinster was on the rise, and fears about increasing female independence were detectable in the more hostile representations.

The most hostile versions are usually secondary characters -- vague miserable beings who float about the subplots of novels and whisper between the paragraphs: representations of spinsters of this type tend to conform to a pattern of submission and eccentricity. Miss Sarah Pocket in *Great Expectations* (1861)⁷² is 'a little dry brown corrugated old woman, with a small face that might have been made of walnut shells, and a large mouth like a cat's without the whiskers' (*GE*, p. 115). The Misses Allaby are glimpsed in passing as they sit huddled round the card table in *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), gambling over a lover. Miss Tox in *Dombey and Son* (1848) is so faded that that her colour seems to have been washed out by long

⁷⁰ 'Our Single Women', p. 62.

⁷¹ 'Toilers and Spinners', p. 2.

⁷² Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861), (repr. London: Penguin, 1985). All future reference to *Great Expectations* will be taken from the Penguin edition.

use, the demands of politely listening to what others say has left her head permanently settled on one side; a lump on the bridge of her nose may well remind one of a camel's hump.

The second type of story was to be increasingly developed throughout the nineteenth-century and represents single women as working, rebellious and sometimes angry about their crippled lives. Women such as Lucy Snowe or Rhoda Nunn in *The Odd Women* (1893) emerge from the cultural disorder of middle-class homes wrecked by death or ruin. Since they are often resourceful and independent women, their singleness is imagined positively even when it is the result of the additional loss of a lover. Such representations of the spinster see her as a way forward rather than a problem.

Charles Dickens, insofar as he became the darling of popular middle-class consciousness, tended to defuse the threatening potentiality of spinsters by running them down into comedy or caricature. Michael Slater notes of Dickens's representation of women in his fiction that: 'virtually all the single women, whether maids or widows, in Dickens's early fiction are presented primarily as husband-hunters of one sort or another'. In support of Slater's observations one need only recall Miss Rachel Wardle's unceremonious dash at wedlock in *Pickwick Papers* (1837). She is easily won by the lachrymose affections of Tracy Tupman, and then soon after, accepts the hand of greasy trickster Alfred Jingle. And we are supposed to find it funny that she is over fifty. Slater cites as the only notable exception to such representations of spinsters the figure of Miss La Creevy in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) whom prolonged spinsterhood does not make desperate, although her patience is rewarded since she is married by the end of the novel.⁷³ Yet even Miss La Creevy is ridiculed through her foolish paintings and inappropriately girlish manner.

Martha Vicinus claims that some of Dickens's representations of spinsters are disquieting figures, 'frightening portents of a world turned upside down.'⁷⁴ Miss Wade in *Little Dorritt* (1857) and Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1861) are exemplary cases. Miss Wade gives Arthur Clennam an account of her unhappy, orphaned life. She has chosen to exert her independence through a refusal to accept kindness, viewing all affectionate approaches as attempts to exploit her affections. The unconscious egotism of Miss Wade's narrative provides both tension and satire. She seeks to perpetuate her own resentments and jealousies by perverting Tattycoram's relationship with the Meagles family. Miss Wade's inability in social relationships derives in part from her orphanhood but is typically reinforced by an

⁷³ Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J. M. Dent, 1983), p. 231.

⁷⁴ *Independent Women*, p. 32.

unhappy love affair. Dickens's visions of spinster figures such as Miss Havisham or Miss Wade may be a function of fear rather than pity, fear of celibacy as a form of female ascendancy.

Within the world of *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham embodies the power of female celibacy and is violently opposed to fruition, mutual affection, and marriage. She has been jilted and robbed of both love and money by a corrupt suitor. Her character has been perverted by this betrayal and her whole life becomes devoted to punishing that innocent love which initially trapped her. Always a bride and never a wife, Miss Havisham dresses in bizarre bridal apparel. Her unending maidenhood appears to give Miss Havisham the power to rule.

Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield* (1850) is an equally malevolent if less fantastically conceived spinster. She derives pleasure from unmitigated cruelty to David which is disguised as duty. But David is blessed with a good aunt as well as a bad, and suitably enough, Betsy Trotwood is one of what Francoise Basch calls Dicken's 'false spinsters' as she is secretly married and supports a n'er-do-well husband.⁷⁵ During her confrontation with the real spinster, Miss Murdstone, she recognises the latter's falseness and sees her off the premises and David's life as summarily as she chases donkeys and boys from her garden.

Men's Umbrellas and Awkward hands: the Spinster as Honorary Hero in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*

Marian Halcombe in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) is however, a lively embodiment of the heroic qualities of the spinster.⁷⁶ Examination of her treatment reveals the limitations imposed upon such spinster figures by mid-century narrative forms and plot structures. Dorothy L. Sayers, in her 1944 introduction to the Dent edition of *The Moonstone*, identifies independence as a feature common to all of Collins's heroines:

The women of Collins are strong, resolute and intellectual; they are more actively inclined towards a purpose, which is not always, nor indeed usually, conditioned by their attitude to a husband or a lover.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures. Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-67* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 148.

⁷⁶ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860), (repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). All subsequent reference to *The Woman in White* will be taken from the Oxford University Press edition.

⁷⁷ Dorothy L. Sayers, 'Introduction', Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (London: J. M. Dent, 1944), p. viii.

In *The Woman in White* Marian does much of the hero's job in his absence; she acts as an honorary hero and partly reshapes mid-Victorian perceptions of what constitutes a female adventure. Marian's position in the plot and as a narrator are, I suggest, determined by her singleness.

Instalments of *The Woman in White* first appeared in *All the Year Round*, and William M. Clarke notes that the reception of Collins' novel was enthusiastic: 'The new serialisation was an immediate success [...] the weekly instalments of *The Woman in White* were eagerly awaited and being discussed at virtually every dinner party.'⁷⁸ The novel was published in book form in the latter part of 1860.

Margaret Oliphant's 1862 review of *The Woman in White* ranks Collins as the foremost sensation novelist. Although Oliphant recognises that *The Woman in White* was not the first sensation novel, she predicts it may start a new school of fiction. She particularly praises Collins's narrative for its successful use of the 'simplest expedients of life' to produce sensation: '[Collins is] a writer who boldly takes in hand the common mechanism of life, and by means of persons who might be living in society for anything we can tell to the contrary.'⁷⁹ Henry James's comments on *The Woman in White* resemble Oliphant's. He approves of the same characteristics of the novel, seeing it as a notable departure from the Gothic and commenting on Collins's grasp of 'thorough-going realism'.⁸⁰ Edward FitzGerald wrote jokingly to a correspondent that he was thinking of having a Herring-lugger boat that he was building named 'Marian Halcombe'.⁸¹ Most tellingly for my purposes Clyde K. Hyder mentions that Collins received letters from a variety of bachelors seeking to propose marriage to the original of Marian.⁸²

Hyder suggests as a source for *The Woman in White* the case of Madame de Douhault: a spectacular and long-running lawsuit in the French courts in the late eighteenth-century which Hyder suggests Collins would have come across in Mejan's *Recueil des Causes Celebres* which he picked up on a bookstall while wandering about the streets of Paris with Dickens and from which he claimed he derived some of his best plots. Like Laura Fairlie, the heroine of *The Woman in White*, Mme de Douhault was abducted. Douhault was abducted by her brother, given a new identity and her letters begging for help were intercepted. The Douhault case made up as it is

⁷⁸ William M. Clarke, *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: W. H. Allen, 1988), p. 99.

⁷⁹ Margaret Oliphant, 'Sensation Novels', *Blackwood's Magazine* (May 1862), 565-74, *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, p. 113.

⁸⁰ Henry James, 'Miss Braddon', *Nation* (9 November 1865), 593-5, *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, p. 123.

⁸¹ Letter to Frederick Tennyson, 29 January 1867, *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, p. 124.

⁸² Clyde K. Hyder, 'Wilkie Collins and *The Woman in White*', *P. M. L. A.* 54 (1939), 297-303, (p. 303).

of testimonies probably had an effect on the narrative mode of *The Woman in White*. Hyder notes the parallel plots and comments: 'Obviously Collins took from the story of Madame de Douhault the idea for Count Fosco's plot, to rob Laura of her property by destroying her identity'.⁸³ The case, however, presents no model for Marian Halcombe, although there is some mention of Mme de Douhault having a sister who is an abbess. Marian is Collins's invention.

In his first description of Marian Collins suggests that her independent nature has actively affected her appearance; her bodily features differ from those of other women. When the central male figure, Walter Hartright, a drawing-master who has been newly appointed to Limmeridge House, first encounters Marian, he gazes at her from behind. What impresses him is the 'rare beauty of her form' (*WW*, 25). Her limbs and torso seem entirely flawless and her waist is 'visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays' (*WW*, 25). Hartright, emphasises the 'natural' femininity of her body; he observes that her waist occupies its most natural place and fills out in a perfect circle. Viewed from this angle Marian seems to be the heroine but Walter is disappointed by the front view: the lady is dark, the lady is ugly! On her upper lip there is almost a moustache and she has 'a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw [...] resolute brown eyes [...] and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead' (*WW*, 25). Walter is confused:

Her expression -- bright, frank, and intelligent -- appeared, while she was silent, to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete [...] to be charmed by the modest graces of action through which the symmetrical limbs betrayed their beauty when they moved, and then to be almost repelled by the masculine form and masculine look of the features [...] was to feel a sensation oddly akin to the helpless discomfort familiar to us all in sleep, when we recognise yet cannot reconcile the anomalies and contradictions of a dream. (*WW*, 25)

The graft of a masculine head on to a feminine body seems necessary to secure female independence. Lisa Tickner writes in *The Spectacle of Women*:

... the Victorian and Edwardian public expected to see the virtues and vices of femininity *written on the body*, and were coached by moralists, novelists, journalists, illustrators and the writers of etiquette manuals in the detailed interpretation of physiognomy, gesture and pose.⁸⁴

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 300.

⁸⁴ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), p. 151.

The terms which Marian uses to describe herself and the contrast she evokes between her and Laura, also seem to highlight her disqualification for status as heroine. She is only nominally Laura's sister:

'Except that we are both orphans, we are in every respect as unlike each other as possible. My father was a poor man, and Miss Fairlie's father was a rich man. I have got nothing, and she is an heiress. I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty. Everybody thinks me crabbed and odd (with perfect justice); and everybody thinks her sweet-tempered and charming (with more justice still). In short, she is an angel; and I am -- (*WW*, 27)

Indeed, Marian is intended not only as a contrast to Laura's fairness, but, with her strange mixture of masculine characteristics and feminine grace, she seems to Hartwright anomalous, a figure who is not reconcilable with the common physical ascriptions of either gender. She is too fantastic a figure to belong to anything other than dream. Marian identifies herself in masculine terms. She admits regret that she is not a man: her hands are 'as awkward as a man's', and she is in the habit of carrying "a horrid, heavy, man's umbrella" whenever it rains (*WW*, 191). Walter confirms this self-description:

She caught me by both hands -- she pressed them with the strong, steady grasp of a man -- her dark eyes glittered -- her brown complexion flushed deep -- the force and energy of her face glowed and grew beautiful with the pure inner light of her generosity and her pity. (*WW*, 110)

Marian's perception of herself as awkwardly masculine is coupled, however, with a tendency to denigrate feminine behaviour. She holds her sex in no high regard (*WW*, 26) and finds that women's minds are too flighty for them do anything very well. When Marian awaits Laura's return from her honeymoon on the Continent, she bitterly laments her status as a woman. She perceives women as 'condemned' to femininity, biologically determined by their 'feeble' femininity:

If I only had the privileges of a man, I would order out Sir Percival's best horse instantly, and tear away on a night-gallop, eastward, to meet the rising sun -- a long, hard, heavy, ceaseless gallop of hours and hours [...] Being, however, nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats, for life, I must [...] try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way. (*WW*, 178)

With her masculine attributes and her resolution Marian occupies in the early sections of the narrative the position traditionally held by the hero: she protects

Laura, passionately ministers to her needs, and gallantly tries to fend off those who would harm her. Walter remains an unfit hero until he is masculinised by foreign adventures. His unfitness is signalled by his 'feminine' lack of control during his self-imposed exile from Limmeridge; he protests, rightly enough as it turns out, that he is being watched by men. Marion fears that the intensity of his identification with Laura and her cause is affecting his mind. Marian's good influence secures Walter a position abroad, excavating ruined cities in Central America (*WW*, 160). This removes him from the adventure, but also prepares him to resume the work of the hero on his return to England. When Walter resumes his narrative he is sure that he has changed:

In the waters of a new life I had tempered my nature afresh [...] my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man should. (*WW*, 373-4)

But just in case Marian should too fully occupy his heroic status in the interim period, Walter's adventures in the jungles of Central America are allegorically presented in a dream sequence. Marian, longing for Walter's assistance, dreams of Walter in Central America, and he addresses her, reassuring her that he is "still walking the dark road which leads me, and you, and the sister of your love and mine, to unknown Retribution and the inevitable End" (*WW*, 248), at each step of the allegory of his trial he tells Marian: "The Pestilence which touches the rest will pass *me* [...] The arrows that strike the rest will spare *me* [...] The Sea which drowns the rest will spare *me* " (*WW*, 248-9).

The central adventure of Marian's life is not the adventure of finding a mate but of rescuing her half-sister, Laura, from the influence of evil men and returning her to the care of the benign hero. Female singleness, as represented by Marian, is an enabling state, in that it allows Marian to maintain a sense of distance from the corrupt marital unions in the novel and makes her a suitable celebrant of the pure marriage which concludes the novel. The plot of *The Woman in White* rests on the negation of Laura's identity through her relationships with men. Sir Percival Glyde, Laura's accepted suitor and eventual husband, and his Italian associate, Count Fosco, conspire against her through a marriage settlement which robs her of control of her inheritance. Tamar Heller points out that the plot, 'emphasizes the lack of legal control Victorian wives had over their money prior to the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882'.⁸⁵ Collins uses Laura to expose the inequities of the

⁸⁵ Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 112.

marriage laws and the economic constraints on women. Laura's father, Philip Fairlie, promised her to Sir Percival Glyde. Laura accepted this before she learned to value her own feelings (*WW*, 62). Laura urges Marian to recognise the value of female independence: she tells Marian to thank God for her poverty which allows her to remain single, her own mistress, unpursued by fortune-hunters (*WW*, 234).

Laura's self-definition is largely determined by the men who control her and her gullibility begs protection. She tells Walter Hartright "I shall believe all that you say to me" (*WW*, 43) and in this unassuming self-description innocently supplies him with the key to her nature. He finds 'that generous trust in others [...] grew innocently out of the sense of her own truth' (*WW*, 44). Embedded within the narrative, then, is a partially articulated dissatisfaction with Laura as heroine. Walter Hartright almost focuses his romantic affections upon Marian, until he discovers she is ugly. Fosco does admire Marian romantically, and tells Percival that she is exceptional:

'Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight and resolution of a man? [...] And this grand creature [...] this magnificent woman, whom I admire with all my soul [...] you drive to extremities, as if she was no sharper and no bolder than the rest of her sex.' (*WW*, 296)

Indeed, Count Fosco's comment towards the end of his narration seems to offer Collins's most direct statement about female dependency in marriage: 'I was married in England -- and I ask, if a woman's marriage-obligations, in this country provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly, to love, honour, and obey him' (*WW*, 570).

Laura's real function is as a vehicle for the plot. She is incapable of her own rescue and this passivity lies at the centre of the novel's intrigues. The real suffering in Laura's rite of passage through her troubles is largely borne by Marian whose perpetual singleness Laura demands as a tribute to her:

'Oh, Marian!' she said, suddenly seating herself on a footstool at my knees, and looking up earnestly in my face, 'promise you will never marry, and leave me. It is selfish to say so, but you are so much better off as a single woman [...] you won't be very fond of anybody but me, will you?' (*WW*, 191)

Marian is sceptical about Laura's marriage to Glyde; she has constant misgivings about it, which, given her initial lack of evidence to support her doubts, she cautiously represents as 'unreasonable prejudice' and 'unworthy suspicion' (*WW*, 156). When she records Laura's marriage in her journal, she surprises herself by

'writing of her marriage [...] like writing of her death' (*WW*, 166). This suspicion of one false man becomes extended, later in the narrative, into bitter railing against men and the powerlessness of women. She complains to Laura:

'Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace -- they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship -- they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return? [...] I'm mad when I think of it!' (*WW*, 162)

The story of Marian's resistance to Sir Percival Glyde is given in an extended journal entry written, for the most part, at Glyde's decrepit family house, Blackwater Park. In journal entries made at Blackwater and in some earlier entries written at Limmeridge, Marian details the oppressiveness of Laura's situation and her critique of the situation of middle and upper-class women is a defiant, if private, response to male authority.

The Woman in White is clearly not centrally an examination of the roles of women in society but the issue of woman's place is seldom far from the centre: the single woman chooses to remain single while married women are represented as the helpless victims of their own natures, Laura is a dull, idealised heroine while Madame Fosco is a glacial caricature of female devotion. Madame Fosco had, before her marriage, advocated the rights of women (*WW*, 210), but now has 'the eyes of a faithful dog' (*WW*, 195), her every movement suggests suppression, and Fosco himself says of their relationship: "we have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine" (*WW*, 219). Marian admits, 'If he had married *me*, I should have made his cigarettes as his wife does -- I should have held my tongue when he looked at me, as she holds hers' (*WW*, 195).

There are two women in white in the novel: Anne Catherick, who is, for a large part of the novel, confined to an asylum, and her double, Laura Fairlie. The white garments which Mrs Fairlie suggests Anne Cathcrick ought always to wear are hand-me-downs from Laura. Laura's hair is so light 'that it nearly melts, here and there, into the shadow of [her] hat' (*WW*, 41); her lovely eyes beam only transparent truthfulness; her step has an 'airy fall'; and Walter considers her the 'visionary nursling' of his fancy (*WW*, 42). The plain white muslin she wears is 'spotlessly pure' (*WW*, 46), and when she and Hartwright are first separated she sleeps with his drawings under her pillow 'just in the place where she used to hide her favourite toys when she was a child' (*WW*, 148). Hartwright comments on the resemblance between Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie: they are 'the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflexions of one another' (*WW*, 84). The links between the two extend

even further for their natures conform to the same model. Walter Kendrick considers the confusion between the two women to be 'the pivotal device' of the novel.⁸⁶ The construction of female identity may be signified by the colour white: white light is both a mixture of all colours and in another sense an absence of any. Neither woman, that is, has any specific colouration of her own.

Fosco can make whiteness represent all there is of Anne and Laura, and he cynically devises the scheme of swapping their identities. Following the death of Anne, he dresses Laura in her clothes. The reader is prepared for such a move before their identities are exchanged. Laura has been so defeated by Fosco and Glyde that she repeats the words which Anne Catherick used to warn her not marry Glyde. Anne's letter began: "Do you believe in dreams" (*WW*, 67) and went on to recount the nightmare she had of Laura marrying Percival Glyde. Laura then unselfconsciously repeats these words to the housekeeper at Blackwater Park, just before her incarceration in the lunatic asylum which had housed Anne: "Do you believe in dreams? [...] My dreams, last night, were dreams I have never had before, The terror of them is hanging over me still" (*WW*, 357). Laura's dreams are never specified, but are ominous in connection with Anne's. When she arrives at the asylum, dressed in Anne's clothes, Laura fails to persuade the matron that she is not Anne Catherick -- the label on her underclothing is enough to name her (*WW*, 393). Textual evidence thus prepares the reader for this swap of identities. The grave in which Anne Catherick lies has Laura's name inscribed on it, and it is specifically Hartwright who orders its removal. Of course, her subsequent marriage to Hartwright changes Laura's name completely.

Marian's swarthy skin, her blackness, and her spinsterhood defend her, in part, from the machinations of villainous men. It is only Marian who can challenge Fosco since her independence and even her features rebel against the ideal of femininity. When she crouches on the roof of the house at Blackwater Park in order to overhear the plans made by Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco, she explains:

I [...] removed the white and cumbersome parts of my underclothing, and replaced them by a petticoat of dark flannel. Over this, I put my black travelling cloak, and pulled the hood on to my head [...] In my present dress [...] no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I. (*WW*, 292)

As Marian adapts and perfects her strategies for protecting Laura she becomes increasingly independent, realising that to subvert masculine authority a woman's

⁸⁶ Walter Kendrick, 'The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32 (1977-78), 18-35, (p. 28).

principles of femininity must be modified, but simultaneously she becomes better than a man when bold 'masculine' endeavour is combined with resourceful 'femininity'. As Marian crouches outside her window Madame Fosco passes heedlessly behind 'the white field of the blind' (*WW*, 293) and lacks the initiative to look out; she is thus rendered useless without Fosco's control and direction. The passive women of the novel run over his omniscience like the white mice which he keeps as pets, the idle playthings of his charity or anger:

His white mice live in a little pagoda of gaily-painted wirework, designed and made by himself [...] They crawl all over him, popping in and out of his waistcoat, and sitting in couples, white as snow, on his capacious shoulders. He [...] smiles at them, and kisses them, and calls them by all sorts of endearing names. (*WW*, 198)

A direct figurative link is made between the Fosco's control of female identity and whiteness when Fosco addresses one of his mice as a woman and examines corrupt marriage from its perspective:

'I transform you, for the time being, into a respectable lady [...] You marry the poor man you love, Mouse; and one half your friends pity, and the other half blame you. And, now, on the contrary, you sell yourself for gold to a man you don't care for; and all your friends rejoice over you; and a minister of public worship sanctions the base horror of the vilest of all human bargains.' (*WW*, 213)

Deception for Laura's sake rarely worries Marian but any connection with Fosco does; she is the unwilling focus of his admiration and when he touches her her sense of the danger which he represents to her independence is overwhelming:

... he took my hand, and put it to his poisonous lips. Never did I know all my horror of him till then. That innocent familiarity turned my blood, as if it had been the vilest insult that a man could offer me. Yet I hid my disgust from him -- I tried to smile -- I, who once mercilessly despised deceit in other women, was as false as the worse of them. (*WW*, 278)

At the same time, the admiration of Count Fosco proves that he and Marian have the same potential for adventure. If Marian has a hellish double it is Fosco, he steals her diary, plunders her narrative, judges her prose and concludes that they share similar sensibilities. Throughout the novel he eases his way into a knowledge of her, insists on a bond: 'His eyes seemed to reach my inmost soul through the thickening obscurity of the twilight. His voice trembled along every nerve in my body, and

turned me hot and cold alternately' (*WW*, 261-2). She confesses that an 'unutterable suspicion that his mind is prying into mine, overcomes me at [...] times' (*WW*, 240).

When Fosco adds his 'Postscript by a Sincere Friend' to Marian's diary while she is ill, her diary loses its integrity, its identity, in a way that parallels Laura's loss of self. Fosco's intrusion is a kind of attempt to thwart the feminist potential of Marian's narrative.

Marian's narrative is central yet in another sense it is contained by the narrative of Walter Hartwright which begins and ends the novel. And Hartwright is the editor who is in control of all the narratives; in one of his editorial notes he admits that he has omitted from Marian's account episodes which seem extraneous to the conspiracy (*WW*, 145). Neither Laura nor Anne Catherick act as narrators, and Marian's narrative is only accompanied by a few very short narratives by other women. Marian's narrative is, then, the only extended narrative of female authorship in the novel and is also the most interfered with narrative: it is edited by Hartwright, Fosco reads it without her consent and adds his own comments to it.

All the narratives refer persistently to events involving the pursuit and coercion of women, many of whom are positioned, at different points, as aberrant or lunatic figures. These figures and stories are placed against a backdrop of male public figures like Mr. Kyrle, the lawyer, or property-owning men like Sir Percival Glyde and Laura's uncle, Frederick Fairlie. All of these manipulate the laws which allow them to incarcerate women who are dependent upon them or to be complicit with their imprisonment.

Fosco likes Marian's journal; he says that it 'charmed, refreshed, [and] delighted' him (*WW*, 307) and he commends it for its 'tact', 'discretion', 'rare courage', 'accurate observation of character' (*WW*, 308). But the 'grateful, sympathetic, paternal lines' which he appends to her journal (*WW*, 308) can be compared to Walter's high-handed and self-important introductory lines to the novel: 'This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and of what a Man's resolution can achieve' (*WW*, 1). Both Hartwright and Fosco function as critics of Marian's narrative and both interfere with its integrity.

When Walter prepares to meet Fosco face to face, Marian begs Walter to let her accompany him: "'Oh, Walter, for God's sake [...] let me go with you. Don't refuse because I'm only a woman. I must go! I will go!'" Walter responds by physically restraining her, and escapes in a cab (*WW*, 542-3). The reinstatement of the hero signifies the containment of Marian; without heroic action to undertake the spinster figure slides back into a secondary passive position in the dominant heterosexual plotting of the narrative.

In *The Woman in White* it seems that there can be no viable expression of the history of the spinster as an autonomous agent. The strategies of the text divide uneasily between the representation of Marian as a sort of hero-in-drag, with all the sexual and physical ambiguities of that role, and as a virginal and ancillary spinster aunt. Marian herself makes shifting responses to these constructions of femininity -- hating her own ill-fitting femininity, responding antagonistically to cultural prescriptions of passive femininity, and yet elsewhere willingly fulfilling and adhering to those prescriptions.

At the end of the novel Marian becomes the property of romance and is pushed back into the life area allowed her by the demands of the heterosexual love plot: she becomes the 'good angel' of Walter and Laura's married life (*WW*, 584) and maiden aunt to their children. Her life will be played out between man and wife; she becomes a third partner in the marriage:

'After all that we three have suffered together,' she said 'there can be no parting between us, till the last parting of all. My heart and my happiness, Walter, are with Laura and you. Wait a little till there are children's voices at your fireside. I will teach them to speak for me, in *their* language; and the first lesson they say to their father and mother shall be -- We can't spare our aunt!' (*WW*, 579)

She has fought against the power of wicked and weak men only to present the insignia of power to the right man at the end. Marian's action has been largely interventionist, interrupting the malign paternalism of anti-heroes, in order to reinstate benign paternalism. She holds up Walter's son and tells Walter that his child is 'one of landed gentry of England', he is the heir of Limmeridge.

Such an ending for a spinster of the type whom Frances Power Cobbe imagined would be capable of scaling Vesuvius or climbing the Pyramids seems to deny Marian any real authenticity.⁸⁷ She becomes a mere extra for whom there will be no second acts. We cannot help feeling that the real living of her life is over and the adventure of spinsterhood is defeated in *The Woman in White*.

'Fair Gladiators': the Rise of the Working Single Woman in *Villette*

Martha Vicinus notes that models of heroic pioneering single women begin to appear more frequently in feminist journals of the mid-century. These feature a

⁸⁷ 'Celibacy vs. Marriage', p. 51.

number of success stories of women making the most of their lives; many of these narratives offer an increasing range of possibilities for women. Vicinus maintains that these narratives not only encouraged single women to improve their lives but also gave them a sense of heritage. Vicinus claims that a form of female empire-building is going on:

Heroic individualism [...] fits the dominant ethos of the times, which idealised the individual man who made his way in politics, business, or the jungle. The female version was more religiously inclined, but she too was expected to overcome opposition for the sake of her vision; victory was assumed to go to the hard-working and committed. Her triumph was respectability and status for women's new careers.⁸⁸

Given the dominant narrative modes and plot structures of the mid-Victorian novel, single women were most frequently allocated places in the narrative as spectators or facilitators of the central drama, probably a heterosexual romance. A writer who positioned the figure of the single woman as heroine would have to address the issue of what was possible for the spinster outside fiction.

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853)⁸⁹ betrays the tensions of narrative restructuring. The surface narrative voices and addresses a solitary woman's journey towards fulfilling heterosexual union, a journey which is mediated by the need for palatable and rewarding love. But the narrative structure and imagery obliquely register a disquieting response to this quest which involves strategies of escape from the hero, the quest for fulfilling work and a locale which fosters such fulfilment, and the need to balance solitude and community in a single woman's life. Much of Brontë's fiction covertly resists the ideological structuring of middle-class womanhood and the social location of that womanhood.

Charlotte Brontë's concern about her own social position must have put pressure on her fiction, although it is difficult to determine how the pressure worked. In her correspondence she repeatedly reflects on her status as a middle-class spinster; she felt bound to be a spinster and in 1839 predicts her fate to Ellen Nussey -- 'I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind. I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old' -- and again to Ellen, in 1840, she writes, 'I am tolerably well convinced that I shall never marry at all.'⁹⁰ She explains more fully in a letter of 1852 that she fears loneliness:

⁸⁸ *Independent Women*, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (1853), (repr. London: Penguin, 1985). All subsequent references to *Villette* will be taken from the Penguin edition.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters* (1862) (repr. London: John Murray, 1929), pp. 179, 193.

The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart -- lie in position -- not that I am a *single* woman and likely to remain a single woman -- but because I am a *lonely* woman and likely to be *lonely*.⁹¹

Brontë was bitterly aware of the difficulties faced by unmarried women and writes to W. S. Williams in 1849: 'Something like a hope and a motive sustains me. I wish all your daughters -- I wish every woman in England had also a hope and motive: Alas there are many old maids who have neither.' In the same letter Brontë goes on to describe singleness without work and urges Williams to encourage his daughters to train for work, for 'the one great curse of single female life is its dependency':

... your daughters [...] should aim at making their way honorably through life. Do not wish to keep them at home. Believe me [...] the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest-wrought and worst-paid drudge of a school [...] Lonely as I am -- how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career [...] I should have no world at all.⁹²

Mary Taylor describes Brontë's eagerness to find an occupation; Taylor mentions that one spinster teacher whom Brontë encountered in Brussels represented to her a petrifying vision of spinsterhood. The woman was very conscious of her increasing age and so afraid that her employment as a teacher would fail her that she would pen begging letters to eligible single men asking them to rescue her from her single state, claiming that otherwise she would have no recourse than to become a sister of charity. Taylor gives an account of Brontë's response:

Charlotte naturally looked with curiosity to people of her own condition. This woman almost frightened her. She said she did not know how people could bear the constant pressure of misery, and never to change except to a new form of it.⁹³

Friends like Mary Taylor seemed to offer Brontë new modes of interpreting the singleness which she believed to be her fate; Taylor herself pursued the radical

⁹¹ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey (25 August 1852), *The Brontës. Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence* edited by John A. Symington and Thomas Wise, 4 vols, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932), volume 4, p. 6.

⁹² Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams (3 July 1849), *The Brontës. Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, volume 4, pp. 5-6.

⁹³ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 243.

Victorian option of emigrating to find valuable employment.⁹⁴ Even the experience of Brontë's elderly former teacher, Miss Wooler, appeared to offer Brontë hope in sustaining virtuous singleness, as the thirty-year-old Charlotte writes to Miss Wooler in 1846:

I always feel a peculiar satisfaction when I hear of you enjoying yourself [...] You worked hard; you denied yourself all pleasure [and] now you are free [...] I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be married women nowadays and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly -- without support of husband or brother and who having attained the age of forty-five or upwards -- retains in her possession of a well-regulated mind -- a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures -- fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend.⁹⁵

Life at Haworth parsonage could be very dull for Brontë, when often the most exciting event of the day was the glimpse of George Nussey's arm flinging mail over the wall. Governessing offered little or no relief from such tedium. Brontë writes longingly, while working as a governess, to Ellen Nussey in 1841, of a letter she received from Mary Taylor describing her stay in Brussels and the effect it had upon her:

I hardly know what swelled to my throat as I read her letter: such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings -- wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute. I was tantalised with the consciousness of faculties unexercised -- then all collapsed and I despaired.⁹⁶

Brontë went on to care for her father following the deaths of her brother and sisters, leading for extended periods the reclusive life of a dependent spinster. Protracted periods of caring for fathers and of heralding the father's death as a release into life's purpose seems to be an experience common to many middle-class spinsters. The death of Harriet Martineau's father in 1829 and the collapse of the family's finances impelled her to work for money, first through needlework and then

⁹⁴ Mary Taylor attempted (unsuccessfully) to persuade several of her single women friends to be more boldly independent; she suggested to Brontë that they teach together in a German boys' school, and invited Ellen Nussey to join her in New Zealand. For further information on Taylor see A. James Hammerton, pp. 71-91.

⁹⁵ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 299.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 210.

by writing. She had already had one article published which so pleased her that she walked home in a delighted dream, the squares of the pavement floating before her.⁹⁷ Frances Power Cobbe spent eight years caring for her father following her mother's death. When released from this charge by his death, Cobbe was thirty-five. She cut off her hair, picked up pen and paper and set off to travel extensively in the Middle East, claiming that 'for viewing human nature [...] commend me to a long journey by a woman of middle age, of no beauty, and travelling as chiefly as possible, alone.'⁹⁸

Brontë was acutely aware of the possible price of self-denial, yet still honoured her obligations to her father. Brontë describes her predicament in 1846:

I know life is passing away, and I am doing nothing, earning nothing. A very bitter knowledge it is at moments, but I see no way out of the mist [...] but whenever I consult my conscience it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release.⁹⁹

The exigencies of Brontë's position as a middle-class Victorian daughter and the requirements of the career of novelist are depicted by Brontë's biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, as hard to reconcile:

Charlotte Brontë's existence becomes divided into two parallel currents -- her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Brontë, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character [...] difficult to be reconciled. When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him [...] But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter [...] a woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving to her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of possessing those talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others.¹⁰⁰

Significantly here Gaskell develops a line of reasoning which demands that the woman novelist follow the dictates of her talents, and further justifies the exercise of those talents in terms drawn from the Victorian ideal of femininity as service to others. Hence the act of writing is constituted as both useful and servicable.

⁹⁷ Janet Courtney, 'Harriet Martineau', *Freethinkers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920), p. 204.

⁹⁸ Frances Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1894), p. 223.

⁹⁹ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, pp. 348-9.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 120.

Brontë's conviction that she would not marry in many ways fired her ambition to find some fitting outlet for her energies and she repeatedly wishes for active exertion. Her first attempts to find useful work involved working as a governess, out of which experience grew her indignant sense of the unjust treatment of governesses. Her unhappy experiences with the Sidgwick family in 1839, the patronising attitude of her employers and her unruly charges convinced Brontë that the governess's lot was miserable. The work of the governess was considered suitably feminine, not breaking any of the rules governing the middle-class feminine sphere. But as governessing became increasingly devalued as a profession, the salaries of governesses dropped and employers demanded that governesses perform more and more tasks outside teaching.

In an attempt to improve their teaching skills, Charlotte and Emily worked in Brussels in the early eighteen-forties; both studied French and taught English at the Pensionnat Heger in the Rue d'Isabelle. This stay obviously informs both *The Professor* and *Villette*. *Villette*, however, was written some ten years after Brontë's return from Brussels. Considerable distance was established between her experiences and her rendering of them.

After their first period in Brussels, Emily chose to remain at Haworth. Charlotte returned alone and felt there an enormous sense of isolation. It was during this second period that Brontë's relationship, whatever it actually was, with Monsieur Heger developed. Brontë's description of Monsieur Heger does bear some similarity to that of the hero of *Villette*, Paul Emmanuel: 'He is a professor of rhetoric, a man of power as to mind, but very choleric and irritable in temperament.'¹⁰¹ The exact nature of Brontë's feelings for Monsieur Heger remain obscure, as Tom Winnifrith writes:

... it is clear that something odd and unhappy was happening in 1843, and even with all the evidence it is not quite clear what is happening. Delicacy and decorum probably prevented the chief parties in the affair, Charlotte, Monsieur Heger and his wife, from revealing their feelings to each other, even if they knew them themselves.¹⁰²

Tom Winnifrith also suggests that Brontë's response to publisher and possible suitor James Taylor may have provided her, in part, with a model for Paul Emmanuel.¹⁰³

Brontë herself intimates that there is a relationship between her experience and her art. Writing to G. H. Lewes in January 1848, she expresses doubt about her

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

¹⁰² Tom Winnifrith, *A New Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 60.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 95.

ability to write prolifically, giving as one reason the narrowness of her experience: 'my stock of materials is not abundant, but very slender; and, besides, neither my experience, my acquirements, nor my powers, are sufficiently varied to justify my ever becoming a frequent writer'.¹⁰⁴ However Brontë was also aware of the dangers of making too sweeping a connection between reality and fictional reality; as she explains to Ellen Nussey (cautioning her against the assumption that any of the characters of *Shirley* were intended as portraits of real persons): 'It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to *dictate*'.¹⁰⁵ Obviously there are dangers in making too simple connections between Brontë's experiences and her fiction, but there can be little doubt that her experience as a single woman does at least contribute to the powerful voice that emerges in her novels.

Tom Winnifrith writes of 'the habit, almost endemic among writers on the Brontës, of treating their books as if they were autobiographies'.¹⁰⁶ In this process Brontë herself becomes a fictionalised figure. Annette Tromly points out that from Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life* onwards Brontë is fictionalised, and that her own fiction is increasingly interpreted as a type of autobiography: 'Shortly after her death, Brontë - the writer of fiction - was herself fictionalized by a novelist who had been asked to become a biographer'.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Terry Eagleton calls for further research into what he perceives as the ideologically governed 'construction and reconstruction of the [Brontë] sisters in critical history'.¹⁰⁸ Two early critical responses to Brontë and her work do reveal very different versions of the writer, which would appear to be mediated by different ideological approaches. Margaret Oliphant considered Brontë's fiction immature and 'working in the narrowest orbit' but also 'incisive' and 'realistic'. Oliphant's late Victorian critique of Brontë as 'the most reticent and self-controlled of maidens, the little governess, clad in all the strict proprieties of the period' is perhaps peculiarly marked by a Victorian penchant for despondently pale spinsters who wring their hands in grief over lost or absent love and also by Oliphant's own conservatism about the elevated status of motherhood:

¹⁰⁴ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p.351.

¹⁰⁵ quoted in Robert B. Martin, *The Accents of Persuasion. Charlotte Brontë's Novels* (London: Faber, 1966), p. 18, taken from Clement Shorter, *The Brontës: Life and Letters*, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), volume 2, p. 84.

¹⁰⁶ Winnifrith, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Annette Tromly, *The Cover of the Mask: The Autobiographers in Charlotte Brontë's Fiction* (Victoria: English Studies Monograph 26), pp. 10-11, quoted in Valerie Myer, *Charlotte Brontë: The Truculent Spirit* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1987), p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction to the Second Edition', *Myths of Power. A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. xix.

In her secret heart, she demanded of fate night and day why she, so full of life and capability, should be left there to dry up and wither; and why Providence refused her the completion of her being [...] The woman's grievance -- that she should be left there unwooed, unloved, out of reach of the natural openings of life: without hope of motherhood: with the great instinct of her being unfulfilled -- was almost a philosophical, and entirely an abstract, grievance, felt by her for her kind: for every woman dropped out of sight and unable to attain the manner of existence for which she was created. And I think it was the first time this cry had been heard.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, in the early twentieth century May Sinclair, herself a spinster, participating in militant agitation for the vote and familiar with the militant celibacy promoted by some sections of that movement, praised Brontë for revolutionising the status of female singleness, and felt that Brontë had been misrepresented by her critics. Sinclair singles out Margaret Oliphant as chief detractor:

There are no words severe enough for Mrs Oliphant's portrait of her as a plain-faced, lachrymose, middle-aged spinster, dying, visibly, to be married, obsessed for ever with that idea, for ever whining over the frustration of her sex. What Mrs Oliphant, 'the married woman,' resented in Charlotte Brontë, over and above her fame, was Charlotte's unsanctioned knowledge of the mysteries, her intrusion into the veiled places, her unbarring of the virgin heart. That her genius was chiefly concerned in it does not seem to have occurred to Mrs Oliphant.¹¹⁰

Brontë wrote to publisher George Smith, "You will see that *Villette* touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying."¹¹¹ Indeed Brontë delayed the publication of *Villette* so that its release did not coincide with the appearance of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *Ruth* (1853), in part because she felt that there was "a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use, to the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend."¹¹² In spite of Brontë's self-deprecation, Lucy Snowe's narrative in *Villette* may have had a social use. It certainly extends the possibilities in fiction for the figure of the unmarried middle-class woman. *Villette* places a strong emphasis upon the spinster's entry to the public world of work through perseverance and self-reliance, and vindicates the venture by its success. Indeed Brontë's writing had already helped to publicise women's issues, whatever the intentions of its author. In Elizabeth Rigby's

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Oliphant, *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897), pp. 5, 24.

¹¹⁰ May Sinclair, *The Three Brontës* (London: Hutchinson, 1912), p. 21.

¹¹¹ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 580.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 592.

discussion of the 1847 Report of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution she mentions the use of the figure of Jane Eyre as a means of publicising the exploitation of governesses and the society itself.¹¹³

In *Villette* Brontë also addresses areas of female activity outside the romantic or domestic sphere. Brontë wrote in a letter of 1843 that marriage may for some women be an inappropriate aim:

... it is an imbecility, which I reject with contempt, for women, who have neither fortune nor beauty, to make marriage the principal object of their wishes and hopes, and the aim of all their actions; not to be able to convince themselves that they are unattractive, and that they had better be quiet, and think of other things than wedlock.¹¹⁴

The source of Brontë's acrimonious dispute with Harriet Martineau, which brought their friendship to an untimely close, was the review of *Villette* which Martineau contributed to the *Daily News*. Brontë resented Martineau's complaint about the primacy of love in the novel:

All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought -- love [...] It is not thus in real life. There are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages [...] quite apart from love.¹¹⁵

Indeed Brontë was baffled by what she construed as the implication that Lucy's love is either improper or impossible, and retorted that there was no shame in the type of love she depicts. Pauline Nestor thinks that Brontë and Martineau were probably fundamentally incompatible, the incompatibility revealing itself in their incongruous responses to the relationship of women and love. In her *Autobiography* Martineau indicates that in order to improve their lot, women must break free from the emotionality that often constricts them:

¹¹³ Elizabeth Rigby, 'Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre and the Governesses' Benevolent Institution -- Report for 1847', *The Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1848), 153-185, (p. 176). Rigby found any identification that was made between Jane Eyre and the plight of governesses lamentable, and she launches a scurrilous attack on the 'immorality' of Brontë's novel. Rigby regards *Jane Eyre* as an anti-Christian composition, the tone of which can be heard in all invocations of Chartism and rebellion. Much of the attention which the figure of the governess received at mid-century was due not only to her middle-class status or her close relationship to the domestic idealisation of the middle-class woman but also, on a more practical level, because of the efforts of the the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, and its publication of annual reports detailing the circumstances of governesses. The charity was founded in 1841 and reorganised in 1843. For further information on the Governesses' Benevolent Institution see Mary Poovey, 'The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre' in *Uneven Developments*.

¹¹⁴ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 257.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 598.

Women who would improve the conditions and chances of their sex must, I am certain, be not only affectionate and devoted, but rational and dispassionate [...] I decline all fellowship and cooperation with women [...] who injure the cause by their personal tendencies [...] The best friends of the cause are the happy wives and the busy, cheerful, satisfied single women, who have no injuries of their own to avenge, and no painful vacuity of mortification to relieve.¹¹⁶

Yet Brontë's writing does search for a plot structure and narrative mode which place the experiences of a middle-class single woman at the centre. The figure of the spinster progresses through Brontë's fiction, finally occupying the central place as narrator and central character in her last novel, *Villette* (although *Villette* was by no means intended as Brontë's final fiction). Brontë's first novel, *The Professor*, which was finally published in 1857,¹¹⁷ was written in the early eighteenthies and is often considered a preliminary sketch for *Villette*. Although *The Professor* contains no prominent spinster figure, William Crimsworth, the male narrator, considers what must be the response to singleness of his lover, Frances:

Frances, had she been as desolate as she deemed, would not have been worse off than thousands of her sex. Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids -- the race whom all despise; they have fed themselves, from youth upwards, on maxims of resignation and endurance. Many of them get ossified with the dry dict [...] and they die mere models of austerity, fashioned out of a little parchment and much bone. Anatomists will tell you that there is a heart in the withered old maid's carcase [...] Can this be so? I really don't know; but feel inclined to doubt it. (*P*, 242)

William's view of spinsterhood is dependent upon male stereotypes. He sees no hope for Frances if she is unfortunate enough to become an old maid. Later, William has the opportunity to question Frances directly about her response to singleness. She shares his worries about the condition:

'An old maid's life must doubtless be void and vapid -- her strained heart empty. Had I been an old maid I would have spent existence in efforts to fill the void and ease the aching. I should probably have failed, and died

¹¹⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, with Memorials* edited by Maria Weston Chapman (London: Smith and Elder, 1877), I, p. 399. Quoted in Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 90.

¹¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor* (1857), (repr. London: Penguin, 1989). All subsequent reference to *The Professor* will be taken from the Penguin edition.

weary and disappointed, despised and of no account, like other single women.' (P, 279)

But in Frances's account there is no doubt that the spinster possesses a heart, although it never ceases to ache. Her end may be loveless and unlucky but Frances can see some room for effort and desire. Thus spinsterhood may not be an entirely fixed and hopeless state.

In *Shirley* (1849)¹¹⁸ Caroline Helstone's uncle forbids her to work as a governess, forcing her to remain in close proximity to Robert Moore who is the cause of her unhappiness. Caroline is enraged by her sense of helplessness and isolation. Her desperation makes an impassioned plea for wider opportunities for single women:

I shall never marry. What was I created for [...] Where is my place in the world? [...] that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve: other people solve it for them by saying, 'Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted.' [...] Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness [...] in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. [...] Each human being has his share of rights. (S, 190)

Shirley is, of course, played out against the backdrop of the Luddite riots of 1812 but Roslyn Belkin plausibly argues that Brontë chose to parallel the working-class plight with the plight of another exploited class, the single women of the community. As Caroline observes: 'Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the rich and happy'(S, 377). Belkin pursues the parallel:

Like the 'matrimonial market,' the mills of Yorkshire are 'overstocked,' and, so far as the relatively privileged classes are concerned, the rejects of the marketplace, that is, the unemployed poor and the single, older women of the community must resign themselves to suffer in silence. Not surprisingly, the male characters in *Shirley* who are least sympathetic to the plight of the workers are also the ones who oppress the old maids of the community, their attitudes towards both groups reflecting the same admixture of distaste, ignorance, petty cruelty and most of all, the desire that the rejected individuals fade into invisibility.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (1849), (repr. London: Penguin, 1974). All subsequent reference to *Shirley* will be taken from the Penguin edition.

¹¹⁹ Roslyn Belkin, 'Rejects of the Marketplace: Old Maids in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *International Journal of Women's Studies* 4, 1 (1981), 50-66, (p. 52).

And contempt for old maids crosses the classes. When Caroline, speaking to Fanny, describes Miss Mann's and Miss Ainley's lot as unhappy, Fanny angrily replies, "They can't be unhappy; they take such good care of themselves. They are all selfish" (S, 192).

Brontë designed Lucy Snowe to typify her vision of a cold initially self-absorbed unmarried woman; at one point she had called her Lucy Frost, because 'a cold name she must have' and Brontë felt that her heroine's life ought not to follow pleasant lines, writing that 'I am not leniently disposed towards Miss *Frost*: from the beginning I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places.'¹²⁰ When publisher's reader William Smith Williams warned Brontë that her heroine would be thought morbid and weak, Brontë replied: 'I consider that she *is* both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid.'¹²¹ Brontë later wrote to Williams that her 'intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which 'Jane Eyre' was raised by some injudicious admirers.'¹²²

Villette is one of the few mid-Victorian narratives in which the figure of the middle-class single woman breaks out of her traditionally peripheral position in the narrative. She is no longer a gaunt handmaiden to an attractive wedded heroine; she becomes the heroine on her own terms and indeed, at one point in the narrative we find Lucy rejecting a subordinate role when it is offered to her, despite the warm comforts and social inclusion as maiden aunt which it involves. In *Villette*, then, the spinster emerges as central female character, she earns her heroic status, and the formation of such a heroine raises questions about viable alternatives to marriage.

Lucy Snowe is in many ways an unhappy unbalanced narrator; she is full of repressed desires and allows herself only solitary, brief excursions into the hopefulness which is the mainstay of other people's lives. Her sensibility is marked by loneliness. Her narrative is full of omissions -- for instance she does not tell the reader when she recognises Dr John as Graham Bretton and at another point asks the reader to cancel her observations (V, 117). Such behaviour partially breaks the contract of first person narration embodied in the sense of trust which operates in the reader's relationship to the narrator. Lucy would often have the reader assume that she is little more than a dingy and dull spinster, who is relatively resigned to the status that that seems to imply. However, the dowdy cover of singleness and self-control all too often lead Lucy only to turmoil and self-division.

¹²⁰ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, pp. 583, 582.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 583.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 605.

Lucy's narrative is, of course, retrospective and seems, therefore, to presume an eventual sense of balance and peace. Early in the narrative, Lucy as narrator describes herself as advanced in years: 'My hair [...] lies now, at last white, under a white cap, like snow beneath snow' (*V*, 105).

The device of the first-person narrative is especially suited to the spinster making her own way in the world, and comes in itself to be part of Brontë's critical exploration of the experience of singleness. May Sinclair writes in her introduction to the 1909 Dent edition of *Villette*:

The book is flung, as it were, from Lucy's beating heart; it is one profound, protracted cry of the agony of longing and frustration. This was a new voice in literature. *Villette* was the unsealing of the sacred springs, the revelation of all that proud, decorous, mid-Victorian reticence most sedulously sought to hide.¹²³

Lucy's self-construction is defined at a meta-fictional level through her narratorial control and within the story by the structure that meaningful work gives to her emotions. The heroine moves through a series of emancipations which are partly structured by her various employments: employment becomes a personal need. Brontë's account of the progress toward social liberty of a middle-class single woman is both unusual and significant in the new light it casts on employment. Employment is a determinant of Lucy's sense of self-definition.

The novel opens with Lucy resident in the Bretton household. Mrs Bretton, her godmother, has claimed Lucy from the 'kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence' (*V*, 62). Lucy's comments at the beginning of the novel hint at unhappy family events, which are never disclosed in the narrative. Her family background is obscure; throughout the narrative Lucy makes cryptic references to past suffering, and, from the start, has learned to respond to apprehended pain by distancing herself emotionally from others. Yet Lucy also responds to this unclarified unhappiness with a sense of 'unsettled sadness' (*V*, 62), and an adult Lucy tells us much later in the narrative: 'Oh, my childhood! I had feelings. Passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days I could *feel*' (*V*, 175).

Lucy finds the Bretton household attractive. The house itself is well-situated amongst clean wide pavements, and has a quiet atmosphere and 'large peaceful rooms' (*V*, 61). Its inhabitants mirror its order, enjoy 'health without flaw' and are 'well-made' (*V*, 61). Yet the Bretton household is also characterised by a sense of stasis and listless comfort; Lucy's perceptions are almost dulled, are sent to sleep, by

¹²³ May Sinclair, 'Introduction', *Villette* (London: J. M. Dent, 1990), p. xvi

the comforts of the Bretton family. Here time passes 'not with tumultuous swiftness, but blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain' (V, 62):

My visits to her resembled the sojourn of Christian and Hopeful beside a certain pleasant stream, with 'green trees on each bank, and meadows beautified with lilies all the year round.' The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; but I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little, that when the latter came I almost felt it a disturbance, and wished rather it had held aloof. (V, 62)

Brontë hints at a contrast between Lucy's two inner selves, implied by her insistence upon her emotional detachment: 'I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination' (V, 69), and this conflict is also mirrored by the emotional flights and domestic quiescence of Paulina Home. Polly is temporarily lodged with Mrs Bretton by her father, following the separation of her parents and subsequent death of her mother. Lucy's response to Polly is dictated by the eye rather than the heart. She makes Polly the object of her 'cool observation' (V, 70). However, Polly's impact upon Lucy is considerable, the room that they share seems 'haunted' by Polly's presence and Lucy wakes on moonlit nights to see 'her figure, white and conspicuous in its nightdress, kneeling upright in bed, and praying like some Catholic or Methodist enthusiast, some precocious fanatic or untimely saint' (V, 69).

Polly tells her nurse: "I am good, but I ache here," putting her hand to her heart, and moaning while she reiterates "Papa! papa!" (V, 67). Lucy watches Polly's response to her father's arrival:

It was not a noisy, not a worldly scene -- for that I was thankful; but it was a scene of feeling too brimful, and which, because the cup did not foam up high or furiously overflow, only oppressed one the more. On all occasions of vehement, unrestrained expansion, a sense of disdain or ridicule comes to the weary spectator's relief. (V, 71)

Polly is delighted at being united with her father and Lucy notes with amazement that 'she seemed to have got what she wanted -- *all* she wanted' (V, 71). Lucy longs for 'relief' from the scene, feels uneasy, and finds that Polly's actions give too 'full occupation to the eye' (V, 72) -- all of which is hardly a neutral response, despite Lucy's protestations.

Lucy watches Polly's emotional turbulence with apparent detachment. To observe is also to try to make sense of what is observed. Lucy's reading of Polly enables a reading of herself. Paulina appears to be a miniature model of femininity,

Lucy describes her as precocious, 'unchildlike' (V, 66) and a 'little woman' (V, 74), she was:

... exceedingly tiny, but was a neat, completely-fashioned little figure, light, slight and straight. Seated on my godmother's lap, she looked a mere doll; her neck, delicate as wax, her head of silky curls, increased, I thought, the resemblance. (V, 64)

She serves her father tea, adding sugar and cream carefully to his cup, in exact accordance with his taste. Paulina is defined by the orthodoxy of her womanliness; she possesses a miniature workbox and tries sewing a handkerchief which is a keepsake for her father, but which proves so hazardous that she leaves a trail of blood on the cloth:

... holding in her hands a shred of a handkerchief, which she was professing to hem [...] she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when that perverse weapon -- swerving from her control -- inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly. (V, 73)

The relationship with her father is repeated in the scenes between Polly and Graham; at first he must 'seduce' her attention (V, 76), but he soon comes to occupy much the same position of esteem as her father. The balance of their relationship is weighted in his favour, as Lucy describes it, 'the match was too unequal in every way' (V, 84), as his light but good-humoured mockery contrasts with her seriousness. He instinctively prefers the company of other boys, while her submission to him means that she can enjoy no life other than one governed by his sensibilities. She procures sweet cake for him on the grounds that it is "only for him -- as he goes to school: girls -- such as me and Miss Snowe -- don't need treats, but *he* would like it" (V, 82). But the veneration with which she regards his masculinity and its privileges also means that she is excluded from his activities with fellow boys, she lies prostrate on the floor in front of his bedroom door (V, 84) while he plays with his friends and adopts a similar position when Graham does not show enough sorrow at the prospect of her departure:

[She] crept to his side, and lay down on the carpet at his feet, her face to the floor; mute and motionless [...] Once I saw Graham -- wholly unconscious of her proximity -- push her with his restless foot. She receded an inch or two. A minute after one little hand stole out [...] and softly caressed the heedless foot. (V, 90)

Lucy also distinguishes a contrast between Polly's public self, displayed for the officious gaze of Mrs Bretton, and an eccentric private self to which, as we have seen, Lucy is often the sole witness:

While lavishing her eccentricities regardlessly before me -- for whom she professed scarcely the semblance of affection -- she never showed my godmother one glimpse of her inner self; for her she was nothing but a docile, somewhat quaint maiden. (V, 90)

When Polly is working on various womanly tasks with Mrs Bretton she never kindles 'once to originality, or [shows] a single gleam of the peculiarities of her nature' (V, 81) and Lucy tells us 'I ceased to watch her under such circumstances: she was not interesting' (V, 81). The fascination she exerts on Lucy depends upon her interactions with men, as Lucy describes her relationship to Graham: 'herself was forgotten in him: he could not be sufficiently well waited on, nor carefully enough looked after' (V, 82):

One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence. (V, 83)

Judith Lowder Newton points out that these initial scenes of *Villette* and their depiction of the infantilised relationship between Polly and Graham, with its full array of inequalities, powerlessness and painful subservience are, in fact, a covert rejection of 'the traditional love and marriage plot [which] strains against ideology -- as it informed literature as well as life.'¹²⁴

Lucy does attach some degree of charm to the relationship between the two, but her feelings are the result of a developing sense of pity for Polly which allows Lucy to step out of her detachment. She eventually comforts Polly and provides her earliest commentary on the unequal relationship between men and women. The commentary stresses caution and self-control. She tells Polly that men are careless of women's feelings, being too "strong and gay" to tolerate deep affection (V, 91) and that "as to likes and dislikes, we should be friendly to all, and worship none" (V, 92). After this she caresses Polly:

¹²⁴ Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion. Social Strategies in British Fiction 1778-1860* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1981), pp. 93-4.

I saw the little thing shiver. 'Come to me,' I said, wishing, yet strangely hoping, that she would comply [...] She came [...] like a small ghost gliding over the carpet. I took her in. She was chill; I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. (V, 92)

Lucy's affectionate actions and deliberately gentle appraisal of life seem remarkable, given her unspoken reservations about Polly's future: 'How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh?' (V, 93).

When she has returned to her unspecified home, Lucy asks that we imagine her later adolescence in the amiable terms which are usually drawn upon to describe women's lives. Lucy again draws upon the water imagery which she invoked to sense of indolence with the Brettons:

I will permit the reader to picture me [...] as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass -- the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer [...] Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy [...] warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. (V, 94)

However gently the reader's imagination is rocked by this passage, it is run through with terms which are deliberately ambivalent: her sleep seems too heavy and she has no means of protecting her slumber, as a 'steersman' controls her state. But the drowsing steersman does not direct his vessel and is 'buried' in prayer. The movement of the original metaphor of Lucy sleeping like Christian and Hopeful beside a stream, to Lucy upon the water, calm though it may seem, prepares for the further development of this symbolism. The narrator wastes no time in shattering the illusion. In an abrupt *volte face*, Lucy's vision crashes against the rocks of despondency and both Lucy and the reader are propelled into the colder salt waters of reality:

... it cannot be concealed that [...] I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been a wreck at last. I too well remember a time -- a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have a nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. [...] In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (V, 94)

At an early age Lucy realises that dependence upon family and friends is not an option she can enjoy. The circumstances of Lucy's solitude are never fully accounted for, which adds to the bereft quality of her narration; her voice emerges from an undifferentiated anguish, almost without a history to account for its timbre:

... there remained no possibility of dependence on others; to myself alone could I look. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances, as they are upon thousands besides. (*V*, 95)

In spite of her problems, however, Lucy tells us that she 'still felt life at life's sources' (*V*, 96), and so determines to support herself by accepting a situation as companion to Miss Marchmont, a 'maiden lady of our neighbourhood' (*V*, 95). Lucy encounters very few cheerful spinsters on her travels, but the stoical Miss Marchmont does seem to represent a first model for Lucy's ability to endure the trials of life. Lucy tells us, 'a sort of intimacy was [...] formed between us' (*V*, 96) and Miss Marchmont's relation to Lucy is likened to a maternal bond; when she scolds Lucy it is 'rather like an irascible mother rating her daughter' (*V*, 96) and Lucy comes to cherish her affection 'as if it were a solid pearl' (*V*, 97). Lucy describes the intensity of her life with Miss Marchmont:

Two hot, close rooms became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty -- her pain, my suffering -- her relief, my hope -- her anger, my punishment -- her regard, my reward [...] She gave me the originality of her character to study: the steadiness of her virtues, [...] the power of her passions, to admire, the truth of her feelings to trust. All these things she had, and for these things I clung to her. (*V*, 97)

Miss Marchmont has lived with some of the dilemmas which Lucy is heir to and has survived them by means of a control of self which Lucy is just beginning to learn. Her account of her life's "'only love -- almost its only affection'" (*V*, 99) centres upon her deceased lover, Frank, who died just before they were to marry. It is an account which prefigures Lucy's story; both Paul Emmanuel and Frank die on a journey, a journey the goal of which is their joyful return. But at the same time, her sojourn with Miss Marchmont offers Lucy too easy a fate and, ironically, too easy an approach to life. Lucy must be 'goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy' (*V*, 97), but of her own accord would prefer to 'compromise with Fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains' (*V*, 97).

Lucy's sense of identification with Miss Marchmont is, in many ways, reminiscent of Caroline Helstone's attempt to come to terms with old maidenhood in

Shirley. Caroline, believing herself destined to be a spinster, promptly tries to embrace her fate by visiting two notable local spinsters, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley. Caroline initially feels daunted by the lovelessness of such lives, and it takes her some time to see beyond those aspects of Miss Mann which are susceptible to caricature:

Certainly Miss Mann had a formidable eye for one of the softer sex: it was prominent, and showed a great deal of the white, and looked as steadily, as unwinkingly, at you as if it were a steel ball soldered in her head; and when, while looking, she began to talk in an indescribably dry monotonous tone [...] you felt as if a graven image of some bad spirit were addressing you. (S, 194)

The injustice of such a view becomes apparent to Caroline, as she finds that: 'Miss Mann's goblin-grimness scarcely went deeper than the angel sweetness of hundreds of beauties'(S, 194). Indeed, Miss Mann's physical appearance is the result of the unhappiness and self-denial which she has withstood with fortitude and magnanimity:

... the old maid had been a most devoted daughter and sister, an unwearied watcher by lingering deathbeds; that to prolonged and unrelaxing attendance on the sick the malady that now poisoned her life owed its origin. (S, 196)

Similarly, Caroline sees that fate has been equally unjust to Miss Ainley, whose misfortunes can be attributed to no more than a want of physical beauty, for in herself she is both graceful and benign: 'She talked never of herself -- always of others. Their faults she passed over; her theme was their wants, which she sought to supply; their sufferings, which she longed to alleviate.' (S, 197). Taken together these spinsters provide Caroline with a model of spinsterhood which is remarkable for its charitable virtues and its resistant abilities. When Caroline contemplates spinsterhood, it only becomes frustrating when she is forbidden by her uncle to work for her living. Brontë remarks that these single women are drawn from living models: 'You must not think, reader, that in sketching Miss Ainley's character, I depict a figment of imagination -- no -- we seek the originals of such portraits in real life only' (S, 198).

After Miss Marchmont's death, Lucy feels herself impelled towards London:

... to-night shone in the north, a moving mystery -- the Aurora Borealis [...] this solemn stranger influenced me [...] Some new power it seemed to

bring. A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it.

'Leave this wilderness,' it was said to me, 'and go out hence.'

'Where?' was the query.

I had not very far to look: gazing from this country parish in that flat, rich middle of England -- I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London. (*V*, 104)

This strategy of a guiding voice not only removes the onus of unseemly and unwomanly ambition from Lucy's resolve but also reconstructs her ambitions as a sacred charge or calling which she must obey. A similar voice will later impel her to journey to Villette (*V*, 121). The partially disembodied voice functions in a similar way to Lucy's unpromising and dowdy exterior; it conceals purposeful aspirations and an appetite for work and Lucy presents just such an outline of herself:

I had a staid manner of my own which ere now had been as good to me as cloak and hood of hodden grey; since under its favour I had been enabled to achieve with impunity, and even approbation, deeds that if attempted with an excited and unsettled air, would in some minds have stamped me as a dreamer and zealot. (*V*, 104)

Lucy journeys to London, 'a Babylon and a wilderness' (*V*, 106), and her move marks not just a geographical shift but also an important transition for the middle-class single woman from a state of social dependency or submission to one of social self-sufficiency. The transition is not an easy one. Lucy is unfamiliar with the wider world. English spoken with a London accent sounds to Lucy like a foreign tongue, and she finds her utter solitude miserable:

... a terrible oppression overcame me. All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous; desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? (*V*, 107)

She is 'unfurnished with either experience or advice to tell me how to act, and yet -- to act obliged' (*V*, 106) but as she lies in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral she determines that: 'it was better to go forward than backward, and that I *could* go forward -- that a way, however narrow and difficult, would in time open -- predominated over other feelings' (*V*, 107).

She has the liberty to buy a book in Paternoster Row, mounts the dome of St. Paul's and surveys all of London before her, wanders through its streets 'in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment' (*V*, 109): 'to do this, and to do it utterly alone,

gave me [...] a real pleasure' (*V*, 109). Lucy finds London vital in its atmosphere of work and effort, it seems so much in earnest; it is 'getting its living' (*V*, 109). Her narrative is peppered with explosive active verbs: 'I went', 'I lived', 'I saw', 'I dared'.

Having nothing to lose but a solitary past she undertakes to travel to Europe in search of work. She makes her passage in a boat called 'Vivid'. Her journey is governed by her gender and her singleness: her spinsterhood is the fuel of her adventure, as she can only journey such distances because she is a 'homeless, anchorless, unsupported' woman (*V*, 112). She has already been cheated of money by her porter, and expressed uncertainty about her accommodation in London. It is only when she has identified herself through the mention of male relatives who are familiar to those who work in the inn that she is treated with proper courtesy. Her coachman deserts her as soon as he obtains her fare: 'he offered me up as oblation, served me as a dripping roast, making me alight in the midst of a throng of watermen' (*V*, 110). As she is rowed across the black water, beneath the rocking hulls of the 'Ocean', the 'Phoenix' and the 'Dolphin', the boatmen bellow oaths at each other, and extort money from her which she phlegmatically describes as 'the price of experience' (*V*, 111). Lucy's sense of social dislocation is mediated by her gender; on arriving in Europe she breakfasts unhappily in a room filled with men and 'should have felt rather more happy if amongst them I could have seen any women; however, there was not one -- all present were men' (*V*, 121). Lucy is led through the dark streets of Villette by a friendly but unrecognised Englishman (actually an adult Graham Bretton), after he departs she is followed by a group of men, whom she describes as 'dreaded hunters' in their pursuit of her (*V*, 125). It is also a man, Paul Emmanuel, who ultimately decides whether or not she is to have any employment in the pensionnat.

Her arrival in the country of Labassecour (a thinly-disguised Belgium), is marked by a predominant feeling of uneasiness: 'the lights of the foreign seaport town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met me like unnumbered threatening eyes' (*V*, 118). Lucy has a sensation of being observed; a reversal of her habitual spectatorship. She traverses Labassecour on her way to Villette and travels through an alien and dangerous landscape, alongside miry canals which twist 'like half-torpid green snakes', the close air is 'stagnant and humid', and even anxiety crouches like a tiger in Lucy's consciousness (*V*, 122). When darkness comes here, Lucy tells us, it is almost tangible (*V*, 122). Lucy finds that Villette is not the benign community which she so longs for -- it is garish, muddy and bourgeois.

The 'Pensionnat de Demoiselles' where she finds employment is the domain of Madame Beck, a small, smooth woman who governs her establishment by

espionage. When Mme Beck consults Paul as to whether or not Lucy would be a good employee, his means of assessment is close scrutiny of her countenance:

The little man fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him [...] Still he scrutinized. The judgement, when it at last came, was as indefinite as what had gone before it.

'Engage her. If good predominates in that nature, the action will bring its own reward; if evil -- eh bien! (V, 129)

This is the first external view of Lucy Brontë offers and this momentary shift of perspective signals the unique nature of Paul's relationship to Lucy. His curious gaze will penetrate beneath Lucy's camouflaging 'cloak and hood of hodden grey'. His watchfulness challenges hers, signifies interaction rather than exclusion and finally draws her in from the uncommitted borders of observation. Paul even hires a room in one of the college boarding-houses to observe the inhabitants of the Rue Fossette with a spy-glass. Lucy herself depends so continuously on sight as her primary mode of response to existence that she sensualises her gaze. When she anticipates the pleasures of a ball or the opera, it is as a witness to the spectacle of such events that she conceives herself. Her desire, she says, 'was not the wish of one who hopes to partake a pleasure if she could only reach it [...] it was no yearning to attain, no hunger to taste; only the calm desire to look on a new thing' (V, 175). Lucy's desires, however, are seldom as calm as she represents them.

From her 'watch-tower' in the nursery (V, 138) Lucy observes proceedings at the pensionnat, and her detached view of the school provides her with a unique view of Mme Beck. Mme Beck spends the day 'plotting and counter-plotting, spying and receiving the reports of spies' (V, 135). However, new work as a teacher compels Lucy into 'closer intercourse' with the inhabitants of the Rue Fossette, and it is the first opportunity Lucy has had to test her abilities. 'I felt I was getting on', she says, 'not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use' (V, 145).

In many ways Lucy is still an on-looker; not only the solitude of singleness marks her out as different but also her Protestantism in a Catholic country. Brontë experienced feelings like Lucy's in Brussels. She writes in 1843: 'above all, there is a constant sense of solitude in the midst of numbers. The Protestant, the foreigner, is a solitary being.'¹²⁵

¹²⁵ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 256.

'In the demi-convent, secluded in the built-up core of a capital' (*V*, 163), Lucy finds her environment hostile: her unruly pupils represent to her a 'wild herd' (*V*, 143) and 'surveillance' is Mme Beck's watchword. This is exactly what Lucy receives instead of the solicitude she so desperately needs. On her first evening at the pensionnat Mme Beck studies Lucy's face while Lucy feigns sleep, and even takes the liberty of making a wax impression of the keys to Lucy's trunk, desk and work-box. Lucy counters this by searching for the key to the intimate recesses of Mme Beck's nature, for in the world of Rue Fossette, observation is the currency of power. She describes Mme Beck in terms habitually connected with ambitious masculinity: 'The school offered for her powers too limited a sphere; she ought to have swayed a nation: she should have been the leader of a turbulent legislative assembly' (*V*, 137). Lucy's need to distinguish the natures of others borders on voyeurism. She early recognises Ginevra Fanshawe for the philistine that she is. Ginevra's suitor, referred to by the pseudonym 'Isidore', is reduced to sighs in her presence; Lucy is disgusted by Ginevra's inability to describe him (this laziness transgresses Lucy's primary criteria for consciousness, as Ginevra fails in interested spectatorship):

... she had neither words, nor the power of putting them together so as to make graphic phrases. She even seemed not properly to have noticed him: nothing of his looks, of the changes in his countenance, had touched her heart or dwelt in her memory. (*V*, 150)

Dr John (Graham Bretton) is also subjected to her intense and secret scrutiny -- again, it is her dowdiness, her spinsterish unattractiveness, which enables her observation.

He laid himself open to my observation, according to my presence in the room just that degree of notice and consequence a person of my exterior habitually expects: that is to say, about what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern. (*V*, 162)

Various figures impinge upon Lucy's consciousness, but also challenge her solitude. This invasion of Lucy's solitude has its positive side, for despite her initial efforts to escape inclusion in relationships with other people, she comes to recognise that some companionship is necessary to her psychic well-being. When Paul locks Lucy in the 'solitary and lofty' attic of the pensionnat, as Lucy learns her part for the play, she finds that the hours passed there are lonely ones :

... it began to appear somewhat hard that I should pass my holiday, fasting and in prison. Remote as was the attic from the street door and vestibule, yet [...] I knew that the house and garden were thronged, and that all was gay and glad below. (V, 205)

On this first occasion when Lucy directly seeks, rather than avoids, the company of others, it is significant that she must demand her release from Paul.

As she becomes more liberated Lucy, in her unrestrained moments, can celebrate the vitality of role-playing and adopting and discarding different selves. She agrees to act a man's part in the play but refuses male dress: 'How must it be, then' asks Paul, 'How, accept a man's part, and go on the stage dressed as a woman?' (V, 208). Lucy solves the problem by: 'Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a *paletôt* of small dimensions' (V, 209).

Lucy acts the part of the fop in the play, while Ginevra Fanshawe acts the coquette wooed by two suitors. Lucy being one of them, notes delightedly that 'with such emphasis and animation did she [Ginevra] favour me' (V, 210). Lucy observes that she is playing up to Dr John, who watches, as part of the audience, the theatrical interplay of Lucy and Ginevra. 'There was language in Dr John's look', Lucy tells us, 'it animated me: I drew out of it a history; I put my idea into the part I performed; I threw it into my wooing of Ginevra' (V, 210). She 'rivalled and out-rivalled him' (V, 210), but acts also to please herself. Thus she provocatively responds to the sexual tension between Dr John and Ginevra in her representation of the male wooer which also signifies a temporary foray into the world of male prerogatives. Through her mimicry of John's attentions, she is momentarily released from the anguish which his carelessness provokes in her. She is learning to venture outside her habits, as role-playing and liberty converge. Such freedoms prove too tempting to Lucy, and she responds cautiously to the pleasures of dramatic expression: 'to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life' (V, 211).

Despite the brief release offered by such episodes, Lucy's existence is characterised by self-denial; her habits of self-control contain her desires beneath the indifferent demeanour which she presents to society. At first Lucy uses this strategy of self-presentation to pursue her own goals under the facade of dowdiness, but the strategy is also caricatured and negatively presented through the unstirred character of Mme Beck. Lucy comes to long for other experiences and repression is characterised by more violent metaphors: her longings 'it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples' (V, 176). She is both fantasist and working spinster:

I seemed to hold two lives -- the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (*V*, 140)

One of the results of self-repression is Lucy's emotional breakdown during the long vacation which she spends alone in the pensionnat at Rue Fossette, whose only other inhabitants are 'a servant, and a poor deformed and imbecile pupil' (*V*, 227). The solitude which she had assumed so suitable proves overwhelming:

When I had full leisure to look on life as life must be looked on by such as me, I found it but a hopeless desert: tawny sands, with no green field, no palm-tree, no well in view. The hopes which are dear to youth [...] I knew not and dared not know. If they knocked at my heart sometimes, an inhospitable bar to admission must be inwardly drawn [...] tears sad enough sometimes flowed; but it could not be helped: I dared not give such guests lodging. So mortally did I fear the sin and weakness of presumption. (*V*, 228)

Brontë seems to be suggesting that states of female singleness and solitude may vary and that the happiness or otherwise of singleness is very much dependent on its whole social context. Lucy must work towards spinsterhood without complete solitude, towards a stable and happy independence with gainful employment.

When she has the opportunity during her solitary summer to escape from the pensionnat Lucy finds herself wandering far afield in search of company or solace: 'a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine' (*V*, 230). When Lucy visits the confessional it is as much communication with another person that she desires as with God:

... the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated -- the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long-pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused -- had done me good. (*V*, 234)

Her Protestantism means that her faith is internalised and submerged, without symbols to bear its burden and she finds that she must resort temporarily to Catholicism as the rites of the confessional help her to externalise her anxiety.

Lucy collapses in the street and is subsequently looked after by the Brettons; she finds their kind attentions soothing but also dangerously tempting. As she lies in bed at La Terrasse she begs reason to shield her from needing them too intensely:

'Do not let me think of them too often, too much, too fondly,' I implored; 'let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream [...] Oh! would to God! I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil!' (V, 251)

The role of spinster which many people seek to force on Lucy is an attempt to define her by her functions, as chaperone, companion, listener, and confidante. The definitions of others are always limiting, however affectionately they are intended. Ginevra commonly addresses Lucy as 'old Diogenes' (V, 153), and calls her an 'old lady' (V, 1550) while Dr John places her as 'the humiliated, cast-off, and now pining confidante of the distinguished Miss Fanshawe' (V, 263):

I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke. (V, 404)

Overall, Dr John is not a suitable match for Lucy and Brontë had specifically discounted the possibility of any union between them; as she comments to her publisher that:

Lucy must not marry Dr John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited, and sweet-tempered; he is a 'curled darling' of nature and of fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery [...] If Lucy marries anybody it must be the Professor -- a man in whom there is much to forgive, much to 'put up with'.¹²⁶

Happiness is Dr John's natural share in life, as Lucy observes: 'Strong and cheerful, and firm and courteous; not rash, yet valiant; he was the aspirant to woo Destiny herself, and to win from her stone eye-balls a beam almost loving' (V, 250). Dr John can laugh at adversity; the fortune which life offers exactly coincides with what he seeks from life, whereas for Lucy happiness is elusive however much she long for it, and can only be won on odd occasions. When he advises Lucy to cultivate happiness, she responds scornfully :

No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to *cultivate* happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 581-2.

potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. (*V*, 330)

He also lacks a developed capacity for sympathy nor does he possess other important qualities; Lucy caustically points out the inevitable disappointment in expecting from him 'refinements of perception, miracles of intuition, and realiz[ing] disappointment' (*V*, 264). In his company Lucy becomes submissive, she delights in 'indulging his mood, and being pliant to his will' (*V*, 267) and he, in turn, finds 'pleasure in homage' (*V*, 273) to his 'masculine self-love' (*V*, 272). But within she retains her own counsel.

Dr John takes Lucy to the Villette art gallery, where she observes 'the queen of the collection', a portrait which depicts Cleopatra:

She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat [...] must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that weight of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say [...] She appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks [...] Out of abundance of material -- seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery -- she managed to make inefficient raiment. (*V*, 275)

The portrait of this 'huge, dark-complexioned gypsy-queen' seems to Lucy 'an enormous piece of claptrap' (*V*, 276). Dr John is untouched by anger or approbation or even curiosity -- all the portrait makes him reflect is that Ginevra is more attractive than Cleopatra.

M. Paul, on the other hand, discovers Lucy looking at the picture and is outraged by the impropriety of her gaze. Although the Cleopatra may be an acceptable spectacle for a married woman, it is certainly not so for a single young woman. Lucy notes ironically that it is obviously suitable for a single man, as M. Paul does not fail to accord it his attention. M. Paul recommends her to study instead a set of sentimental pictures of women at various stages of virtuous womanhood:

The first represented a 'Jeune Fille,' coming out of a church door [...] her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up -- the image of a most villainous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a 'Mariée' with a long white veil kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber [...] showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a 'Jeune Mère,' hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a 'Veuve,' being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument. (*V*, 277-8)

What distinguishes Paul from Dr John in this episode is that Paul at least recognises that Lucy's response is important, she is sentient and responsive -- dangerously so, in Paul's estimation. Lucy is unimpressed by all of these representations:

All these four 'Anges' were grim and gray as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with! -- insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gypsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers. (*V*, 278)

Both the 'four Anges' and the Cleopatra are the projections of male imaginations. They offer no possible model for Lucy.

The evening at the theatre which Lucy spends watching 'Vashti', radically alters Lucy's life. The actress's performance is 'a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation' (*V*, 339):

Suffering had struck the stage empress; and she stood before her audience never yielding to, nor enduring, nor in finite measure, resenting it: she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance [...] Where was the artist of the Cleopatra? Let him come and sit down and study this different vision. Let him seek here the mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed flesh he worshipped. (*V*, 340)

Her performance is powerful and, crucially, female. It subverts the male representations of female experience signified by the gallery portraits: 'Wicked, perhaps, [Vashti] is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair' (*V*, 340).

Brontë drew on the Bible for the name, Vashti. Ahasuerus, entertaining visiting princes, sent for his queen, Vashti, to come before the group 'to show the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on' (Esther I. ii). Vashti refused to be displayed and her non-cooperation incurred her husband's wrath. Her defiance was interpreted as dangerous not only to the authority of the king but to all married men whose wives might hear of Vashti's defiance and become rebellious. Ahasuerus commanded that Vashti be deposed and her position be given to a new submissive wife. Many virgins were prepared for the king to select and he chose Esther who is, in any case, one of the 'chosen people'. Vashti is 'rigid in resistance' and 'locked in struggle' with the male gaze and Lucy gleefully invites the male artist of Cleopatra to look upon Vashti. This episode overturns all Lucy's disinterested spectatorship, the spectacle of Vashti's passion brands Lucy's consciousness with 'a

deep-red cross' (V, 342), as she observes, Vashti is 'a study of such nature as had not encountered my eyes yet' (V, 338).

Vashti's performance generates emotion in a way that Lucy can comprehend, the 'strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit' (V, 340). The line between fantasy and reality is dissolved by Vashti's art which denies Lucy voyeurism and forces participation: this is not the calm spectacle she had anticipated. Lucy is aroused. Vashti's image and art has entered Lucy's life and its force remains as a 'deep-red cross'. By watching Vashti she can on some level recognise herself and has a privileged sense of inclusion which is not available to Dr John. In her excitement Lucy forgets to observe Dr John, but when she does recall his presence she finds that Vashti's 'agony did not pain him, her wild moan [...] did not move him: her fury revolted him [...] but not to the point of horror' (V, 341). His sexual judgement of Vashti is 'as a woman, not an artist' (V, 342) and he 'brands' her as a fallen woman, even in her status as an actress, working outwith the confines of the mid-Victorian home. This episode above all others enables Lucy to understand his nature and deliver an achieved estimate of his character:

His natural attitude was not the meditative, nor his natural mood the sentimental; *impressionable* he was as dimpling water, but, almost as water, *unimpressible* [...] for what belonged to the storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. (V, 341)

Dr John is not only incapable of comprehending the complexity of passions which Vashti displays, but, as Vashti is to some extent a projection of Lucy's submerged and turbulent passions, he is unlikely ever to comprehend Lucy. Vashti's complexity authenticates Lucy's response to the Cleopatra as a weary, gross stereotype. What the representation of Cleopatra offers is commodified passion. Fire breaks out in the theatre, as if Vashti's passions are truly incendiary. From the chaos which ensues Dr John rescues his future non-inflammatory bride, Polly Home.

Compared with Dr John, M. Paul may seem a comic figure; as a suitor he is mysterious, ludicrous, short and moustachioed; he fumes 'like a bottled storm' (V, 225) when crossed, but Lucy notes that there 'was a relish in his anger; it was artless, earnest, quite unreasonable, but never hypocritical' (V, 226). His scorn acts as a spur to her ambitions: 'his injustice stirred in me ambitious wishes -- it imparted a strong stimulus -- it gave wings to aspiration' (V, 440). She also comes to love Paul because he perceives her so differently from others, jealously regarding her as 'the volatile, pleasure-loving Mademoiselle Lucie' (V, 405):

... he accused me of being reckless, worldly, and epicurean; ambitious of greatness and feverishly athirst for the pomps and vanities of life. It seems I had no 'd vouement,' no 'r cueillement' in my character; no spirit of grace, faith, sacrifice, or self-abasement. (V, 387)

When she attends a concert attired in a attractive pink dress he stares at her with disapprobation. He imputes strong traits to her character, decries her as selfish, cowardly, uncharitable; he says that she would make a useless Sister of Mercy (V, 279), indeed, perhaps unknowingly, he refuses her any of the qualities ascribed to dependent submissive singleness; in his eyes she lacks any capacity for selflessness. When she realises that another individual can see her as something other than a 'melancholy sober-sides' she re-examines her own sense of identity:

... behold! there starts up a little man, differing diametrically from [others], roundly charging you with being too airy and cheery -- too volatile and versatile -- too flowery and coloury [...] You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life's sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray. (V, 421)

Paradoxically Paul appears an appropriate lover for Lucy because Brontë provides him with a history which in many ways resembles the traditional history of the single woman: he has been engaged, his lover died and he appears to have remained steadfastly single in deference to her memory. Similarly, the characters who depend financially upon Paul form a false family unit which confines him as effectively as the Victorian family could confine the dependent middle-class spinster. Mme Walravens put up fierce opposition to her grand-daughter's marriage to Paul when his family became bankrupt, but Paul has since rescued her family from poverty, and supports them financially with three-quarters of his own income, making it impossible for him to marry. Père Silas tells Lucy:

She, who had been the bane of his life, blighting his hope, and awarding him, for love and domestic happiness, long mourning and cheerless solitude, he treated with the respect a good son might offer a kind mother. (V, 485)

Paul also shelters his old tutor and Agnes, 'a superannuated servant of his father's family' (V, 486). Towards the end of the novel, it becomes apparent that Mme Walravens, Père Silas and Mme Beck all hope to profit from Paul's ill-fated journey to Guadeloupe. Paul journeys to Guadeloupe to manage Mme Walraven's estates there and Mme Beck hopes to inherit some part of Mme Walravens's improved

fortune, while Père Silas hopes that the church will reap some of the profits. Paul will be released from his obligations to them if he fulfils this contract. With such dependents as these, Paul shares Lucy's impoverishment and Lucy tells us that he possesses a heart which is:

... tender beyond a man's tenderness; a place that humbled him to little children, that bound him to girls and women; to whom, rebel as he would, he could not disown his affinity, nor quite deny that, on the whole, he was better with them than with his own sex. (*V*, 425-6)

Mme Beck asks Lucy to deliver a basket of fruit to Madame Walravens at the Rue des Mages, with the express purpose of deterring Lucy from making a match with Paul. Mme Walravens is grotesque; three feet high and shapeless, she seems to have no neck, a silver beard on her chin, 'malign unfriendly eyes' (*V*, 481), and despite being 'hunchbacked, dwarfish, and doting', Lucy tells us, 'she was adorned like a barbarian queen' (*V*, 482). On the wall of her home hangs a portrait of Paul's deceased fiancée, Justine Marie, dressed in nun's apparel. Lucy, however, is undaunted by this: 'Was I, then, to be frightened by Justine Marie? Was the picture of a pale dead nun to rise, an eternal barrier?' (*V*, 491).

The ghostly nun is prefigured by glimpses of other strange figures haunting chambers and corridors at night-time. There is Polly 'perched like a small white bird' by her bed in the darkness of their shared room (*V*, 90), or the white figure of Mme Beck whom Lucy wakes to see moving soundlessly about the room on the first evening of her stay at the pensionnat (*V*, 131). During the early stages of her stay at the pensionnat Lucy mentions the legend of a nun, who was buried alive in garden of the Rue Fossette in a vault under a 'Methuselah of a pear-tree' (*V*, 172) 'for some sin against her vow' (*V*, 172). However, the significance of the nun lies dormant until Lucy's passions assert themselves: her first sighting of the nun is when she hides in the garret to read a precious letter from Dr John:

... my light was dim, the room was long -- but, as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white. (*V*, 325)

When she tells Dr John of her vision of the nun he explains the character of her vision as "some appearance peculiarly calculated to impress the imagination" (*V*, 329) and as the result of her over-stretched nerves.

Lucy's next sightings of the nun are when she has been burying Dr John's letters -- on the site where the nun was said to have been buried -- and again, when Paul declares his affinity to Lucy, when crucially Paul also sees the nun. The nun

turns out to be M. de Hamal, with whom Ginevra Faushawe elopes. However the thematic function of the nun is apparent in its connection with Justine Marie, whose memory represents an external obstacle to marriage between Lucy and Paul. The nun may also symbolise the repression of Lucy's passions, as it would appear more than incidental that she features during episodes in which Lucy is trying to master her emotions -- so Mary Jacobus finds *Villette* 'a novel in which repression returns vengefully on the heroine in the form of a ghostly nun.'¹²⁷ However, it is also worth noting that the legendary nun was buried alive for a transgression against her vow; a transgression which hardly indicates self-repression, but rather the reverse. She is punished for the expression of her emotions. Therefore, it is just as likely that when the figure of the nun acts at a symbolic level, it is at moments when Lucy is at the point of transgressing the boundaries of her carefully contained feelings. On the first two occasions Lucy's behaviour is passionate, solitary and aberrant, while on the third occasion, and the last on which she sees the figure of the nun in action, Lucy is on the verge of an emotional commitment to Paul. His suitability is confirmed by his being the only other person to see the nun. Lucy's final encounter with anything that resembles the nun is in the dormitory in Rue Fossette, when she finds an effigy of the nun lying on her bed. Lucy attacks it:

... all movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force; as my instinct felt. I tore her up -- the incubus! I held her on high -- the goblin! I shook her loose -- the mystery! And down she fell -- down all round me -- down in shreds and fragments -- and I trod upon her. (*V*, 569)

This occurs just before Paul's confession of love, and at a time when Lucy believes her solitude to be settled. Thus it is as a projection of both her self-containment and what she regards as her foolish hopes that Lucy destroys what seems almost a mocking representation of both. Lucy's destruction of the nun perhaps then signals the beginning of her liberation from self-delusion.

Robert Colby notes that indications of Lucy's ability to self-determine are present in her attempt to unite Dr John and Polly and her resolve to run her own school rather than be a companion.¹²⁸ Lucy gives her blessing to Dr John's engagement to Paulina Home. She tells Polly:

'I think it is deemed good that you two should live in peace and be happy -- not as angels, but as few are happy amongst mortals. Some lives *are* thus

¹²⁷ Mary Jacobus, 'Villette's Buried Letter', *Essays in Criticism* 28 (1978), 228-44, (p. 228).

¹²⁸ 'Villette and the Life of the Mind', p. 414.

blessed: it is God's will: it is the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden.' (V, 468)

Consciousness, scepticism, the constant teasing-out of liberty remain, for Lucy, matters of primary self-definition, as she strives to clear a way for herself between fidelity to self and service to others. She gradually learns to distance herself from the union of Graham and Polly, although she still finds Polly's confidences difficult to endure, as they present glimpses of fortunate and unsolitary life. She somewhat acerbically comments: 'There is, in lovers, a certain infatuation of egotism; they will have a witness of their happiness, cost that witness what it may' (V, 521).

Although Lucy is at pains to confirm the sanctified nature of the union of Polly and Graham, one need only think back to the examples of corrupt marriage in the novel, in order to preserve some ambivalence about the dependencies of marriage. Polly herself is the child of an ill-fated union: 'Mrs Home had been a very pretty, but a giddy, careless woman, who had neglected her child, and disappointed and disheartened her husband' (V, 63). Lucy's brush with the Watsons en route to Villette convinces her that there is a marked contrast between bride and bridegroom; he is old, plain and as greasy-looking as an oil-barrel while his youthful bride is artificially gay with abandonment (V, 113). Ginevra Fanshawe's sister is forced by poverty to marry an elderly gentleman who is the colour of a guinea, having been exposed to yellow fever in India, and the connection between his hue and a piece of money indicates what his attractions are (V, 116). Indeed, Paul Emmanuel need only promise to contract marriage in order to be trapped in Mme Walraven's evil web for twenty years. Polly herself still possesses the minute stature she had as a child and both Graham and her father, the Count de Bassompierre, treat her as if she were a child. Polly's relationship to men is marked both by her class position and her dependency; she is incapable of understanding the economic circumstances which compel Lucy to work, and does not conceal her surprise when she discovers that Lucy is a schoolteacher:

... she fixed on me a pair of eyes wide with wonder -- almost with dismay.

'Are you a teacher?' cried she. Then, having paused on the unpalatable idea, 'Well, I never knew what you were, nor ever thought of asking; for me, you were always Lucy Snowe. [...] And do you like it?'

'Not always.'

'And why do you go on with it?'

To which Lucy responds, 'Chiefly, I fear, for the sake of the money I get' (V, 368-9).

But Lucy is determined to cling to a fuller perception of herself. Rather than be Paulina Home's companion, a 'bright lady's shadow', Lucy would risk penury: 'Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence' (V, 382). Dr John and Paulina both offer Lucy employment -- but it is an employment which conforms to the accepted role of the spinster as an ancillary in a middle-class family. Lucy finds that the prospect of working as Paulina's companion is in part tempting; her work would be comfortable and secure. However, Lucy has learned too deep a sense of engagement with her independence to fill the role proposed. Lucy resists the pattern and sets a role for herself through her vocation and new kinds of awareness emerge from her experience -- although as a representation of heroinism within Victorian culture she remains somewhat alien, not altogether assimilable.

Lucy's capabilities develop through the narrative -- she progresses, is promoted, derives satisfaction from her exertions. When Ginevra Fanshawe asks "'Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?'" (V, 392), Lucy replies, partly in jest, "'I am a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school teacher'" (V, 394). But her response is exact, and details her unaccompanied progression through increasingly expressive employments. Appropriately, however, the school in which Paul installs Lucy at the end is both workplace and dwelling-house and strikes the balance for Lucy between these two spheres. But the employment Lucy gains through the agency of M. Paul is certainly as much the result of Lucy's enterprising imaginings and industrious exertion as of her union with Paul. Before there is any overtly romantic link between the two Lucy has conceived and even furnished an independent school in her dreams and can see it within the compass of her own unaided efforts, as she tells us:

When I have saved one thousand francs, I will take a tenement with one large room, and two or three smaller ones, furnish the first with a few benches and desks, a black tableau, an estrade for myself; upon it a chair and table [...] begin with taking day-pupils, and so work my way upwards. [...] Courage Lucy Snowe! With self-denial and economy now, and steady exertion by-and-by, an object in life need not fail you [...] be content to labour for independence until you have proved, by winning that prize, your right to look higher. (V, 450)

In this sense *Villette* is a narrative of the spinster's entry into the public world. Lucy's employments change rapidly, she begins as companion to Miss Marchmont, then replaces the drunken Mrs Sweeney as nursery governess to Mme Beck's children, but is so good a teacher to these children that she is rapidly

propelled into the official position of teacher in the pensionnat. It is initially Mme Beck's scornful response to Lucy's reservations about her abilities as a teacher, which compels her to meet the challenge:

If left to myself, I should infallibly have let this chance slip. Inadventurous, unstirred by impulses of practical ambition, I was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children's frocks. Not that true contentment dignified this infatuated resignation: my work had neither charm for my taste, nor hold on my interest: but [...] the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know. (*V*, 140)

The outline Lucy presents of her readiness to accept employment which does not demand the full exercise of her abilities directly parallels her willingness to remain in 'two hot, close rooms' as Miss Marchmont's companion, hoping thereby to dodge the arrows of fortune lest they strike her heart with hope. But Brontë does not permit Lucy such narrow safety: she is continually thrust into more demanding employments. She restlessly paces the '*allée défendue*' wondering 'how I should make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position' (*V*, 450). As a narrative of a middle-class single woman's life *Villette* is as fully occupied with the issue of Lucy's labour, as with the demand for her fulfilment through love. Whole tracts of the narrative are devoted to Lucy's attempts to tackle her work; she lies awake at night plotting strategies through which to control her mutinous pupils and to master French. She succeeds in winning the affection of her charges. Lucy's heroic status is a consequence of her steadfast labour as much as a construct of her love for Paul.

Brontë's point seems to be that the validity of Lucy's entry to an expansive public world of work resides in the emotional, rather than the financial, profits which this world offers. The promotion of Lucy as a working woman is, then, immediately connected to the fulfilment of Lucy's capacity for emotion. It is through this connection that Brontë's narrative can be read as a mid-Victorian feminist narrative. It reshapes the 'separate spheres' ideology which is so often used to justify the exclusion of middle-class women from the public world of work, promoting women's happy confinement within the private, domestic sphere. Work is man's remit while the emotions are woman's. Indeed, poor wages could be enough to ensure that a single woman would stick to the domestic sphere. For example, although Lucy replaces a man, Mr. Wilson, as a teacher at Mme Beck's pensionnat, Lucy tells us that she is paid half of what he received and must work twice as hard for it. Brontë's hope for the future of working single women would appear to lie in the feminisation of the public sphere; this is why Mme Beck's mode of working,

masculine in its power and desensitised in the maintenance of that power, bereft of reference to the inner emotional needs of its subjects, cannot be treated as a valid expression of women's work in itself. Similarly, the figure of Ginevra Fanshawe proves unacceptable as a model for the heroine because, although vigorously self-reliant, Ginevra shapes her ambitions not towards working for a living, but rather towards a dubious marriage to M. de Hamal. Ginevra treats herself both as saleswoman and commodity.

By the end of the novel, Lucy has realised that defensive solitude may incur profound unhappiness and that freedom may coexist with love. Lucy has come genuinely to love Paul and he installs her as *Directrice* of an *externat de demoiselles* which he has obtained for her. Although Paul has arranged Lucy's occupation of the premises, she will pay the rent to the proprietor, M. Miret. The interior of Lucy's school combines femininity and vocation, affection and independence. Its outer room is fragrant and welcoming:

Its delicate walls were tinged like a blush; its floor was waxed; a square of brilliant carpet covered its centre [...] there was a little couch, a little chiffoniere; the half-open, crimson-silk door of which, showed porcelain on the shelves [...] the recess of the single ample window was filled with a green stand, bearing three green flower-pots, each filled with a fine plant glowing in bloom [...] The lattice of this room was open; the outer air breathing through, gave freshness, the sweet violets lent fragrance. (V, 585)

But beside this is another room which is scholarly and practical:

... it contained two rows of green benches and desks, with an alley down the centre, terminating in an estrade, a teacher's chair and table, behind them a tableau. On the walls hung two maps; in the windows flowered a few hardy plants; in short, here was a miniature classe -- complete, neat, pleasant. (V, 585)

Having facilitated Lucy's independence and promising to return in three years time, Paul sets off from Guadeloupe only to drown in a storm at sea on his return voyage. Their anticipated union has not solved all problems of identity for Lucy but has allowed both hero and heroine to enjoy sympathetic communion without taking on the form of fulfilled heterosexual romance. Thus the ending of *Villette* is an act of transformation, through which extended spinsterhood is swathed in some of the benefits of heterosexual union. Through such indirection the radicalism of Brontë's vision of contented spinsterhood is both concealed and revealed, as Janet Gezari points out:

Brontë's heroines [...] are unconventional not in their rejection of the roles and wife and mother but in their serious contemplation of the single life and in their rejection of the ordinary role assigned to old maids.¹²⁹

Lucy does enjoy an anticipation of Edenic existence with Paul as they:

... walked [...] to the Rue Fossette by moonlight -- such moonlight as fell on Eden -- shining through the shades of the Great Garden, and haply gilding a path glorious, for a step divine -- a Presence nameless. Once in their lives some men and women go back to these first fresh days of our great Sire and Mother -- taste that grand morning's dew -- bathe in its sunrise. (V, 591-2)

But Paul must die, Lucy cannot remain in Eden, her very name being the wrong sort of weather for that place. Storms wrack the sea on his voyage home:

It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance [...] Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope [...] Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. [...] Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell. (V, 596)

Paul's death on a stormy sea completes the imagery of rough, tempestuous or calm passage over water which, from the very beginning, Brontë has used to shape Lucy's narrative. This imagery carries a sense of the arbitrariness of fate -- no just rewards can be expected but resentment is pointless. Lucy's antagonists, Mme Beck and Mme Walravens, survive and prosper. Paul Emmanuel drowns. Yet Lucy refuses a commentary on this.

In spite of its concessions to 'sunny imaginations', the narrative surely closes with a confirmation of Lucy's solitude. The ending of *Villette* was softened from its initial unequivocal shipwrecking of M. Paul in order to satisfy the desires of a *male* reader -- Patrick Brontë. Elizabeth Gaskell recounts:

Mr Brontë was anxious that her new tale should end well, as he disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind; and he requested her to make her hero and heroine [...] 'marry, and live very happily ever after.' But the idea of M. Paul Emmanuel's death at sea was stamped on her imagination, till it assumed the distinct force of reality;

¹²⁹ Janet Gezari, 'Marriage or Career: Goals for Women in Charlotte Brontë's Novels', *Bucknell Review* 24, 1 (1978), 83-94, (p. 89).

and she could no more alter her fictitious ending than if they had been facts which she was relating. All she could do in compliance with her father's wish was so to veil the fate in oracular words as to leave it to the character and discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning.¹³⁰

The conventional ending which her father wanted, would, Brontë realised, be untruthful and unchallenging. Brontë wanted to shake her readers' expectations of the form which female fulfilment could take, even at the risk of leaving them dissatisfied.

The ambivalence which ostensibly surrounds the conclusion of *Villette* perplexed many of Brontë's readers. Margaret Oliphant writes that 'the ultimate fate of M. Paul, left uncertain at the conclusion, was debated in a hundred circles with greater vehemence than many a national problem.'¹³¹ Brontë also reports several enquiries she received from female readers petitioning her for information concerning the true outcome. This indicates some degree of incredulity about the possibility of the narrative resolving itself in something other than marriage. Brontë refused to oblige her readers. She wrote to her publishers' reader, William Smith Williams:

The note you sent this morning from Lady Harriet St. Clair is precisely to the same purport as Miss Mulock's request -- an application for exact and authentic information respecting the fate of M. Paul Emmanuel! [...] I have sent Lady Harriet an answer so worded as to leave the matter pretty much where it was. Since the little puzzle amuses the ladies, it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key.¹³²

Brontë also advised George Smith as to how he should answer readers' enquiries about the conclusion:

With regard to that momentous point M. Paul's fate [...] every reader should settle the catastrophe himself, according to the quality of his disposition, the tender or remorseless impulse of his nature: drowning or matrimony are the fearful alternatives. The merciful [...] will of course choose the former and milder doom -- drown him to put him out of pain. The cruel-hearted will, on the contrary, pitilessly impale him on the second horn of the dilemma, marrying him without ruth or compunction to that -- person -- that -- that -- individual -- 'Lucy Snowe'.¹³³

¹³⁰ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 582.

¹³¹ Margaret Oliphant, *The Victorian Age of English Literature* (London: Percival, 1892), p. 324.

¹³² *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 606.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 607.

Effectively, Brontë obliges the reader to choose singleness for Lucy.

What Brontë suggests through her ending is that marriage may not be the common lot of women. She reveals Lucy's future to be not a compensatory life but a real and viable alternative. Lucy need no longer remain on the outside, listening to the echoes of other people's lives. She tells us that the three years Paul is away are, paradoxically, the happiest of her life, and accounts for this:

I commenced my school; I worked -- I worked hard. I deemed myself the steward of his property, and determined, God willing, to render a good account. [...] My externat became a pensionnat; that also prospered. [...] At parting, I had been left a legacy; such a thought for the present, such a hope for the future, such a motive for a persevering, a laborious, an enterprising, a patient and a brave course -- I *could* not flag. (V, 593-4)

Fittingly enough, Lucy is also the beneficiary of Miss Marchmont's estate, a hundred pounds are sent to her by the nephew who inherited her fortune and Lucy uses the money to expand her school.

Any approach to Brontë's fiction which regards it as romantically inspired wish-fulfilment is clearly reductive and usually inspired by a sense of Brontë's own lengthy period of spinsterhood. Thackeray falls for this cliché when he writes of Brontë to his friend Lucy Baxter, who was in the middle of reading *Villette* at the time, that 'I can read a great deal of her life as I fancy in her book, and see that rather than have fame, rather than any earthly good or mayhap heavenly one she wants some Tomkins or another to love her and be in love with'. He continues, with a narrowness of vision which at least parallels Dr John's mistaken view of Lucy Snowe:

But you see she is a little bit of a creature without a penny worth of good looks, thirty years old I should think, buried in the country, and eating up her own heart there, and no Tomkins will come. You girls with pretty faces and red boots (and what not) will get dozens of young fellows fluttering about you -- whereas here is one a genius, a noble heart longing to mate itself and destined to wither away into old maidenhood with no chance to fulfil the burning desire.¹³⁴

In his discussion of Thackeray's letter, Laurence Lerner attempts to soothe the feminist reader by sympathising over the 'condescending masculinity' of Thackeray's view, and it is possible that one can forgive Thackeray his prejudice as

¹³⁴ William Thackeray to Lucy Baxter (11 March 1853), *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray* edited by Gordon Ray, vol. 3: 1852-1856 (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 233.

he probably had not read *Villette* by the March of 1853. But Lerner's indulgence and his relish in a bit of long-distance backslapping is difficult to forgive especially when he pulls in another rather misogynistic patriarch for support: 'how right he [Thackeray] is that patriarchal society had, in the end, nothing to fear from this fiery creature.'¹³⁵ Lerner urges that:

It is important to see that *Villette* is a love story; for when Charlotte's two concerns encounter each other, there is no doubt that the romantic scores an easy victory over the feminist [...] Charlotte's fiery feminism takes second place to her need for a man [...] how clearly [Thackeray] has anticipated Freudian views that trace intense writing back to the intensity of deprivation.¹³⁶

Lerner reads as weakly conventional what is actually subversive: Brontë's novels had progressively edged towards the subjugation of the hero and in *Villette* she plunders male plot lines to write out the hero: the journey from London to Belgium mimics the male bildungsroman as does the protagonist's desire for more than one of the opposite sex, and the determined emphasis upon vocation. Brontë dispenses with 'Tomkins'. Reader, she did not marry him!

Elizabeth Gaskell and the Amazons in *Cranford*

Margaret Oliphant considered that Brontë's fiction shared ground with Elizabeth Gaskell's in that both created new types of 'unruly' heroines who disturbed the calm waters of the mid-Victorian novel. Oliphant could hear the same disrespectful splash of rebellion in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction:

... here are still the wide circles in the water, showing that not far off is the identical spot where Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, in their wild sport, have been casting stones.¹³⁷

Writing to John Ruskin in 1865, Elizabeth Gaskell humorously insists upon the realism of *Cranford* (1853) ¹³⁸:

¹³⁵ Laurence Lerner, *Love and Marriage. Literature and its Social Context* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 199.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 199.

¹³⁷ 'Modern Novelists -- Great and Small', p. 559.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford* (1853) (repr. London: Penguin, 1976). All subsequent references to *Cranford* will be taken from the Penguin edition.

And it is true too, for I have seen the cow that wore the grey flannel jacket -
- and I know the cat that swallowed the lace, that belonged to the lady that
sent for the doctor, that gave the emetic.¹³⁹

The initial story 'Our Society at Cranford' was published in *Household Words* in December 1851, and, in the same letter to Ruskin, Gaskell provides an account of its genesis. She wrote the story intending it to stand alone as one paper in *Household Words* and so, very reluctantly, killed off the character of Captain Brown at the end of this first section of the narrative.¹⁴⁰ The first episode, intended as a self-contained sketch, was entitled 'Our Society at Cranford' -- although Angus Easson does make the point that that Gaskell so rapidly produced a sequel to this first part that it seems apparent that they were conceived at the same time.¹⁴¹ *Cranford* proved immediately popular with its contemporary readers, who regarded it as a fond and innocent sketch of vanishing rural life. This first piece received such an enthusiastic public reception that Gaskell was encouraged by Dickens to extend it in a further seven instalments, and so this set of drowsy and pleasant vignettes came to form an integrated whole.

Cranford draws on the material which Gaskell had used in an earlier discursive essay, 'The Last Generation in England', which appeared in 1849 in the American journal *Sartain's Union Magazine*.¹⁴² This essay observes the rural life and customs of the previous generation. Winifred Gerin writes that 'It is, as certain incidents betray, a first sketch for the setting of Cranford, without the immortal *dramatis personae*.'¹⁴³

Cranford is an episodic study of a number of older unmarried women, including its heroine Miss Matty Jenkyns, seen through the eyes of a younger unmarried woman, Mary Smith. From a mid-Victorian perspective, what is most striking about *Cranford* is that Gaskell imagines a community of spinsters. An unsigned review for the *Examiner* in 1853 describes Cranford as governed by a 'spinster aristocracy', and suggests that the narrative presents 'a parcel of not very wise old maids for its heroines [...] poor but remarkably genteel, having a thorough

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell to John Ruskin, (February 1865), in *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* edited by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 747.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 748.

¹⁴¹ Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 101.

¹⁴² Edgar Wright, *Mrs. Gaskell. The Basis for Reassessment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 102.

¹⁴³ Winifred Gerin, *Elizabeth Gaskell. An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 120.

distaste for that sour grapes Man'.¹⁴⁴ An earlier review of *Cranford*, which appeared in the *Athenaeum* in 1853, describes these unlikely heroines as:

... a few foolish and faded gentlewomen of limited incomes, moving round the younger daughter of a deceased rector, as central figure [...] there is a rare humour in the airs and graces of would-be finery which the half-dozen heroines display, -- in their total ignorance of the world, in their complacent credulity, in their irritable curiosity about all that touches matrimony.¹⁴⁵

Gaskell's easy generosity of spirit and willingness to help other women, ensured that she maintained close connections and personal friendships with many women's rights activists including Harriet Martineau, Dinah Mulock, Bessie Parkes (editor of the *English Woman's Journal*), Barbara Bodichon (founder of the Langham Place group), the Winkworth sisters, who were, in turn, friends of Frances Power Cobbe and Florence Nightingale. All of these women influenced mid-century feminist discourse on modes of middle-class female independence.

Feminist contacts were not, however, the only source for Gaskell's narrative of a society controlled by spinsters and widows. Her biographer, Jenny Uglow, notes that much of Gaskell's childhood was spent living with her aunt, Hannah Lumb, at 'The Heath' in Knutsford in Cheshire. Uglow observes that 'The Heath was [...] a house of single women, but this was a source of strength rather than deprivation'.¹⁴⁶ Gaskell herself describes Knutsford in 'The Last Generation in England' as populated by 'spinsters innumerable':

You may imagine the subjects of conversation among these ladies; cards, servants, relations, pedigrees, and last and best, much mutual interest about the poor of the town, to whom they were one and all benefactresses; cooking, sewing for, advising, doctoring, doing everything but educating them.¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, Pauline Nestor suggests that Gaskell's own fears about the sorts of lives her unmarried daughters would be expected to lead awakened her deeper sympathies for the plight of the spinster.¹⁴⁸ Gaskell believes that single women can take delight in lives which are in many ways as gratifying as those of married

¹⁴⁴ From an unsigned review of *Cranford*, the *Examiner* (23 July 1853), in *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage* edited by Angus Easson, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 196-7.

¹⁴⁵ Henry Fothergill Chorley, unsigned review of *Cranford*, *Athenaeum* (25 June 1853), p. 765, in *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage*, p. 194.

¹⁴⁶ Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell. A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber, 1993), p. 14.

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford* (London: Penguin, 1976), Appendix A, p. 323.

¹⁴⁸ Nestor, p. 36.

women, but, that in order to reach a state of happy spinsterhood, the single woman must face difficulties which are linked specifically to reproductive capacity. Gaskell writes to Charles Norton in 1860:

I think an unmarried life may be to the full as happy, *in process of time* but I think there is a time of trial to be gone through with *women*, who naturally yearn after children.¹⁴⁹

Martin Dodsworth suggests that Gaskell writes *Cranford* 'from a feeling of unconscious envy at the male', which he later reconstitutes as 'unconscious hostility to the male'.¹⁵⁰ He does see some link between 'themes of gentility and frustrated sexuality', although he never fully develops this observation, choosing instead to centre his arguments on the connection he perceives between spinsterhood and sexual frustration. So, according to Dodsworth, the novel represents 'an elegy on the insufficiency of the female in a world of two sexes.'. Miss Matty's 'spinsterly life', Dodsworth claims, is chiefly depicted by Gaskell in terms of repressed sexuality. Dodsworth cites as examples:

[Matty's] slavish imitation of her dead sister, the fanatical fear that the maid may have 'followers', the neurotic manner of eating oranges, which may be sucked in private, but not in public [and] the panic ensuing on the visit of a male cousin from India.¹⁵¹

Overall Miss Matty's state is one of 'sterile isolation' because she has been thwarted in love. However, Dodsworth finds that even this inadequately describes 'the full horror of the Cranford situation' -- the main features of Cranfordian society are 'greed', 'snobbery' and 'triviality'. All of which can only be put to rights by the entry of 'male vitality' which brings with it the 'promise of new life'.¹⁵²

The tales of robbery and theft which circulate after the entry of Signor Brunoni into the narrative are, Dodsworth suggests, 'merely a reflection of the unconscious fear aroused by [...] masculine power'. Dodsworth feels confident enough to generalise about common features of spinsterhood; he describes Miss Matty's fear of a man hiding beneath her bed as 'one that is often considered characteristic of old maids' without considering what class of people consider it so. Dodsworth places the figure of Mrs Brown as a healthy contrast to the old maids,

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell to Charles Norton, (January 1860), in *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* edited by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 598.

¹⁵⁰ Martin Dodsworth, 'Women Without Men at Cranford', *Essays in Criticism* 13 (1963), 132-45, (pp. 134, 138).

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 138, 139, 139.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 139, 139, 140, 141.

particularly in the story of her journey through the jungles of India, which is 'a parable on the courage that a marriage requires, and which is so signally lacking in the ladies.'¹⁵³

Patricia Beer follows a similar line to Dodsworth. She finds much of the social practice of the Cranford spinsters, such as their derogatory comments about men or their habit of feminising notions of gentility, to be evidence of endemic 'sexual deprivation', which is all too tellingly revealed in actions which counter their self-reliance such as hanging a man's hat in the hall, and in various comments interspersed in the narrative.¹⁵⁴ Both Dodsworth's and Beer's interpretations of the Cranford spinsters fail to address the idea that it may not be celibacy that limits these spinster figures, so much as etiquette. Their arguments present sexual repression as the chief social characteristic of celibacy and neither critic interprets the spinsters' actions as a necessary consequence of a Victorian culture, which excludes middle-class spinsters on social and economic terms, so that they are victimised by cultural responses to female singleness rather than the 'essential' celibate status of their spinsterhood.

Feminist approaches to *Cranford* have generally chosen to concentrate on those features of the text which have addressed the issues of female community. Nina Auerbach regards Cranford, the locale of the ironically entitled 'Amazons', or elderly spinsters and widows, as a positive representation of a new form of Victorian female community in that it has 'moved from the sphere of household management into that of government [...] Cranford is a town [...] governed by tightly-knit circles of women.'¹⁵⁵ Carol Lansbury interprets Cranford as a benign family of women,¹⁵⁶ while Pauline Nestor recognises that the novel is 'topical' in dealing with single women.¹⁵⁷

At the outset of the narrative Gaskell emphasises that singleness holds few fears in the village of Cranford where everyone is single:

In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad.(C, 39)

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 141, 142, 142.

¹⁵⁴ Beer, pp. 155-6.

¹⁵⁵ Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women. An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 77.

¹⁵⁶ Lansbury, Carol, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Paul Elek, 1975).

¹⁵⁷ Nestor, p. 50.

The narrator, Mary Smith, travels between Drumble and Cranford and finds that little changes in Cranford from one season to the next: 'There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last. Everybody lived in the same house, and wore pretty nearly the same well-preserved, old-fashioned clothes' (C, 52). Cranford is so self-reliant that it has almost ceased to move and possesses its own legislature and morality.

The spinsters have persisted as a group by means of elaborate rituals and their spinsterliness is expressed and maintained through linguistic strategies: 'economy was always "elegant", and money-spending always "vulgar and ostentatious"; a sort of sour grapeism, which made us very peaceful and satisfied' (C, 42). Their code of gentility enables them swiftly to circumvent any circumstance which would highlight their poverty. Cranford's rituals are, in part, satirised, for example the etiquette of paying calls: no more than three days may elapse before a call is returned, hospitality must be accepted for no longer than fifteen minutes, but no watch may be consulted, the minutes must be counted out silently, while conversing with the hostess. The result is that:

As everyone had this rule in their minds [...] of course no absorbing subject was ever spoken about. We kept ourselves to short sentences of small talk, and were punctual to our time. (C, 41)

Yet despite such gentle comedy there is a subdued triumph in finding meaning for lives pronounced meaningless by society at large.

In Cranford the spinsters maintain social codes inherited from their deceased fathers, whose attitudes or financial positions prevented their daughters marrying. There is the tiny ageing spinster who is dwarfed by her father's red silk umbrella, which she still uses in the rain, despite the fact that its size exhausts her, for it represents her daughterhood (C, 40) and signifies her social placement, however unwieldy the signifier may be. Other spinsters devise strategies for feeling part of a family, as is the case with Miss Betty Barker's near-maternal admiration for her cow: 'You could not pay the short quarter of an hour call, without being told of the wonderful milk or wonderful intelligence of this animal' (C, 43). Not all the spinsters chose to be single, but, despite this, they have not only learned to manage their lives without men but do so with such efficiency that the village itself seems to conspire against men. Middle-class Cranford bachelors are shy of matrimony; the local rector, Mr Hayter is so afraid of matrimonial reports being made about him that 'he would rush into a shop, or dive down an entry, sooner than encounter any of the

Cranford ladies in the street'. He surrounds himself with National School boys as camouflage, only feeling safe as one of their number(C, 136).

Fixed theories about the opposite sex are also popularly held and resemble myths. The women narrate these to each other with disdain and wonder. It is commonly agreed that men are a nuisance about the house and that masculinity represents vulgarity. Miss Pole sums up:

'... men will be men. Every mother's son of them wishes to be considered Samson and Solomon rolled into one -- too strong to be beaten or discomfited -- too wise ever to be outwitted. If you will notice, they have always forseen events, though they never tell one for one's warning before the events happen; my father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well.'
(C, 145)

Similarly, the spinsters congratulate each other on their escape from that dangerous and foolish state, matrimony, and present their own analysis of it:

Miss Pole began a long congratulation to Miss Matty that so far they had escaped marriage, which she noticed always made people credulous to the last degree; indeed, she thought it argued great credulity in a woman if she could not keep herself from being married [...] We were thankful, as Miss Pole desired us to be, that we had never been married. (C, 157)

The leader of this league of spinsters is Miss Deborah Jenkyns, who dresses in a way appropriate to her official status:

Miss Jenkyns wore a cravat, and a little bonnet like a jockey-cap, and altogether had the appearance of a strong-minded woman; although she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! She knew they were superior. (C, 51)

Military metaphors regularly occur in the narrative, and the relation between the sexes is expressed in terms of warfare: Cranford is the spinsters 'territory' and they charge at boys who peer through the railings at their garden flowers. Intrusive men enter the narrative at different points. The first is Captain Brown, who immediately transgresses Cranfordian etiquette by loudly and publicly discussing his poverty.

Captain Brown works for the railroad which connects Cranford to the 'masculine' environment of the town of Drumble, and against which the ladies have feverishly petitioned. They uniformly decide to snub Captain Brown yet, in spite of themselves, come to respect him. He solves many of the spinsters' domestic difficulties, as when they are faced with the perplexing issue of why a chimney

should smoke before a fire is lit. Much of their affection for him is determined by the fact that he is a 'tame man' (C, 43) with 'excellent masculine common sense' (C, 43). He responds sensitively to the needs of the spinsters and the forces which he employs to break down feminine defences derive from an engagement with the terms of their lives. As the middle-class women of Cranford might be social misfits elsewhere, so might men like Captain Brown -- he admits that he is too poor to live elsewhere: he shares the poverty which prescribes Cranford's elegant economies.

Captain Brown can perhaps be interpreted as a feminised father figure, replacing the narrow masculinity represented by Deborah Jenkyns's father, Parson Jenkyns, as much as challenging Deborah's authority (authority dependent upon the status of Deborah's father). He is father to two spinsters, who roughly resemble Deborah and her sister Matty.

The lines of battle drawn up between Deborah Jenkyns and Captain Brown are defined by a war over books as Captain Brown dares to disparage the adored Dr Johnson as a 'writer of light and agreeable fiction' (C, 50), setting up Boz instead as the author to be preferred. Deborah Jenkyns and Captain Brown fire readings at each other from *Pickwick Papers* and *Rasselas*. The literary dispute swells into a quarrel of some magnitude, for Miss Jenkyns cannot resist talking at Captain Brown while he seems to openly court her disapproval. Miss Jenkyns mutters Johnsonian sentences like incantations of a curse whenever the Brown family are mentioned and when Captain Brown dies crushed by a train as he attempts to rescue a child, he has in some sense died in battle as he was reading a new number of *Pickwick* as the train approached. However, the death of this favoured inhabitant of Cranford signifies the threat that the railway represents to the community rather than any threat that he presented.

His death is rapidly followed by the demise of his elder daughter, while pretty Miss Jessie Brown is saved from work by the entry of a faithful suitor, whom she accepts. Deborah heartily approves of their union, and this in part counters Martin Dodsworth's idea that she is separatist feminist; when Miss Matty announces "there's a gentleman sitting in the drawing-room, with his arm round Miss Jessie's waist!", Deborah retorts that this is: "The most proper place in the world for his arm to be in" (C, 61).

Martin Dodsworth has suggested that a main preoccupation of *Cranford* is to show, through the figure of Deborah Jenkyns, feminist assertiveness on trial and that the narrative deliberately leads up to the point at which her hostility to men can be rightfully purged from the community of Cranford, after which the Cranford community must atone for the harsh feminism which she practised.¹⁵⁸ Within the

¹⁵⁸ 'Women Without Men at Cranford', 132-45.

legislature of Cranford, Deborah is inheritor of her father, Parson Jenkyns, patriarchal rule. It is possible to interpret narratorial disapproval of Deborah as a critique not of her feminism but of her willingness to perpetuate patriarchal codes of behaviour. In accordance with a reading of Deborah as patriarchal Patricia Wolfe points out that: 'This desire to remain close to her father -- both during his life and after -- led to the expulsion from Cranford of any male whose vitality threatened to overshadow the minister's influence.'¹⁵⁹

In this predominantly female community then patriarchy and its values are not eradicated but passed from father to daughter. Deborah was devoted to her father and vowed to remain single for his sake. Patsy Stoneman makes the point that Deborah's predilection for Dr Johnson's writing may be interpreted as an attempt to appropriate his masculine authority by borrowing his voice, indeed, 'her intellect and her strict code of gentility' have become the means by which the dead father rules the community of women.¹⁶⁰ Deborah claims that "'Dr Johnson's style is a model for young beginners. My father recommended it to me when I began to write letters'". She models her prose on Johnson's, priding herself on the similarity. Comic tension is generated by the contrast between style and subject matter in one of Deborah's letters:

'The Honourable Mrs Jamieson has only just quitted me; and, in the course of conversation, she communicated to me the intelligence, that she had yesterday received a call from her revered husband's quondam friend, Lord Mauleverer [...] Mrs Johnson, our civil butcher's wife, informs me that Miss Jessie purchased a leg of lamb; but, besides this, I can hear of no preparation whatever to give a suitable reception to so distinguished a visitor. Perhaps they entertained him with "the feast of reason and the flow of soul."' (C, 51-2)

Angus Easson notes a shift in Gaskell's treatment of Deborah after the 'Our Society' section of the narrative.¹⁶¹ The rest of the narrative focus on the relationship between the Jenkyns sisters and on how Miss Matty's life changes after the death of her sister. Deborah's dictatorial interpretation of sisterhood means that she has infantilised Matty. The contrast between the sisters is apparent even in their letter writing habits: Deborah's are self-assured, whereas Miss Matty's are full of seditiously bad spellings, apologies, and hastily erased or revised sections in which she wanders erratically from Deborah's epistolary rules. Matty lets slip contraband

¹⁵⁹ Patricia Wolfe 'Structure and Movement in *Cranford*, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 23 (1968-1969), 161-76, p. 164.

¹⁶⁰ Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. 89.

¹⁶¹ *Elizabeth Gaskell*, p. 102.

words, which she anxiously tries to retract, but signal the liberalisation of Cranford through its modes of expression. Her use of the term 'hoaxing' is appropriately mutinous. She uses it to describe her brother Peter's penchant for the practical jokes which had so irritated their father:

'[Peter] seemed to think that the Cranford people might be joked about, and made fun of, and they did not like it; nobody does. He was always hoaxing them; "hoaxing" is not a pretty word, my dear, and I hope you won't tell your father I used it, for I should not like him to think that I was not choice in my language, after living with such a woman as Deborah. And be sure you never use it yourself. I don't know how it slipped out of my mouth, except it was that I was thinking of poor Peter.' (C, 93-4)

For a time after Deborah's death, Matty attempts to maintain the traditions of her sister. However, as the memory of Deborah recedes Miss Matty breaches her rules. Mary explains that with Deborah's death, 'something of the clear knowledge of the strict code of gentility went out too'(C, 109). It becomes necessary to interpret Cranfordian law more pragmatically, given the exclusive circumstances of female singleness:

As Miss Pole observed, 'As most of the ladies of good family in Cranford were elderly spinsters, or widows without children, if we did not relax a little, and become less exclusive, by-and-by we should have no society at all.' (C, 109)

The beginnings of a new liberality are evident in the party which Miss Barker holds some time after Deborah's death: Mrs Jamieson conveniently forgets all her snobbery about seed-cake, eats several slices, then proceeds to snore by the fire, her snores accompanied by those of her dog, Carlo; the ladies eat a supper which subverts all their elegant economy with its bright trembling jellies, scalloped oysters, potted lobster and succulent maccaroons sopped in brandy, and then, following Mrs Jamieson's lead, sup cherry brandy (merely, of course, for digestive purposes).

The revival of Matty's romance with seventy-year-old gentleman farmer, Mr Thomas Holbrook, who 'despised every refinement which had not its root deep down in humanity' (C, 69), is further indicative of the changes in her life. Matty had been forbidden to marry him by her sister and father, as they felt he belonged to the wrong social class. The lovers have been separated for over thirty years. Holbrook acts as a countering force to Cranford propriety: when Miss Matty, Miss Pole and Mary go to visit him, they eat lunch in the counting-house where he pays his labourers. His sitting-room is strewn with books purchased in accordance with his wide-ranging

literary tastes, and not because they 'were classical, or established favourites' (C, 74). As he and Mary walk together after lunch, he strides ahead in companionable silence, pausing occasionally to address fragments of poetry, in a kind, rough voice, to the odd tree or inspiring cloud. His free and easy use of literary reference implicitly counters Deborah's habit of staging her correspondence in Johnsonian prose, and is depicted as a spontaneous response to the natural charm of his environment.

Following Holbrook's death, Matty adopts the same style of widow's hat as Mrs Jamieson, so that Matty dons both this and Deborah's best hat intermittently and, on one occasion, accidentally and, of course, symbolically, wears one hat atop the other. Matty allows her maid, Martha, a follower, whereas her previous maid had had to conceal her suitor. Miss Matty comes to defend the married state against Miss Pole's aspersions, excusing her defence on the grounds that 'a husband can be a great protector against thieves, burglars and ghosts' (C, 157), and at least a married woman need not suffer as a spinster may from "being tossed about, and wondering where she is to settle" (C, 180). All this is paralleled by the marriage of Lady Glenmire, whom Matty's maid irreverently likens to "Mrs Deacon, at the 'Coach and Horses'" (C, 117), with a local surgeon, who is remarkable for his strong personal odour and want of refinement; a union which forces the Cranford spinsters to shift their position on matrimony. It is the fact that a marriage can occur amongst their associates which horrifies the ladies more than the individual characters of the couple. "Marry!" exclaims Miss Matty in aghast tones, "Well! I never thought of it. Two people that we know going to be married. It's coming very near! [...] Here, in Cranford, poor Lady Glenmire might have thought herself safe" (C, 166). Miss Pole claims that the news almost brought her heart to a stop, and is so keen to impart the news to Mrs Forrester that a fit of coughing seizes her:

I shall never forget the imploring expression of her eyes, as she looked at us over her pocket-handkerchief. They said, as plain as words can speak, 'Don't let nature deprive me of the treasure which is mine, although for a time I can make no use of it.' And we did not. (C, 168)

Male figures have repeatedly entered the Cranford community, and the entry of conjuror Signor Brunoni is significant. He ignites the womens' imaginations: 'Conjuration, sleight of hand, magic, witchcraft were the subjects of the evening' (C, 131). He dresses in Turkish costume, wears a false beard, and is designated the Grand Turk by Miss Pole. The image of Signor Brunoni is attached to their imaginations with such force, that a panic ensues among the ladies of Cranford.

There had been several genuine robberies in Cranford, and although the culprits had been apprehended and tried by the local judiciary, the ladies persistently fear robbery. Such fears are not the result of fevered spinsterish imaginations or repressed sexual fantasies but are shared by the community as a whole, irrespective of gender or marital status. Peter Keating mentions, in his notes to the 1976 Penguin edition of *Cranford*, that fears of this nature, although without foundation in this instance, were common to many small rural towns, where neighbourhoods could, on occasion, be regularly ransacked by teams of robbers, for which the whole population would be on the alert.¹⁶² However, the single women of Cranford do develop their unique response to their predicament:

... we used to make a regular expedition all round the kitchens and cellars every night, Miss Matty leading the way, armed with a poker, I followed with the hearth-brush, and Martha carrying the shovel and fire-irons with which to sound the alarm (C, 138)

Miss Pole hangs a man's hat in her lobby to deter burglars, and the women live in a state of near-seige, 'as if we were living among the Red Indians or the French' (C, 139). Indeed, Mrs Forrester suggests that the intruders may well be of French origin, with Signor Brunoni as their ringleader (because he wears a turban like Madame de Staël), punishing the Cranfordians for their pleasant relationship with the local aristocracy. In spite of such misgivings, the spinsters rally together to protect each other; Miss Pole moves her plate and person into Matty's house when she spots a suspicious-looking band of men pass her house, and the spinsters are all determined to brave the darkness of a lonely lane to visit Mrs Forrester on the anniversary of her wedding-day, lest solitude provide her with too sad a 'retrospect of her not very happy or fortunate life' (C, 147).

It is worth noting that the initiative permanently to accommodate some mode of masculinity and indeed foreignness comes from Mary Smith, herself rapidly on the way to being a Cranfordian spinster, and thus masculinity is not, as Martin Dodsworth suggests, forced upon this society. When Mary posts her letter to Peter Jenkins, asking him to make contact with Matty, she pauses to wonder at her actions, somehow recognising how little she can account for the future of her letter:

It would get tossed about on the sea, and stained with sea-waves perhaps; and be carried among palm-trees, and scented with all tropical fragrance; -- the little piece of paper, but an hour ago so familiar and commonplace, had set out on its race to the strange wild countries beyond the Ganges! (C, 182-3)

¹⁶² Peter Keating, ed., *Cranford* (London: Penguin, 1976), note 1, p. 351.

When conjuror Signor Brunoni turns out to be ill and luckless Samuel Brown, the women of Cranford rally to his aid:

... the great Cranford panic, which had been occasioned by his first coming in his Turkish dress, melted away into thin air on his second coming -- pale and feeble, and with his heavy filmy eyes. (C, 155)

Samuel Brown's wife and daughter, Phoebe, are welcomed into the community and Matty relinquishes her defences in favour of maternalism; the penny ball which Matty had used to check if there was a man under her bed, she covers with 'gay-coloured worsted in rainbow stripes' (C, 156) to give to Phoebe. As she confesses to Mary Smith:

I am just as fond of children as ever and have a strange yearning at my heart whenever I see a mother with a baby in her arms. [...] I dream sometimes that I have a little child -- always the same -- a little girl of about two years old; she never grows older, though I have dreamt about her for many years. I don't think I ever dream of any words or sounds she makes [...] but she comes to me when she is very sorry or very glad, and I have wakened with the clasp of her dear little arms round my neck. Only last night [...] my little darling came in my dream, and put up her mouth to be kissed. (C, 158-9)

Matty is redeemed from arid and patriarchally-dictated spinsterhood by her womanly biology, and the maternal softness which she embodies. She has been directly aligned with the figure of her mother throughout the narrative: her mother used to call Matty 'her right hand' (C, 158) and in her letters misspells as fulsomely as her daughter; both share a humble and natural concern for others. Matty also urges Mary not to be afraid of matrimony, and thus wins control of Cranford from the patriarchal forces of which her sister, Deborah, was the agent.

When Deborah Jenkyns tried to augment her income through investment, without training or experience, she chose unwisely to purchase shares in the Town and Country Bank, choosing on this one occasion to ignore the financial advice which she habitually accepted from Mary Smith's father. Bank failure later leaves Matty with an income of thirteen pounds a year. Faced with possible ruin, she conscientiously observes her own humane and decent principles. When she witnesses a tradesman's refusal to accept a Town and County bank note from a Mr Dobson, as he tries to purchase a shawl for his sweetheart, she intervenes despite all warnings, offering him five sovereigns for his note.

What appears to be a disaster gives Matty the only opportunity she has ever had to take care of herself. She presents an example to the other spinsters in her efforts to economise, and even attempts to give notice of dismissal to her maid, Martha, who hotly rejects her 'offer', preferring to care for Miss Matty rather than 'serve Mammon'. The Cranford spinsters and widows also band together and their spokeswoman, a weeping Miss Pole, secretly offers to support Matty financially.

Mary turns her attentions to the one solution to her poverty which Matty has never considered; that she find paid employment. Mary speculates on the appropriate employments for a middle-class woman of fifty-eight, whose talents are not of the marketable kind and whose training for any vocation is questionable. She rejects the idea that Matty could do needlework, as her eyesight is poor, and the thought of Matty teaching rapidly presents comic dimensions: 'it struck me that equators and tropics, and such mysterious circles, were very imaginary lines indeed to her, and that she looked upon the signs of the Zodiac as so many remnants of the Black Art' (C, 185). Finally, the idea dawns on Mary that Miss Matty should sell tea. A notion which is furthered by Martha's announcement that she and her suitor, Jem Hearn, are to marry and wish Matty to lodge with them.

Matty goes into trade as an agent for the East India Tea Company. She sells tea from her home, comforting herself with the assurance that men never buy tea. It is apparent that, had Deborah not died, such a move would have been impossible for Matty; as she admits, Deborah could not have borne such a fall in gentility (C, 180).

On the face of it genteel singleness seems to be defeated in *Cranford*. Either on the one hand it belongs to an attractive but fading past or on the other shows itself as liable to error and defeat. But this is a dangerously simple response to the complicated positions of the novel. Martin Dodsworth, pursuing his notion of the defeat of feminism, claims that Miss Matty's loss of fortune represents the defeat of Deborah and 'purges the book finally of the dangerous elements of its feminism'. He cites too Miss Matty's dependence 'upon those who have paid no regard for Cranford spinsterhood -- Martha and Jem -- and on the male, Mary Smith's father, who is called upon to sort out Miss Matty's affairs.'¹⁶³ Yet Martha has valued singleness and marries, at least in part, for Miss Matty's sake: in this light her marriage has an equivocal air of self-sacrifice. Similarly Mary's father's masculine values are not allowed to simply win the day. When Miss Matty chooses to consult a fellow tradesman on whether her business would damage his interests, the narrator's father scornfully regards this as:

¹⁶³ 'Women Without Men at Cranford', p. 143.

... 'great nonsense,' and 'wondered how tradespeople were to get on if there was to be a continual consulting of each other's interests, which would put a stop to all competition directly.' And, perhaps, it would not have done in Drumble, but in Cranford it answered very well; for not only did Mr. Johnson kindly put at rest all Miss Matty's scruples [...] but [...] he repeatedly sent customers to her, saying that the teas he kept were of a common kind, but that Miss Jenkyns had all the choice sorts. (C, 200-1)

Miss Matty is shown to be right in rejecting Mary's father's advice in favour of a more humane cooperative business practice. Her approach to business wins her both loyalty and custom -- which surely qualifies complete faith in 'male' methods of transacting business. And the very dangerous feminist practice of entering the public world of trade can hardly be constituted as a defeat of feminism.

The business of setting up in trade was almost the only resource available to the poorly educated spinster in circumstances such as Matty's; she has no practical, marketable ability. Feminist Mary Taylor emigrated to Wellington, New Zealand in 1845 and opened a small drapery establishment there, and her friend Charlotte Brontë writes perhaps somewhat discontentedly of the challenges which life offered to Taylor:

Mary Taylor finds herself free, and on that path to adventure and exertion to which she has so long been seeking admission. Sickness, hardship, danger are her fellow-travellers -- her inseparable companions [...] Yet these real, material dangers, when once past, leave in the mind the satisfaction of having struggled with difficulty, and overcome it. Strength, courage, and experience are their invariable results.¹⁶⁴

Taylor's adventurousness and determined pursuit of constructive employment never failed to astound Brontë; she heard tales of Mary's tenacity and cattle-dealing and there is a definite sense, in Brontë's correspondence of admiration for Mary's transgression of the common modes of middle-class ladyhood; as she writes to Ellen Nussey in 1846:

Mary Taylor sits on a wooden stool without a back, in a log house, without a carpet, and neither is degraded nor thinks herself degraded by such poor accommodation.¹⁶⁵

Taylor herself perceived that what limited unmarried women was the hope of marriage and of being provided for. Time which should be spent working or training

¹⁶⁴ *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters*, p. 285.

¹⁶⁵ quoted in A. James Hammerton, p. 81, from Clement K. Shorter, *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle* (London, 1931), pp. 338-9.

for work were instead spent in futilely waiting for a suitor: it was the waiting which effectively rendered single women incapable of facing independent life.

In *Cranford* Matty's venture proves moderately successful even though her sense of justice transcends her financial interests. From the beginning she opposes the commercialism of Drumble:

It was really very pleasant to see how her unselfishness and simple sense of justice called out the same good qualities in others. [...] People would have felt as much ashamed of presuming on her good faith as they would have done on that of a child. But my father says, 'such simplicity might be very well in Cranford, but would never do in the world.' And I fancy the world must be very bad, for with all my father's suspicion of every one with whom he has dealings, and in spite of all his many precautions, he lost upwards of a thousand pounds by roguery only last year. (C, 201)

The narrator, Mary, is a young single woman, whose name is not revealed until the fourteenth chapter. Pauline Nestor points out that use of a female narrator 'allows for a deeper, more sympathetic exploration of female community'¹⁶⁶ while Hilary Schor considers *Cranford* to be one of Gaskell's most experimental works in terms of narrative form because of 'the evolution of the narrator, Mary Smith, into a different kind of storyteller'. Schor observes that Mary's voice becomes increasingly defined and the role she takes in the novel becomes more active.¹⁶⁷

But perhaps most importantly of all Mary remains a spinster; she becomes an Amazon. In the early stages of the narrative, she comes and goes from Cranford with ease, but as she is more fully involved in its social life, she comes to regard any departure from Cranford as a form of banishment -- she feels deprived of its atmosphere, and longs for news of its events. Mary even comes to practise Cranfordian characterisation of men and their practices: 'My father's was just a man's letter; I mean it was very dull, and gave no information beyond that he was well' (C, 172).

Gaskell also, in part, seems to have intended Mary to function as an agent of Matty's rescue and Mary emerges as a self-appointed guardian to Miss Matty. She is the first to suggest that Matty could work for her living and she does Matty's accounts. She also functions in the narrative as a force against stultifying propriety and finds some Cranfordian dicta 'eminently dull and tiresome' (C, 134). And it is she who initiates the return of Peter. Fired by Matty's precarious financial circumstances, Mary writes to an 'Aga Jenkyns' in India (who she suspects may be

¹⁶⁶ Nestor, p. 50.

¹⁶⁷ Hilary Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace. Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 83, 87-88.

Matty's long-lost brother), and thus brings about the reunion of Matty and her brother. Indiscretion, as Mary confesses, is her chief fault, and she resolves to exercise prudence by writing secretly to Peter (C, 163). Patsy Stoneman considers the future of Cranford depends upon other people's children, and that therefore conciliatory attitudes towards heterosexual union are necessary for its survival.¹⁶⁸ The narrative does appear to support Stoneman's interpretation, yet such an interpretation is by no means exhaustive, and Cranford may survive in additional ways, given that Mary, herself belonging to a younger generation, becomes an Amazon. The point is that female independence must be fostered alongside and in co-operation with others ways of living, and need not be maintained only in exclusion and flight.

Miss Matty's period of independence is short since her long lost brother returns to live with her. However, his return does not signify the defeat of Cranford, as Martin Dodsworth suggests, nor does it signify 'a complete acceptance' of the male as Patricia Wolfe claims.¹⁶⁹ The return of Peter does indicate Cranford's new ability to extend sympathy outside its own boundaries, in the sense that, as Patsy Stoneman observes, Peter is also connected with the maternal forces which motivate Matty.¹⁷⁰ As Mary tells us:

He was the darling of his mother, who seemed to dote on all her children, though she was, perhaps, a little afraid of Deborah's superior acquirements. Deborah was the favourite of her father, and when Peter disappointed him, she became his pride. (C, 93)

Matty also likens him to Captain Brown, and it is through his agency that Mrs Brown and her baby daughter were saved in India -- an act which, ultimately, facilitated his reunion with Matty.

Peter's predilection for practical joking had, in the past, led him to affront Cranfordian snobbery, embodied by their father. Peter had dressed as a woman and consulted Parson Jenkyns, claiming that 'she' had read his one published sermon. This so appealed to the Rector's vanity that he "offered to copy out all his Buonaparte sermons for her" and Matty found that she "could hardly keep from laughing at the little curtsies Peter kept making, quite slyly, whenever my father spoke of the lady's excellent taste and sound discrimination" (C, 94). Indeed, no member of the household other than Matty had prior knowledge of the hoax. Peter's second, and most grievous offence, is that he dresses up as Deborah, disguising a

¹⁶⁸ Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987).

¹⁶⁹ 'Structure and Movement in *Cranford*', p. 161.

¹⁷⁰ Stoneman, p. 97.

pillow as a baby, and strolls in the garden, cooing to the child. When his father comes across him, Peter is being watched by a small crowd of people, whom the Rector delightedly imagines are admiring his rhododendrons. It is not long, however, before he discovers the real cause of their attention:

... 'his face went quite grey-white with anger, and his eyes blazed out under his frowning black brows; and he spoke out -- oh, so terribly! -- and bade them all stop where they were [...] and, swift as light [...] seized hold of poor Peter, and tore his clothes off his back -- bonnet, shawl, gown, and all -- and threw the pillow over the railings [...] and before all the people he lifted up his cane, and flogged Peter!' (C, 96)

Smarting from this humiliation, and having at this moment, as Matty tells us, become a man and no longer a boy, Peter leaves home, apparently never to return. His departure breaks his mother's heart, and she loses the will to live. His banishment literally is the death of maternalism in Cranford and his return coincides with the birth of Martha's baby.

Cranford is a site of female fantasy, enriched by the tales which its inhabitants devise. By story-telling the spinsters enlarge their lives, escape harsher cultural interpretations of their spinsterhood, and shelter each other from the chilling realities of Drumble. Pauline Nestor observes: 'Although Gaskell does not endorse a Cranfordian dismissal of the married state, neither does she discount the viability and worth of those single women's lives.'¹⁷¹ The 'male' interpretations of experience which had been characterised both by the figure of Parson Jenkyns and through the worst excesses of Deborah's rule, had had little room for self-fictionalising of the kind that preserves the Cranford community. Matty tells Mary Smith:

'My father once made us,' she began, 'keep a diary, in two columns; on one side we were to put down in the morning what we thought would be the course and events of the coming day, and at night we were to put down on the other side what really had happened. It would be to some people rather a sad way of telling their lives [...] I don't mean that mine has been sad, only so very different to what I expected.' (C, 158)

There are fears that the returned Peter might marry Mrs Jamieson but he shows his fidelity to the Amazons and fantasy. The miraculous tales of foreign adventure which guarantee Peter's popularity possess the same exotic dimension and narrative potential and depend upon the same degree of chosen credulousness as the spinsters' fabrications, horror stories and adopted terms which are used to shield

¹⁷¹ Nestor, p. 55.

them from their poverty and exclusion. Peter tells tales like Baron Munchausen's, 'more wonderful stories than Sinbad the Sailor' (C, 211), which include an account of accidentally shooting a cherubim in the Himalayas, to which Mrs Jamieson responds, "But, Mr Peter -- shooting a cherubim -- don't you think -- I am afraid that was sacrilege!" (C, 217). The Cranford ladies had already fantasised during his absence that he had 'been elected Great Lama of Thibet' (C, 163) and Mary finds that the Cranford ladies 'liked him all the better [...] for being what they called "so very Oriental"' (C, 211). He comprehends the potential of fantasy to overcome forms of dominance and uses it to quell Mrs Jamieson. His exoticism blends happily into the landscape of Cranford.

The narrative of *Cranford* is not so much a tract of feminist independence as a privileging of female over male power. Gaskell directs the course of the narrative so that the married state is given its due, but this by no means negates the unusual compensations of spinsterhood. Pauline Nestor regards it as significant that 'the criticism within Cranford of any unbending doctrine of female self-sufficiency is self-generated, and not the imposition of a heterosexual status quo'.¹⁷² However, it is important to note that *Cranford* contains none of the scepticism about heterosexual union which was to invade many later nineteenth-century texts.

Gaskell certainly conveys the point that spinsterhood need not be about propriety (etiquette would barely allow Matty to work -- and even the form of work she can choose is conditional upon her class status) but this does not make *Cranford* an attack on celibacy. It is, I think, at this point that critical misreadings set in. Gaskell writes to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth in 1850 of the dilemmas which she perceives in the single state:

Do you know a little book [...] called *Passages in the Life of a Daughter at Home*? It is very painful, and from the impression of pain, which, in despite its happy ending, it leaves upon one I think it must want some element of peace, but still it is very true, and very suggestive; and a description to the life of the trials of many single women, who waken up some morning to the sudden feeling of the *purposelessness* [...] of their life.¹⁷³

Gaskell never deviates from her belief in the sense of direction which maternity gave to women's lives:

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁷³ Elizabeth Gaskell to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, (May 1850), in *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* edited by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 117.

I am always thankful [...] that I am a wife and a mother and that I am so happy in the performance of those clear and defined duties; for I think there must be a few years of great difficulty in the life of every woman who foresees and calmly accepts single life.¹⁷⁴

According to Gaskell the urge to motherhood is the presiding spirit of women's nature and the lack of opportunity for spinsters to satisfy this urge was a great loss. But Gaskell equally insinuates that the spinster can still satisfyingly exercise maternal feelings in other ways. Gaskell does not suggest that all spinsters are happy, but rather that spinsterhood, lived appropriately, may have a sweet yet lively innocence about it, and that the support that spinsters give each other can amount to a different kind of love, not marital, but true and steadfast for all that.

All the representations I have discussed were familiar to the mid-century Victorian reader. The middle-class Victorian woman felt an active engagement with the fiction of her culture -- from Frances Power Cobbe reading 'Aurora Leigh' as a rallying call to women in the arts to the women who donned the white bonnets, shawls and gowns made fashionable by *The Woman in White*.¹⁷⁵

A study of these representations of middle-class spinsters in fiction both adds a new dimension to texts and provides routes into nineteenth century feminism. The very entry of such figures as central actors and narrators in mid-century narratives constitutes what amounts to an assault on the predominant structuring of narratives. And these restructurings in turn ask how women can become individuals in a society which emphasises their relatedness and their duty to be an influence for good in the middle-class Victorian home. At the same time, the very idea of feminine influence proved problematic for many Victorian women; 'I should like to see,' Mary Taylor hotly observes, 'a human being, man or woman, whose main business was to influence people. How do they make a business of it? What time does it begin in the morning? And how do they fill, say a few hours every day in the doing of it?'¹⁷⁶ The rebellions of middle-class spinster figures are tense with warnings for patriarchal values. Revelations that women feel as men feel and that single women may prefer vocation and the exercise of their faculties to aunthood and good works might well seem alarming.

Villette is the most innovative text in its representation of the single woman at mid-century. Brontë tries to balance plot and narrative around a middle-class

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁵ S. M. Ellis, *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and others* (London: Constable, 1951), pp. 29-30.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Taylor, 'What Am I To Do?', *The First Duty of Women*, p. 14.

spinster's need for some form of community along with meaningful work and independence. Lucy Snowe confronts her destiny, re-thinks and narrates her experience, picks over the dilemma of her type, not to assume a gorgeous and limitless freedom, to be inscribed in the 'who's who' of her time, but at first just to move a little, enjoy the first stirrings of active public work, cast out the Miss Havishams inside her, feel the spaces about her, and realise that time can be her own.

At mid-century the feminists were preparing to fight on the battleground of the single woman's life. Mrs William Grey addressed the Chelsea Literary and Scientific Institution in 1875:

The conquest of a higher position in public estimation must be made by our single women, who, not being bound like married women to care for the things which please their husbands, may claim the right to devote themselves to the things of the Lord, the cultivation of whatever faculty He has given them towards perfection.¹⁷⁷

According to Mrs Grey, marriage represented no more than a concession to human frailty, and best suited the type of woman who modelled herself on Eve, 'tempted by the serpent, and in her turn tempting the man to forbidden fruit', whereas the single woman is of the same order of womanhood as 'the women who followed their Master to the foot of the cross'.¹⁷⁸ Such women were far from superfluous, as in Britain alone:

... they gave us in literature, Miss Austen, Miss Edgeworth, Joanna Baillie, Harriet Martineau, Frances Power Cobbe. Was Elizabeth Barrett superfluous till she became Mrs Browning? In science, was Miss Herschell superfluous, whose labours were invaluable to her father and brothers? Was the devoted sister of the poet Wordsworth superfluous? In philanthropy, could they count as too many Florence Nightingale, Lady Burdett Coutts, Mary Carpenter, Octavia Hill, and the great sisterhood of nurses of every denomination, under every garb? Could we spare Miss Davies and Miss Buss in education?¹⁷⁹

Novels which placed the figure of the middle-class single women centrally were increasingly to contend for that larger area of life outside the emotions, which had so often been occupied by the narrative of 'male' experience. The spinster was, in one of her most powerful forms, to emerge later in the century as Gissing's 'odd women', women kicking against the social order, renouncing the hero and his lies.

¹⁷⁷ Mrs William Grey, 'Old Maids', reported in *Women and Work* 43 (27 March 1875), 5-6, (p. 6).

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 6.

Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot, acting out the roles cast by their names, declare their revolutionary intentions. Mary Barfoot proclaims:

'We live in a time of warfare, of revolt. If woman is no longer to be womanish, but a human being of powers and responsibilities, she must become militant, defiant. She must push her claims to the extremity.'¹⁸⁰

She venture into the wilderness of the patriarchy only to re-emerge, cleansed and powerful.

¹⁸⁰ George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (1893), (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 135-6.

CHAPTER TWO

The Virtues of Honest Trade in Margaret Oliphant's *Kirsteen*

'Single woman! Is there not something plaintive in the two words standing together?' asked one anxious Victorian woman.¹ For after all, marriage, according to Emily Faithfull, was regarded as 'the sole and inevitable destiny of any woman'² and Sarah Stickney Ellis, the author of a treatise on women written in 1842, approved of this principle. Wives were spiritual in character, the 'poetry of life', according to Ellis, the redeemers of their husbands' souls, husbands who may, dozing by the domestic hearth in a 'heavy after-dinner sleep', nod into prosaic materialism without the uplifting influence of the matron.³ John Ruskin too supposed that it was only proper to protect woman, who was characterised by incorruptible goodness and the sweet ordering of things, from coming to any harm, by keeping her within the home. Man was 'the creator, the discoverer, the defender' and woman 'infallibly wise -- wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation'.⁴ According to W. R. Greg it was the nature of woman to be connected with other existences 'which they embellish, facilitate and serve' and which fulfil the 'essentials of woman's being: they are supported by, and minister to, men'.⁵ In this version of woman's nature it is only, as it were, through duty and sacrifice, through sitting in draughts and eating small portions, that woman may discover the true meaning of her presence on earth.

In *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* Dinah Mulock Craik, speaking more generally, suggests that women's energies, having no other outlet, were being devoted to:

... the massacre of old Time. They prick him to death with crochet and embroidery needles; strum him deaf with piano and harp playing -- not music; cut him up with morning-visitors, or leave his carcass in ten-minute

¹ Dora Greenwell, 'Our Single Women' *North British Review* (February 1862), p. 63.

² Emily Faithfull, 'Open Council', *English Woman's Journal* (September 1862), p. 70.

³ Sarah Ellis, *The Daughters of England* (Fisher: London, 1852), p. 157.

⁴ John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', *Sesame & Lilies, The Two Paths etc.* (London: J. M. Dent, 1928), pp. 58-9.

⁵ W. R. Greg, 'Why are Women Redundant?', *Literary and Social Judgements* (London: Trubner, 1868), p. 364. Greg intended such comments to be directed in the first instance at female domestic servants, work which he approved for single women, but also intended his remarks more generally to be a description of the essential nature of womanhood.

parcels at every 'friend's' house they can think of. Finally, they dance him defunct at all sorts of unnatural hours; and then, rejoicing in the excellent excuse, smother him in sleep for a third of the following day.⁶

It is in the light of this kind of commentary that we may usefully read the treatment of women's relationship to issues of feminine identity in the fiction of the second half of the century.

The popular Victorian novel assumed that women sought marriage and that they were rarely the correct material for heroines when they had no marital prospects. Heroines, Margaret Oliphant writes in an article on Charles Dickens in 1855, were 'a sadly featureless class of well-intentioned young women'. Oliphant found Dickens's ambition to create acceptable heroines a laudable one, as Dickens would be struggling against the habits of imagination of his own sex; the 'indistinct visions of beauty and sweetness' which were presented as aspects of female heroism usually derived, for the most part, from the male writer's perceptions of womanhood.⁷ They were youthful, attractive and had unimpeachable manners, doubtful intellectual interests (if these were not on the point of extinction) and almost always were married off on the last page. However, silly lady novelists, claimed George Eliot, were just as likely to churn out saccharine heroines. Eliot's description of the heroine whose nose and morals match wittily undermines the vogue for such fictions:

The heroine is usually an heiress [...] with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers indicated beyond. Her eyes and wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb *contralto* and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues.⁸

She is, of course, certain to marry well.

The middle-class Victorian ideal of the angel in the house prescribes wedding bells in countless novels. In her article 'Novels', published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in September 1867, Oliphant observes that the novel is 'precious to

⁶ Dinah Mulock Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858), p. 10.

⁷ Margaret Oliphant, 'Charles Dickens', *Blackwood's Magazine* 77 (April 1855), 451-66, (pp. 464-5).

⁸ George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856), 442-61, (p. 442).

women and unoccupied persons' and laments the effect that contemporary fiction might have upon such readers, regularly presented with modern heroines who are:

... driven wild with love for the man who leads them on to desperation before he accords that word of encouragement which carries them into the seventh heaven; women who marry their grooms in fits of sensual passion; women who pray their lovers to carry them off from husbands and homes they hate; women, at the very least of it, who give and receive burning kisses and frantic embraces, and live in a voluptuous dream, either waiting for or brooding over the inevitable lover.⁹

Oliphant characterises such writing as 'protest' fiction, and traces its emergence back to Jane Eyre's first complaint against the circumstances of her narrow lot. Protest fiction, Oliphant asserts, places an undue emphasis upon the heroine's need for a lover and wrongly bemoans the solitude of the single woman:

When the curate's daughter in *Shirley* burst forth into passionate lamentation over her own position and the absence of any man whom she could marry, it was a new sensation to the world in general [but] [...] we have grown accustomed to the reproduction, not only of wails over female loneliness and the impossibility of finding anybody to marry, but to the narrative of many thrills of feeling much more practical and conclusive. What is held up to us as the story of the feminine soul as it really exists underneath its conventional coverings, is a very fleshly and unlovely record.¹⁰

As early as the mid-century Oliphant detailed a new movement in Victorian fiction in response to the 'plight' of the spinster, which she contested was not as hard as commentators claimed, nor was the social visibility of the single woman a new phenomenon:

There were single ladies [...] as long as anyone can remember, yet it is only within a very short time that writers and critics have begun to call the attention of the public to the prevalence and multiplicity of the same. 'What are we to do with our spinsters?' asks, with comic pathos, one of the many reviewers of the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*; and our enlightened contemporary, the *Athenaeum*, congratulates itself that even novels [...] begin to see the propriety of recognising the condition of the old maid; and even though they ultimately marry their heroine, suffer her first to come to years of extreme discretion, and to settle upon her own mode of life.¹¹

⁹ Margaret Oliphant, 'Novels', *Blackwood's Magazine* 102 (September 1867), 257-280, (p. 259).
¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 259.

¹¹ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Condition of Women' *Blackwood's Magazine* 83 (February 1858), 139-54, (p. 141).

Oliphant makes the tongue-in-cheek remark that social commentators, in order to attain their startling statistics concerning the numerousness of single women, must count as single women female children of nursery age. 'Our age,' Oliphant observes, 'is not the inventor of feminine celibacy'.¹²

'The Grievances of Women' which Oliphant wrote for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1880 contains her most extended and feminist analysis of the cultural situation of Victorian women. Women's work in the domestic sphere is underrated or unacknowledged despite the fact that 'half of the work of the world is actually accomplished by women': the balance and preservation of society depends upon such partially visible female labour without which it would be a 'chaos of accidents'. Of working-class women Oliphant states:

So far as I can see, the working-man's wife [...] has harder and more constant work than her husband [...] To talk of the great mass of working women [...] in a pretty and poetical way as the inspirers of toil, the consolers of care, by whose smiles a man is stimulated to industry, and rewarded for his exertions, would be too ridiculous for the most rigid theorist. Whatever powers of this passive kind may be possessed by the wife of the bricklayer or carpenter will stand her in little stead if she does not put her shoulder to the wheel.¹³

Oliphant feels that any critique of the difficulties endured by women must also take account of the trials of maternity, 'interrupting yet intensifying that round of common toil' and that women who face the dangers of childbirth 'are perpetually exposed to dangers as great as those of an army in active service'.¹⁴ She goes on to refer to 'the sense of injustice which exists more or less in every feminine bosom -- injustice actual and practical, which may be eluded by all sorts of compromises and expedients, and injustice theoretical and sentimental, which is more difficult to touch'. This sense of injustice, she continues, persists in the form of a hereditary female 'consciousness of injustice [...] it has been handed down to [women] [...] from our mothers, it descends from us to our daughters'.¹⁵ This is a sentiment which seems to possess the same linear drive as Woolf's suggestion that 'we think back through our mothers if we are women'.¹⁶ There are several such parallels between Oliphant and Woolf; they give the same firm attention to the practicalities of

¹² *ibid.*, p. 148.

¹³ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Grievances of Women' *Fraser's Magazine* (May 1880), 698-710, (p. 702).

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 704.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 700.

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929), p. 114.

independence. Woolf inherited five hundred pounds per annum at the same time as women were granted the vote, but Woolf thought that of the two, the vote and the money, 'the money [...] seemed infinitely more important'.¹⁷

Strong-minded women and quixotic old maids often provided a source of humour in the nineteenth century novel and spinsterhood was accurately recognised by writers such as Oliphant and Charlotte Brontë as a stigma. Margaret Oliphant did much to rehabilitate the spinster within her fiction where the single life is not always a transitional one. In her novel *Kirsteen* (1890)¹⁸ the spinster does not languish while waiting for a husband, nor does she live through others; she is, more often than not, central to the resolution of conflict. Kirsteen must continually fight for authentic existence, singleness does her no favours, but Kirsteen achieves that difficult self-definition by the very intensity of her struggle.

Although a large part of Oliphant's fiction does tend to support nineteenth-century directives concerning the appropriate life for the middle-class woman, her selection of a single woman as heroine for *Kirsteen* signifies a departure from convention. Nor can a model for Kirsteen be found in the novels of Oliphant's Scottish predecessor, Susan Ferrier, herself a spinster. Ferrier's 'long-chinned spinsters' in *Marriage* (1818) are obscure and caricatured figures; their personalities are reduced to obstinacy, dull good-nature or confusion. Jenni Calder points out that Ferrier's female figures 'have no reality except in terms of the marriages they make, or fail to make, or make and then ruin'.¹⁹ The non-fiction writer, Sarah Ellis, who was to emerge as the handmaiden of the Victorian patriarchy and doyenne of wifedom, might well have written an entirely different series of advice manuals for women, casting a unique light on spinsterhood, since she was for thirty-eight years a spinster, until her union with the missionary, Madagascar Ellis. But Sarah Ellis treated singleness endured as a potential dowry, a time which would allow a woman to accumulate the accomplishments to attract a husband and purchase the unsolitary life.

Certainly in the unfinished novel *Weir of Hermiston* (1896) Robert Louis Stevenson treats his spinster figure, Kirsty, with compassion and insight, but she is only the sub-heroine of the novel and his representation of the spinster is neither sustained nor elaborated. She may, as Stevenson describes her, wash floors with her heart, but her tragedy, as far as we can tell, was not to have been central to the narrative. Margaret Oliphant, perhaps because of the style of her life, 'of carrying a whole little world' with her whenever she moved, understood the bonds of domestic

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁸ Margaret Oliphant, *Kirsteen* (1890), (repr. London: Dent, 1984).

¹⁹ Jenni Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 18.

life better than some of her contemporaries and could probably see shortcomings in the role of wife-mother, although Oliphant never denies, and is in this sense typically Victorian, that mothering is a woman's highest function.²⁰

Margaret Oliphant's talent was expended over an increasingly large area as she attempted, beginning at the age of twenty-one, to pay debts; those incurred by her brother Willie in London, a 'little bill [...] paid and never known of at home', those for the maintenance of her husband Frank's expensive workshop, and then later in life those that paid for the upkeep of spendthrift sons and diligent nieces. Oliphant characterises her dependents with affectionate exasperation: 'there are all the helpless young people, boys who ought to be earning their own living [and] girls who can't, but would somehow if I was out of the way'.²¹ Oliphant's art always had an ancillary function, and throughout her autobiography she stresses the point that her writing talents were always subordinated to the needs of her family:

I have always had to think of other people and to plan everything [...] always in subjection to the necessity which bound me to them. On the whole, I have had a great deal of my own way [...] but only at the cost of infinite labour [...] When my poor brother's family fell upon my hands, and especially when there was a question of Frank's education, I remember that I said to myself, having then perhaps a little stirring of ambition, that I must make up my mind to think no more of that, and that to bring up the boys for the service of God was better than to write a fine novel.²²

After reading Oliphant's autobiography Virginia Woolf felt she could only deplore the circumstances which had forced Oliphant to write readily marketable popular fiction: 'Mrs Oliphant sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that she might earn her living and educate her children'.²³ Oliphant confessed that she could not afford 'to live the self-restrained life which the greater artist imposes upon himself'²⁴ and so she became a self-professed 'general utility woman' for *Blackwood's Magazine*.²⁵ Oliphant's contemporary Henry James admired Oliphant's selfless resilience but, as

²⁰ Margaret Oliphant, *Autobiography* (1899), edited by Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 16. All subsequent references to the *Autobiography* will be taken from the Oxford University Press edition.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 27, 155.

²² *ibid.*, p. 16.

²³ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952), p. 116.

²⁴ *Autobiography*, p. 16.

²⁵ quoted in Merryn Williams, *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 23, from Margaret Oliphant, *Annals: Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and his Sons*, 2 volumes (1897), volume 2, p. 475.

Merryn Williams notes, disapproved of what he characterised as Oliphant's 'feminine' approach to her work:

The poor soul had a simply feminine conception of literature: such slipshod, imperfect, halting, faltering, peeping, down-at-heel work -- buffeting along like a ragged creature in a high wind, and just struggling to the goal, and falling in a quivering mass of faintness and fatuity. Yes, no doubt she was a gallant woman -- though with no species of wisdom -- but an artist, an artist!²⁶

James concedes that praise is due to Oliphant, due to her 'gallantry'. In a review of Oliphant's fiction in *Harper's Weekly* following her death in 1897, he conceded that her quiet life-long labour showed a high degree of personal bravery but did not of itself recommend her as a writer of fiction:

She worked largely from obligation -- to meet the necessities and charges and pleasures and sorrows of which she had a plentiful share. She showed in it all a sort of sedentary dash -- an acceptance of the day's task and an abstention from the plaintive note.²⁷

James found the quality of Oliphant's writing remarkable given its quantity. Yet in a review of *White Ladies* for the *Nation*, he asks the questions that perplexed other critics and indeed Oliphant herself:

Is this a writer capable of finer things, jaded and demoralised by incessant production? or is it a writer in whom inspiration naturally flows thin, who has thoroughly learnt the trick of the trade, and who, in grinding out a smooth, tame, respectable novel, is simply fulfilling her ideal?²⁸

James's assessment of Oliphant's fiction depends on his construction of her as a woman writer. He finds her novels superior in comparison to other examples of 'female' writing but suggests that her style is marred by its lack of a 'masculine' consciousness or at least by that characteristically feminine entanglement in familial obligations which ruins the fiction she might have been capable of producing; domestic pressures apparently result in incompetent writing. James's description of Oliphant's writing practice is couched in metaphors of feminine domesticity; with the thimble of female art on her thumb Oliphant produces, as James describes it,

²⁶ quoted in *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography*, pp. 57-58, from H. Montgomery Hyde, *Henry James at Home* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 110.

²⁷ Henry James, 'London Notes', *Harper's Weekly* (21 August 1897) reprinted in Henry James, *Essays, American and English Writers* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1406-1413, (p. 1412).

²⁸ Henry James, 'New Novels', 23 September 1875, *Nation*, repr. in *Essays* pp. 26-33, (p. 29).

'fiction by the square yard'.²⁹ Hence even *Kirsteen*, a novel which James admired, seems aesthetically marred:

... so much of the essence of the situation in *Kirsteen* strikes me as missed, dropped out without a thought, that the wonder is all the greater of the fact that in spite of it the book does in a manner scramble over its course and throw up a fresh strong air.³⁰

James's criticisms typify responses to Oliphant's writing; she is viewed as a pertinacious and stoical worker rather than an aesthetically driven intellect, although James did recognise the spirited quality of Oliphant's struggle with the circumstances of her life: 'She was really a great *improvisatrice*, a night-working spinner of long, loose, vivid yarns, numberless [and] pauseless'.³¹

Oliphant spent her energies continuously writing: we are told that she developed a sore on her writing hand. The pressure of on-going debt meant that she expressed herself in almost every imaginable medium: essay, novel, history, children's narrative, travelogue and political commentary. Oliphant herself felt that her writing was not authentically intellectual, had none of the angst and spirituality of the Brontës or the sheer intelligence of George Eliot or Elizabeth Barrett Browning. One commentator in the *Edinburgh Review* suggests that Oliphant's maternalism directly interfered with her ability to write good fiction and compares her status to that of other women writers who managed to avoid the bonds of maternity:

George Eliot was childless and George Sand was a mother indeed, but one to whom her child was an interest scarcely competing with her art or her various loves. To Mrs Oliphant her children were the universe; she lived in them and for them, and in their lives she built up a new happiness to which her own success was only contributory [...] It may be an accident -- but more likely it is not -- that the women who have been great artists have been childless women.³²

Oliphant's writing then is felt to be limited by her pragmatism, by economic necessity, and her intellect is felt to range over all subjects without mastery of any. In a way she seems to typify so many educated Victorian women who tried to survive within the confines of narrow expectations, avoiding the partisanship of

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁰ 'London Notes', p. 1413.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 1412.

³² Anonymous, 'The Autobiography and Writings of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant', *Edinburgh Review* (July 1899), 26-47, (p. 37).

sexual or other politics and remaining faithful to some notion of objective principles and culture. On one occasion, for example, in 1861 Oliphant, sensing perhaps that she had overstepped the feminine line, writes to William Blackwood from Italy, humbly begging his pardon for writing unsuitable liberal commentary (which Blackwood chose not to publish) on the Florentine revolution.³³

Oliphant's existence then is an account of a self-disciplined life which paradoxically seems to issue in undisciplined fiction. In a revealing commentary upon an eighteenth-century Scottish predecessor, Lady Grisell Baillie, Oliphant expresses her frank admiration of Baillie's ability to withstand the 'pressure of the *must*'; 'The moral of her [...] life is this, what she has to do she will do, be it hard or easy [...] she makes no reasonings with necessity -- never runs away from anything'.³⁴ Any irregular or undutiful imaginings Oliphant may have had were to be confined by practical wage-earning pragmatism. But her belief in the ultimate authority of duty to the family did not result in passivity but rather in hard-working and inventive responsibility. What makes Oliphant so unacceptable a writer to many critics is that she denied art its rarity; according to Oliphant the production of literature is not so very different from any other form of labour. She admired the journal of Sir Walter Scott because he 'makes no wonder of his work though he likes it, and carries it on honestly and cheerfully with its due importance, yet not enough to eclipse a single field or forest, far less the mountains or the stars!'³⁵

Margaret Oliphant, then, effectively lived the life of what we would in the present time describe as that of a single parent and it seems most generous of her that when she does treat the position of the unmarried woman in her fiction she does so without giving her quite as many burdens as she herself suffered from. Kirsteen's bonds, however, are considerable and her success, if we compare her with other Victorian heroines who are forced to work, is remarkable.

From mid-century to the eighteen-nineties it may have been the case that there was a gradually developing market for spinster heroines. Not only was the 'plight' of the unmarried woman, her exclusion from marital domesticity and her increasing visibility in areas of public life so much raw material for the novel, but also, almost conversely, the issues of marital and heterosexual union which so dominated the plotting of the middle-class Victorian novel meant that the figure of the spinster, with her assumed desire to enter into marital union, could prove to be

³³ For further information see *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography*, p. 31.

³⁴ Margaret Oliphant, 'Family History', *Blackwood's Magazine* 80 (October 1856), 456-471, (p. 467).

³⁵ Margaret Oliphant, 'Men and Women', *Blackwood's Magazine* (April 1895), 641-651.

acceptable material for such narratives. Her femininity was at odds with her resistance, even if this was presented as involuntary, to marriage. Bachelor figures, on the other hand, appeared to experience a minimal degree of contradiction between their masculinity and their non-marital status. They were single because they were wise, and were most readily represented as cheerful celibates and the reluctant quarry of packs of desperate and designing spinsters. Elderly bachelor heroes are consistently celebrated -- perhaps nowhere more markedly than in *Pickwick Papers* (1837) with its joyful celebration of Mr Pickwick and the male celibacy he represents. When Pickwick evades the clutches of Mrs Bardell, readers wipe their brows in relief. It never seems necessary for Dickens to account for Pickwick's bachelor life other than as a piece of good luck and we first encounter Pickwick when he is about fifty or sixty years old, by which time his past is spoken for. Even in *Great Expectations*, although Pip resigns himself to the single life very unwillingly, and, as it turns out, probably only for a curtailed period of time, his singleness is presented as a grievous and damaging state only in so far as it is less directly his choice than the result of thwarted romantic inclinations. It is never posited as the transgression of his masculinity.

Kirsteen presents many single women who support themselves through meaningful employment; there is Marg'ret the housekeeper and 'giver of all indulgences' (K, 2) at Drumcarro, the home of Kirsteen's family. Marg'ret remains faithful to family memories and houses. She shows little desire to go forth and create an unprecedented life for herself, yet she is strangely powerful in altering the history that the novel gives us. Marg'ret is described by her mistress, Mrs Douglas, as "'a stand-by for everything about the place'" (K, 49) and she provides a sharp contrast to Mrs Douglas, a 'pale pink woman' (K, 1), whom she accompanies to Drumcarro as a maid at the beginning of her marriage. Mrs Douglas brings to her marriage little more than a piano and a few limply 'feminine' accomplishments, which prove to be no protection against her husband, who wants a wife to be only a domestic drudge. Marg'ret rescues her from this role by shouldering the work of the family herself, Marg'ret, the narrator affirms 'is not to be daunted, as she is no man's wife' (K, 42):

Poor Mrs Douglas had not vigour enough to make the least stand against her fate. But for Marg'ret she would have fallen at once into the domestic drudge which was all Drumcarro understood or wanted in a wife. With Marg'ret to preserve her from that lower depth, she sank only into invalidism -- into a timid complaining, a good deal of real suffering, and a conviction that she was the most sorely tried of women. (K, 33)

Kirsteen's mother describes herself as married to "'just meesery'" (K, 94) because "'it's little, little a lassie kens'" (K, 94) and her reproductive role is depicted by Oliphant as providing her with a route to indolence and selfishness, leaving the more important duties of household management and familial stability to Marg'ret and later to Kirsteen -- her responsibilities have devolved onto them -- while she remains 'entirely subject to her husband's firmer will' (K, 32).

All the single women in *Kirsteen* derive a sense of self-worth from their work, Marg'ret's sister Jean has constructed a profitable dress-making business through the 'virtues that specially belong to honest trade' (K, 180); her success is signified by such items as 'a large gold watch like a small warming-pan hooked to her side' (K, 156). While Miss MacNab, a quiet dressmaker, can fit gowns 'with something like a sculptor's art' (K, 54):

To see her kneeling upon her rheumatic knees, directing the easy fall of the soft muslin line to the foot which ought to peep from underneath without deranging the exactness of the delicate hem, was a wonder to behold. A rivulet of pins ran down the seam, and Miss MacNab's face was grave and careful as if the destinies of a kingdom were upon that muslin line. (K, 54)

Oliphant felt that it was in the interests of society to maintain a class of spinsters, whose qualities were often remarkable. She writes of Scottish spinsters in her 'Family History':

... such friends, counsellors, and aids they were, nearer than kindred. Old ladies, sometimes with harsh enough angularities of character, sometimes very plain in speech, yet somehow preserving about them a certain subtle bloom of maidenhood, the hidden delicate atmosphere in which they carried safe into old age the purified romance of youth.³⁶

Oliphant felt that single women 'were not the gentle souls of modern romance' spending their lives 'in recollection of a lost love'. Rather 'this class of celibates' behaved with 'emphasis in the world' and 'worked their reminiscences into the history of their time'. Yet Oliphant recognised the reprobation that the working middle-class spinster might face. She writes in 'The Grievances of Women' in 1880:

What the world does say when a woman outside of the bonds of marriage claims to be allowed to work for her bread as she best can is, that she ought to go back to her proper sphere, which is home.³⁷

³⁶ 'Family History', p. 459.

³⁷ 'The Grievances of Women', p. 706.

In the same article, Oliphant advocates the enfranchisement of widowed and single women, arguing that married women receive political representation through their husbands and so have less need of the vote:

Some of them have never had husbands; in which case it is sometimes asked, with the graceful courtesy which characterises the whole discussion, why such a privilege should be bestowed upon these rejected of all men, who have never been able to please or to attract what is called 'the other sex.' But this is illogical [...] since if these poor ladies have thus missed the way of salvation, their non-success should call forth the pity rather than the scorn of men who feel their own notice to be heaven for a woman, and who ought to be anxiously desirous to tender any such trifling compensation as a vote as some poor salve to the mortification of the unmarried.³⁸

It is not without relevance that Oliphant chose a single woman as the narrator and pivotal character of her earliest published novel, *Passages in the Life of Mrs Margaret Maitland, of Sunnyside* (1849). The gentle narrative of Oliphant's novel develops around the character of a spinster; 'a quiet woman of discreet years and small riches'.³⁹ The title tends to mislead the reader at first for what Oliphant presents is not so much a life of Margaret Maitland but rather of that portion of an elderly spinster's life which is lived through her adoptive daughter and an attractive young niece, and the marital choices they make. Oliphant accounts for Margaret's spinsterhood through the traditional disappointed first love explanation which so many Victorian novelists relied upon. Margaret was disappointed in her youth by the impiety of a suitor and because of her religious principles felt marriage impossible, but she has remained faithful to the memory of her first love. She refuses a subsequent opportunity to give up the single life (although in truth the elderly suitor who offers his hand is too ridiculous a figure to represent a real temptation). Margaret Maitland prefigures Oliphant's later heroines such as Kirsteen or Catherine Vernon in *Hester* (1883) in her strength of purpose and the emotional support she so generously offers to various friends and dependents. Margaret Maitland declares wonderingly: "'Truly it was a strange thing, that on me, a single woman, there should more charge of bairns than many a mother of a family is trusted with'" (*MM*, II, 96-7). Critical responses to *Margaret Maitland* were favourable and the device of a spinster narrator delighted one reviewer in the *Athenaeum* :

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 709.

³⁹ Margaret Oliphant, *Passages in the Life of Mrs Margaret Maitland, of Sunnyside* (London: Henry Colburn, 1850), p. 1. All subsequent reference to *Margaret Maitland* will be taken from the Colburn edition.

Its imaginary writer is, of her single self, sufficient to sweeten the tempers of all who have maintained a traditional antipathy to the *genus* Spinster: so artlessly kind, -- so modestly unselfish, does she prove herself to be as we follow the easy course of her simple revelations. There are Mistress Maitlands in real life: but we are not sure that the Maiden Aunt has ever before found so favourable a representative in print.⁴⁰

In Oliphant's opinion novels, 'those arbitrary matchmakers', normally involved the charting of life towards one solution -- marriage.⁴¹ In the preface to *Agnes* (1865) Oliphant writes that life 'lacks altogether the unity of a regularly constructed fiction, which confines itself to the graceful task of conducting two virtuous persons through a labyrinth of difficulties to a happy marriage [...] yet at the same time everybody knows that there are many lives which only begin after that first fair chapter of youthful existence is completed'.⁴² According to the criteria represented in such statements Oliphant can be viewed as a partisan of non-centricity in her fiction; she found the rigid plotting of women's lives in fiction in terms of heterosexual and marital fulfilment unlikely. Women's lives were larger and more ambivalent than such plots allowed, and love stories she found banal and ridiculous. More generally she disapproved of the ascendancy of what she would term egotism and hedonistic passion in much contemporary fiction.

From the common Victorian perspective spinsters were marginal but necessary figures at least when they were 'useful'. According to one social commentator, the useful spinster need not experience marriage and passion as 'the one grand necessity that it is to aimless lives' for 'the habitual faculty of usefulness gives them in themselves and with others [...] obvious value [...] which will for ever prevent their being drifted away, like most old maids, down the current of the new generation, even as dead May-flies down a stream'.⁴³ But in fiction the stand-by does not always receive just reward for a selfless old-maidhood, either in heaven or within the course of her own life. Katherine Tredgold, the spinster heroine of Oliphant's narrative *Old Mr. Tredgold* (1896) discovers that the burden of care does not lessen nor is it relieved or rewarded as she cares for an ungrateful father through his old age.⁴⁴ Katherine likens the years spent caring for her father to conventual life and at the end her father treats her like a nun without needs or desires, when he leaves his enormous fortune entirely to her attractive, ruthless and married sister

⁴⁰ Anonymous, 'Untitled Review of Margaret Maitland', *Athenaeum* (24 November 1849), 1178, (p. 1178).

⁴¹ 'The Condition of Women', p. 141.

⁴² Margaret Oliphant, *Agnes* (1865), quoted in *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography*, p. 68.

⁴³ *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Margaret Oliphant *Old Mr. Tredgold* (London: Longmans and Green, 1898). All subsequent reference to *Old Mr. Tredgold* will be taken from the Longmans and Green edition.

Stella, who has systematically pursued her own interests. Katherine's situation is ambivalent. She is entirely unpoliticised, is unattracted by feminism (she avoids reading any book which advertises as its main feature the 'Woman question'), yet she finds women who profess themselves unable to live without men 'immodest'. Ironically, given her position on feminism, one of her luckless suitors, Dr Burnet, speculates as to whether she seeks to avenge the wrongs of her sex by her persistent refusal to marry. He reflects coldly upon the appearance of the thirty-five year old Katherine; she is 'without any elasticity, [and has] prematurely settled down into the rigid outlines of an old maid' (*OMT*, 317). Yet this rigidity is more a question of his perception than her conviction.

The powerlessness in which her singleness results does rankle and yet Katherine mutely accepts that she is 'in her life of the secondary person [...] always inferior [and] [...] had learned unconsciously a great deal of self-repression' (*OMT*, 180). Oliphant does not provide any firm resolution to the narrative of Katherine's life in *Old Mr. Tredgold*. She leaves Katharine in a state of transition moving from her father's house, now the property of Stella, into a small cottage of her own. Oliphant further tantalises the reader by refusing to conclude the narrative according to the conventions of the Victorian novel by marrying Katherine to the most appropriate suitor. The narrator explains teasingly that the choice of conclusion is the reader's:

It is a great art to know when to stop when you are telling a story [...] Now, the good ending of a novel means generally that the hero and heroine should be married and sent off with blessings upon their wedding tour. What am I to say? I can but leave this question to time and the insight of the reader. If it is a fine thing for a young lady to be married, it must be a finer thing still that she should have, as people say, two strings to her bow. There are two men within her reach who would gladly marry Katherine, ready to take up the handkerchief should she drop it in the most maidenly and modest way. She had no need to go out into the world to look for them. (*OMT*, 450)

The life courses of the spinster in fiction had been frequently negatively presented. In the fiction of Dickens with his caricatured or symbolic spinsters or in Wilkie Collins, the unmarried woman had tended to appear as unfulfilled. When single women were positioned centrally in the narrative as heroines, spinsterhood and work often proved to be only a testing ground, a temporary discomfiture to be eased by marriage. 'Reader, I married him' though stressing the active agency of the woman can still function as literary ghetto. In *Villette* Lucy Snowe is a rare example of a

spinster who finds fulfilment through work, although this itself is, to some extent, dependent upon the love of Paul Emmanuel. Thus a narrative such as *Kirsteen* may be set alongside texts such as *The Bostonians* (1886) or *The Odd Women* (1893) as a suitable harbinger for new interpretations of the single woman in which the single woman was no longer to be rescued but emerged as rescuer herself, although *Kirsteen* lacks the overtly political emphasis of *The Bostonians* and active feminist consciousness of *The Odd Women*.

When the novel opens Kirsteen has "not a meenit to hersel" (K, 1) as she constantly attends her invalid mother. Her father has made his fortune through ruthless business practices in the West Indies, as a planter he had dealings with the slave trade, and local rumour has it that he is haunted by 'dream[s] of flogged women and runaways' (K, 32). However he appears remorseless and untroubled by his conscience: 'with all his narrow country notions strangely crossed by the traditions of the slave-driving period, with all his intense narrow personal ambitions and grudges, [he had] not an idea beyond the aggrandizement of his family' (K, 60). As his daughter, Kirsteen is at the mercy of Drumcarro who defines women as dependent nonentities who gain identity through their relationships with men -- all her sisters do this -- and Kirsteen is expected to marry any suitor of an appropriate background who will take her.

The restricted scope of middle-class women's education in the nineteenth century and its rigid and uneven structure treated female achievement as if it were part of a service industry. Demands were made on girls to cultivate their appearance and domestic skills. Oliphant touches upon the inadequacies of such an approach to female education in *Kirsteen*. The narrative points out that the girls, 'just as precious a gift from their Maker as their brothers' (K, 42), are expected to cheerfully endure the monotony of home life while they cultivate whichever 'feminine' attributes will catch them a husband. And Kirsteen and her sisters do not even receive the circumscribed education deemed appropriate for girls of the middle-classes:

Mr Douglas felt that every farthing spent upon the useless female portion of his household was so much taken from the boys, and the consequence was that the girls grew up without even the meagre education then considered necessary for women [...] They grew up in the wilds like the heather and the bracken, by the grace of nature, and acquired somehow the arts of reading and writing [...] but without books, without society. (K, 34)

Oliphant's short story 'The Library Window' (1895), which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1896, can stand as a metaphor for female dependency. The story is set mid-century and its narrator is a young woman who has the gift of

imagination, she enjoys dreaming as she pretends to read and, during a stay at her aunt's house, would sit half-hidden by a curtain in the 'deep recess' of a window seat in the drawing-room of that house, to be, as she tells us, 'a spectator of all the varied story out of doors'.⁴⁵ She becomes the eager recipient of a supernatural vision of a young man writing at the window of a College Library across the street. He sits at a writing-table which resembles her father's, his face is turned away from her and he appears to be writing on 'a long long page which never wanted turning' ('LW', 306). As she sits with her hands folded, a book forgotten on her lap, she is caught up in 'a sort of breathless watch, an absorption' ('LW', 305) as 'there was so much going on in that room across the street!' ('LW', 307). The narrator directly aligns the young writer whom she watches with the tradition of great male novelists by comparing him to Sir Walter Scott:

I trembled with impatience to see him turn the page, or perhaps throw down his finished sheet on the floor, as somebody looking into a window like me once saw Sir Walter do, sheet after sheet. I should have cried out if this Unknown had done that. ('LW', 307)

Noting her fascination with the view from the window seat an elderly relative asks "'is she bound to sit there by night and by day for the rest of her days?'" ('LW', 298). The window may be read as the barrier of sexual difference and differentiation, the woman sits in an enclosed female space like the space behind the red curtain which Jane Eyre hides in to read books while living with the Reed's; the man writing then becomes a vision of intellectual labour which cannot be attained by the girl, women can only be spectators. The narrator's Aunt Mary tells her "'women of our blood'" always have this longing "'it is a longing all your life after -- it is a looking -- for what never comes'" ('LW', 326).

In *Kirsteen* female desire is more brutally crushed. Mr Douglas is a domestic tyrant who bullies the women within his power. His control of the family home rests in part upon his ability to intimidate his female dependents. The conventional success of his sons, five of whom he has sent to work in India, also props up his sense of his own masculine superiority. The boys 'had been bred for this destination from their cradles' (K, 6) and are regularly exported to 'the incomprehensible Indian world' (K, 240) from which they rarely return. Although the young men are given the opportunity to experience life in an alternative community they are also oppressed in a different way, the trade in 'male' resilience means that they are 'bred'

⁴⁵ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Library Window' (1895) in *A Beleaguered City and Other Stories* edited by Merryn Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 289. All subsequent reference to 'The Library Window' will be taken from the Oxford University Press edition.

for export to the gruelling and fly-blown corners of the British Empire, with little allowance made for their own desires.

Among the young women, Kirsteen experiences her solitude more sharply as she 'was one of those who make a story for themselves'(K, 36) and is the only daughter to leave home alone and unaided. She is driven from the family home by her father's mercenary demands upon her, as he attempts to contract a marriage for her against her will. Her father arranges Kirsteen's marriage to an elderly admirer for whom she feels no love insisting, as Marg'ret puts it, that Kirsteen is "a creature of no account. A lass that has to obey her father till she gets a man, and then to obey him" (K, 86). Kirsteen's desire to sacrifice herself for the well-being of her family is thwarted, she is willing to perform any act of heroism other than that act of selflessness and dishonesty which will enable her to enter into a false and expedient marriage:

If there was anything that she had desired to do in her visionary moods it had been to sacrifice herself, to do some great thing for her mother, to be the saving of little Jeanie. She had made many a plan how to do this, how to perform prodigies for them, to deliver them from dangers. In her dreams she had saved both from fire and flood, from the burning house [...] or from the roaring stream.(K, 97)

But Kirsteen has also promised herself to a lover of her own choice, on the eve of his departure for India. The lovers are committed to 'wait for all the unfathomed depths of life, through long absence and silence, each invisible to the other' (K, 18).

Significantly, it is Marg'ret who offers Kirsteen her means of escape from corrupt marriage, offering her refuge with her sister Jean in London. As a spinster, Kirsteen finds that professional work rather than marriage allows her access to respectability. All her sisters, however, are socially placed through securing appropriate husbands.

It takes enormous courage for Kirsteen to travel to London to find work, a place from which, Kirsteen tells her sister Anne, a "person never can tell if they will ever win back"(K, 143) for London is 'something blazing into the night full of incomprehensible voices and things' (K,147). London is the single woman's India and Kirsteen's journey there is a voyage 'from the impossible to the possible -- from the solitudes of the hills into the world'(K, 110). She must chart her way through the strange landscapes of an 'undeciphered' world in much the same way as the boldest of male explorers. Oliphant explicitly describes her single woman as a new Columbus -- she is:

... a sailor like Columbus trusting himself absolutely to the sea and the winds, not knowing what awaited him [...] Kirsteen was not quite sure

whether she could understand the language which was spoken in London; the ways of the people she was sure she would not understand [...] Somewhere in the darkness that great city lay as the Western world lay before its discoverer [...] she had all the shrinking yet eagerness of a first explorer. (K, 147)

Oliphant uses the trope of exploration as a central metaphor for Kirsteen's journey. She describes Kirsteen's safe arrival in London as 'dark seas [...] traversed, the unknown depths fathomed, and paradise attained' (K, 154).

Kirsteen walks through 'the gloomy mystery of Hell's Glen' on the first night of her journey and then on Loch Long side faces near robbery by a nameless man and the unwanted attentions of Lord John. She continuously encounters male figures who act as trials of her independence, culminating in her uncomfortable visit to Dr Dewar's household in Glasgow. Her journey shares some features with Jeanie Dean's ordeal in the *Heart of Midlothian* (1818), although in Scott's novel the trials of Jeanie can be reduced to the rescue of a fallen woman by the agency of virtuous womanhood. *Kirsteen* is set in 1818 and its heroine's departure from home is as radical an act as Becky Sharpe's throwing her dictionary out of the carriage window: it is a rejection of inauthentic life.

In London Kirsteen becomes "a mantua-maker to support myself and help -- other folk" (K, 161). Kirsteen presents a challenge to notions of 'masculine' public work and 'feminine' domestic privacy upon which the 'separate spheres' ideology of male and female middle-class Victorian life was founded. A family acquaintance tells Kirsteen that home is "always the best place for a girl" (K, 175) and her father says of his daughter's desire for excitement and experience that "she must get a man to do that for her" (K, 44). Kirsteen, however, refuses to exist passively "when there are so many things to be done in the world" (K, 211). Her sister Mary is 'astonished with this new view' (K, 211) -- it is about the only time in the novel that anything manages to surprise the impervious Mary.

Kirsteen not only supports herself through her work but comes to derive real pleasure from it: 'She was not, perhaps, very intellectual, but she was independent and original' (K, 164) and she 'found a pleasure in heaping together and contrasting with each other the soft silken stuffs' (K, 165). Oliphant does not present ambition or professional skill as unwomanly, Kirsteen enjoys the exhilaration of profitable employment, the joy of an exacting craft; 'It may not be thought a high quality in a heroine,' the narrator explains, 'but Kirsteen soon developed a true genius for her craft' (K, 164). Kirsteen colours with pride at the prospect of earning her living and 'it is certain that she applied herself to the invention of petty confections and modifications of the fashions with much of the genuine enjoyment which attends an

artist in all crafts' (K, 165). Margaret Oliphant was concerned with the problem of the alienation of labour -- work should not exclusively be an act in the pursuit of profit or an act in the pursuit of pleasure. Oliphant herself worked for profit and also because she enjoyed working -- thus Kirsteen works for love of craft and love of profit. Oliphant explains in her *Autobiography*, she wrote because 'it gave me pleasure, because it came natural to me, because it was like talking or breathing, and besides the big fact that it was necessary for me to work for my children'.⁴⁶

Oliphant regarded her own writing primarily as a viable product, a printed item to be sold publicly at a profit to provide family revenue. Expenditure in both monetary and emotional terms dictated the rate and quality of her production of fiction; Merryn Williams reports that 'none of the novels she produced during her married life was especially good. She was living through all kinds of intense experiences [...] she had very little emotional energy to invest in her work'.⁴⁷ Oliphant was not uniformly proud of all her writing and wrote of the novels 'I should like at least half of them forgotten, they stare'.⁴⁸ She admitted of George Eliot that 'I used to be intensely impressed [...] with that curious freedom from human ties which I have never known' but that she had reached the conclusion that Eliot's lifelong sojourn in 'a mental greenhouse' meant that she lived at too great a distance from the humbling and compromised experience which so many have of life.⁴⁹ Oliphant regarded Eliot as a 'philosophic observer', a self-inventing intellectual, doing vigorous training in the life of ideas, with a spiritualised lack of interest in the common run of life.⁵⁰ If similarly sheltered from the demands of life, Oliphant wondered if she could have been a better novelist, aware that she had had episodes of excellence but never the opportunity to develop her skills. She admitted that George Eliot and George Sand made her half inclined to cry 'over my poor little unappreciated self':

I do feel very small, very obscure, beside them, rather a failure all round, never securing any strong affection [...] I acknowledge frankly that there is nothing in me -- a fat, little, commonplace woman, rather tongue-tied -- to impress anyone; and yet there is a sort of whimsical injury in it which makes me sorry for myself.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Autobiography*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography*, p. 27.

⁴⁸ *Autobiography*, p. 15.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

⁵⁰ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Anti-Marriage League', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 159 (January 1896), 135-149, (p. 135).

⁵¹ *Autobiography*, p. 17.

She continues, 'no-one ever will mention me in the same breath with George Eliot. And that is just.'

However, in a review of 1883 John Skelton suggests that although Oliphant may not be the most outstanding female novelist of the era, she is certainly 'the most remarkable woman of her time' in her ability to produce fiction of a high standard under pressing circumstances. Skelton sets Oliphant's 'happy womanhood' against the more implicitly sterile natures of Brontë and Eliot. Laden with domestic duties Oliphant had none of the opportunities afforded to some other women writers to concentrate on her writing, which makes her achievements all the more remarkable:

Mrs Oliphant has never had leisure for this absorbing devotion, this almost fierce concentration [...] Had Mrs Oliphant concentrated her powers, what might she not have done? We might have had another Charlotte Brontë or another George Eliot, with something added which neither of them quite attained, -- the soft gracious and winning charm of mature and happy womanhood.⁵²

In *Kirsteen* the heroine initially experiences some embarrassment at the prospect of learning a trade, as she suspects that such work is demeaning for a middle-class woman of her background, and treats her occupation as an interlude which will precede her marriage. However she comes to realise that she will enjoy no 'postscriptal life or new love' (*K*, 241) and that work is 'her established place' in life when her fiancé dies in India 'on some obscure field' with 'little glory or any advantage that she knew of gained' (*K*, 218). She can no longer approach her spinsterhood as a 'preparatory chapter' to the 'real' reproductive life of women, but must now reconceptualise singleness as a permanent state.

One could complain about Oliphant's limiting women's sphere of employment by making *Kirsteen* a mantua-maker, a trade connected with domesticity and which does not deviate in too large a degree from Victorian notions of appropriate employment for the middle-class woman (employment which extended the natural attributes of their domestic femininity). But forms of middle-class female employment were limited at that time (there could be no middle-class female bricklayers!), as Oliphant wrathfully observes in 1858:

A woman who cannot be a governess or a novel-writer must fall back upon that poor little needle, the primitive and original handicraft of femininity. If she cannot do that, or even, doing it, if stifled among a crowd of others

⁵² John Skelton, 'A Little Chat About Mrs Oliphant' *Blackwood's Magazine* 133 (January 1883), 73-91, (p. 80).

like herself, who have no other gift, she must starve by inches, and die over the shirt she makes.⁵³

Women must survive within the same economy as men and at least Oliphant did not make Kirsteen join the already cramped ranks of governesses or, as one working man puts it, some such "pingling trade like showing or hearing weans their letters" (K, 115).

Although Kirsteen proves to be adept at her trade and eventually finds herself able to repurchase land which the Douglasses had previously lost, winning a grudging respect from her father in the process, her family never learn to value her or respect her single status: 'Kirsteen was a rare and not very welcome visitor in the house she had redeemed. They all deplored the miserable way of life she had chosen, and that she had no man' (K, 341). Catherine Vernon, the spinster figure in Oliphant's earlier novel *Hester* (1883), is similarly resourceful and independent. The novel opens with an account of her rescue of the family bank from financial ruin and she goes on to enjoy an active and fruitful life in the community. She is equivocally presented:

Catherine Vernon was like Queen Elizabeth, a dry tree -- while other women had sons and daughters. But when the hearts of the mothers were torn with anxiety, she went free [...] She was an old maid, to be sure, but an old maid who was never alone. Her house had been gay with young friends and tender friendship. She had been the first love of more girls than she could count [...] she had -- at least since her youth was over -- never had occasion to remember the want of those absorbing affections which bind a married woman within her own circle. The children of the barren in her case were more than those of any wife.⁵⁴

She has excellent business sense and must rescue the family business from the financial corruption of male relatives more than once. Her monetary good sense and the benevolence of the financial protection she provides for her family is only grudgingly acknowledged. Indeed, her philanthropy gives rise to disaffected neighbours and resentful relatives who persistently misconstrue her motives for being generous:

Catherine Vernon, according to their picture of her, was a woman who, being richer than they, helped them all with an ostentatious benevolence, which was her justification for humiliating them whenever she had a chance, and treating them at all times as her inferiors and pensioners [...]

⁵³ 'The Condition of Women', p. 142.

⁵⁴ Margaret Oliphant, *Hester* (1883), (repr. London: Virago, 1984), pp. 22-3. All subsequent reference to *Hester* will be taken from the Virago edition.

They had grown to believe that she was all this, and to expect her to act in accordance with the character they had given her. (*H*, 59)

The narrative effectively offers the reader two heroines: Catherine and her impetuous young cousin, Hester, both of whom remain single, and it is through these characters that Oliphant addresses the middle-class Victorian ideal of dependent femininity, an ideal which Oliphant repeatedly debunks in various ways. Hester 'was not what people call unselfish -- the one quality which is supposed to be appropriate to feminine natures. She was kind and warm-hearted and affectionate, but she was not without thought of herself' (*H*, 37). Hester envies Catherine the opportunities which have presented themselves for her to act in the interests of the family and to work at the bank; when a suitor attempts to flatter Hester by suggesting that she would be sweet inspiration to male heroism she retorts:

'Do you really think [...] that the charm of inspiring, as you call it, is what any reasonable creature would prefer to doing? To make someone else a hero rather than be a hero yourself? Women would need to be disinterested indeed if they like that best. I don't see it.' (*H*, 331)

Hester's dreams of an appropriate outlet for her sense of heroism do seem to prefigure Kirsteen's longing to heroically provide for her family, and in both novels Oliphant displays the same belief in the unshakeable virtue of fidelity to familial structures, although she is obliquely aware that that such fidelity may appear to be unrewarded. The good are exploited by the careless. Kirsteen has to 'accept the position of inferiority' allotted to the single woman who would have been better with any sort of man even if, according to her brother's judgement, 'he had been a chimney sweep' (*K*, 341). Yet by the end of the novel her spinsterhood is depicted as both rewarding and beneficent: 'She drove the finest horses in the town, and gave dinners in which judges delighted and where the best talkers were glad to come' and 'she was well known not only as the stand-by of her family, but as the friend of the poor and struggling everywhere' (*K*, 342). Oliphant applauds individual courage and the spirit of Kirsteen's performance is shown to count for as much as her actual success. Despite this, Oliphant's conservatism insists in the end that Kirsteen's 'life was blank, though so full' (*K*, 266), as she has missed out on maternity. Even though Oliphant's representations of married women figures such as Mrs Douglas or Kirsteen's sister, Anne, reveal a large degree of dissatisfaction with dependent womanhood, an ideal which never fails to disappoint or anger Oliphant, her scepticism is always chaperoned by her belief in the high function of mothering.

It is apparent at the beginning of *Kirsteen* that the heroine has an honest directness which distinguishes her from her sisters and which makes her

nonconformist, irrespective of her single status. She will "'not marry a man to deceive him when I care for nothing but his money'" (K, 157) and is committed to one man even though 'silence would fall between them like the grave', for 'all the time she would be waiting for him and he would be coming to her' (K, 18). When such a commitment comes to be 'for death instead of for life' (K, 107) she is painfully aware of what she has lost; she must continue in 'the long life to come, which might go on and on for so many years' (K, 255) with the knowledge that "'No bairn will ever be at my breast -- no man will ever take my hand'" (K, 239).

But since it is necessary, she is quite strong enough to survive alone and to make a success of her life. Her courage is very like that of Lucilla Marjoribanks, in *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), who, after her father's death, realises that she is 'a penniless single woman with nobody to look to, and nothing to live on' but who still has 'no intention of sinking into a nobody'.⁵⁵ Lucilla recognises that:

... she had to fight her way by herself, and had nobody to look to. Such a thought is dreary sometimes, and there are minds that sink under it; but at other times it is like the touch of the mother earth which gave the giant back its strength; and Lucilla was of the latter class of intelligence. (MM, 358)

Lucilla is perplexed by the scarcity of the proposals which she receives, apart from her cousin's offer of marriage at the start of the narrative, 'society had laid no tribute of this description upon Lucilla's shrine' (MM, 339) and Oliphant chooses to avoid any extended description of the ten years of singleness which Lucilla spends in the company of her father from the ages of nineteen to twenty-nine:

The ten years [...] were very different from the ten years she had looked forward to, when, in the triumph of her youth, she named that period as the time when she might probably begin to go off, and would be disposed to marry. By this time the drawing-room curtains and carpets had faded a little, and Lucilla had found out that the delicate pale green which suited her complexion was not to call a profitable colour [...] Thus the moment had arrived to which she had looked forward, but the man had not arrived with it. (MM, 342)

This short section of commentary in the narrative of *Miss Marjoribanks* enables Oliphant to recognise Lucilla's single years a little elegiacally yet without giving them undue significance. The experience and history of spinsterhood seems to reside metaphorically in this parenthesis. Lucilla's ten years of service caring for her

⁵⁵ Margaret Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), (repr. London: Virago, 1988), pp. 411, 435. All subsequent reference to *Miss Marjoribanks* will be taken from the Virago edition.

father is a significant variation of the allowable history of the heroine, but ultimately does not depart completely from the fixity of romantic conventions. Moments such as these raise questions about the extent to which Oliphant complies with readerly expectations of heterosexual romance.

Lucilla Marjoribanks is an affectionately ironic projection of the idea of 'feminine' influence which was so promoted by the Victorian domestic ideology. She is originally represented as a gushing and selfless daughter who, following the death of her mother, vows to devote herself to the care of her father for a full ten years; Oliphant tells us, 'the great aim of her life [...] was to be a comfort to her dear papa' (*MM*, 58). Ostensibly, she exists only to facilitate and anticipate the pleasures of her widowed father but Lucilla is an 'accomplished warrior' whose unselfconscious chicanery allows her to exercise statesmanlike control of events in Carlingford; she unites several sets of lovers and successfully ensures the political ascendancy of Mr Ashburton, the Member for Carlingford. She constantly constructs outcomes for other lives through the play of her lively but orthodox imagination. Lucilla, we are told a little ironically, 'possessed in perfection that faculty of throwing herself into the future, and anticipating the difficulties of a position, which is so valuable to all who aspire to be leaders of mankind' (*MM*, 59). Indeed she can be taken, to some extent, as a version of Margaret Oliphant herself as she regulates the courses of lives within the narrative and builds her own tale; much of Oliphant's commentary on Lucilla is couched in terms which implicitly indicate such connections between the writer and her character: 'young men, like old men and the other less interesting members of the human family, were simple material for Miss Marjoribank's genius, out of which she had a great result to produce' (*MM*, 83). The 'great result' which Lucilla anticipates is not only a successful and prudent marriage for herself but, more importantly, the social good of Carlingford. Through the Thursday socials which she instigates and hosts Lucilla manages the destinies of the inhabitants of her locality, Grange Lane, and the social organisation of Carlingford comes to depend upon her. By the end of the novel Lucilla has so deftly managed affairs that she is moving on to influence the larger stage of local and national, rather than household, politics through the person of her newly-acquired husband, her cousin Tom. The Marjoribanks purchase the old family home at Marchbank and Lucilla decides that Tom will become an Member of Parliament and that she will reorganise the social life of the county. Oliphant makes the point that, although Lucilla's marriage appears to provide an orthodox conclusion to the narrative, it is, in effect, unusual in the unpredictability of Lucilla's choice of a mate: 'she had upset everybody's theories, and made an altogether original and unlooked-for ending for herself' (*MM*, 495). Furthermore, Oliphant implies that Lucilla's

choice is determined by the ends towards which Lucilla intends to direct her marriage, within it 'full development [is] afforded to all the resources of her spirit' (*MM*, 497) because, as Lucilla observes, Tom 'was not a man of original mind [but] that was a gift which was scarcely to be wished for; but he had a perfect genius for carrying out a suggestion' (*MM*, 496).

In *Kirsteen* the worth of Kirsteen's life will be measured not by its events, but by the intensity with which she lives it. Her sisters, although they 'fulfil every duty of women' by catching husbands, pale in comparison with Kirsteen. Anne boasts that she "'never goes a step without my man'" (*K*, 270) while Mary pretends to be weaker than she is to flatter a prospective husband. The unseen ideal of the wife-mother when realised reveals itself to be manipulative and designing. According to Mary's philosophy "'it is better to be a married woman in your own good house, than a lass at home with nothing but what her father will lay out upon her [...] or [...] an Old Maid'" (*K*, 201), and such opinions do still rankle with Kirsteen:

... it sometimes gave her a sting to know that [...] faithless, prosaic Mary [...] would assume airs of superior importance, and pity the sister who had no man, and would be an old maid all her life. A woman may be capable of taking her part in a tragedy such as Kirsteen's, yet resent the comedy, generally more or less contemptuous, that winds itself about an unmarried woman's life. (*K*, 250-1)

As the sisters move towards opposite extremes, they establish the limits for women's experience. The narrative of *Kirsteen* shows the reader that there is not one fixed nature to women, a point which Oliphant returns to repeatedly throughout her fiction: all the sisters in *Kirsteen* are offered similar options and react to these according to their alternate natures. How they manage their own destinies says much about them as individuals. Kirsteen is not a mere 'bundle of clothes' like her sister Anne, who has carried feminine passivity to extremes; Mary is almost a parody of the good daughter and wife; and Jeanie, the youngest sister, subjected to the attentions of the licentious and indolent Lord John, proves to be both weak and destructive. Marriage, in Jeanie's case, provides the return to a safe and unified society; the true integration of a woman.

Kirsteen is endowed with a richer inner life than her sisters. During the early part of the novel Mary spends most of her time 'sitting at her seam' (*K*, 63) with 'the placid superiority' of one who 'had rejected no-one's advice'; 'she had not crossed her father or her mother, or disappointed her family' (*K*, 95). She has a quiet sense of family duty and a disquieting passivity. Mary, who cannot be surprised,

embodies a rejection of the classic sensibility of the feminine; that a woman's life is a life of the emotions.

Mary may be 'more correct and satisfactory' (K, 198) than Kirsteen -- no 'ridiculous prejudices' (K, 200) such as honesty or emotional inclination will prevent her from marrying a man she feels no love for. Mary realises that women may manipulate men, a little weakness and humility can secure a proposal of marriage. Mary will lie in wait for Glendochart as she feels he will make 'a more complaisant husband' (K, 186) and besides, it would be advantageous to keep such a 'prize' within the family (K, 197).

Oliphant implies that women do as much to perpetuate fictions about their nature as do men; Mary is 'faithless' having 'never known a throb of profound feeling in her life' (K, 251) but will encourage a man she feels not an ounce of love for to believe that she looks at him with 'dove's eyes' (K, 196). She will endure the humiliations of her apparent powerlessness and she proves the point that the nature of woman is in the eye of the beholder and it little matters whether one is ruthless or heartless as long as one is not found out.

Kirsteen's attitude to Anne, her eldest sister, who eloped before the beginning of the novel, is ambiguous. Anne is kind, good-natured and attractive, but she is also indiscriminating, inexperienced, self-deluded and unintelligent. She has little choice in the role she plays and is caught in the predicament of the female who cannot act on the world, but can only experience it.

Anne's marriage may be 'a glimpse of paradise on the edge of the dark' (K, 148) but Oliphant insists that it is 'unreal in its pleasure' (K, 148). When Marg'ret encounters Anne again, some years after her elopement with David Dewar, Marg'ret displays an unwillingness to refer to her by any other title than as 'Mrs Doctor Dewar', a form of address which signals the disappearance of Anne's identity in marital union. When Marg'ret finally delivers her estimate of Anne's nature, Anne is placed, once and for all, in her correct niche: "She's a poor creature with little heart, wrapt up in her common man and her little vulgar bairns" (K, 279). This is also apparent when Kirsteen attempts to persuade Anne to visit their dying mother:

Kirsteen stood and looked at them all with a flash of scorn. Was this the effect of marrying and being happy as people say? The little plump mother [...] no longer capable of responding to any call outside her own little circle of existence, the babies [...] holding up little gaping mouths to be fed [...] it was sweet no longer [...] the bondage of all these little necessities, the loosening of all other bonds of older date or wider realm, was this what happiness meant? Sometimes a sudden *aperçu* of this kind will flash through the mind of one for whom those ties are forbidden, and give a consolation, a compensation, to the fancy. (K, 254)

Merryn Williams points out in her introduction to the Dent edition of *Kirsteen*, that the adjective 'little' follows Anne about the novel, enforcing 'the point that personal happiness is not the only thing that matters'.⁵⁶ Life, when it involves the simple gratification of pleasure, becomes little more than a situation of supply and demand. Anne is a self-abnegating mother, and her existence dwindles to no more than that of the 'motherly hen whose wings can extend over many chickens' (K, 252).

When Anne is eventually persuaded to visit her dying mother she is more concerned with seeking protection for herself than with doing any actual mourning -- an example of her incompetence in the face of any difficulties presented by life -- Anne embraces a cult of weakness with the same enthusiasm as she grasps Kirsteen's arm as they travel to their mother.

As alone in the world as 'the sparrow on the housetop' (K, 162), the single woman had to find her identity outside the domestic context and Kirsteen is disdainful of ignorant submission to any kind of dominance. Kirsteen's waiting becomes an act of affirmation in itself, providing her with a heightened sense of self-worth which is an end in itself. In the slow steady practice of her writing Oliphant legitimises the single woman. Her representation of the well-balanced spinster as worthy of the greatest respect is typical of her writing. Thus in spite of the apparent conservatism which directs so much of Oliphant's response to feminism, her fiction, and *Kirsteen* in particular, offers a kind of model for women to enable them to improve the conditions of their lives without resorting to the thoughtless or deliberate domesticity of Anne and Mary or to the selfish emotionalism of Jeanie. In *Kirsteen* and elsewhere Oliphant appears to be making the point that women's struggle is with themselves as much as with men.

Oliphant's persistent interest in Rudyard Kipling's fiction, which she expresses in a review of his work for *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1891, and her certainty about the value of his writing may suggest some affinity between the two writers. Like Oliphant, Kipling does not allow male-female relationships to occupy a central position in his fiction. Lovers fare badly in the Kipling text, his interests tend to be off-centre and Margaret Oliphant so appreciated his fiction that she sat up reading it 'through the moonlight hours of an Italian midnight, until the blueness of the morning began to lighten over the sea, and the grey olives twinkled silvery in that first dawn which comes before the sun'.⁵⁷ She found his perception of life more plausible than that found in the work of other fiction writers: he realised 'a world in which every cruel ill is confronted by that struggling humanity which is continually

⁵⁶ Introduction' by Merryn Williams, ed., *Kirsteen* (repr. London: Dent, 1984), p. ix.

⁵⁷ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Old Saloon', *Blackwood's Magazine* 150 (November 1891), 712-35. (p. 735).

overborne, yet always victorious -- victorious in defeat, in downfall, and in death' and placed no reward for heroism or heroism in the form of marriage at the end of his narratives, they have the 'stamp of reality' upon them.⁵⁸ Rather Kipling offered his readers a vision of the immensity and diversity of India: 'here it lies, a hundred nationalities, a world unknown, under that blazing sky -- innumerable crowds of human creatures, like the plains they inhabit, stretching into distance further than the eye can see.'⁵⁹ Kipling waved India like a bright rag at the Victorian reader and, more importantly for Oliphant, wrote about those people who lived at the edges of the Empire; the civilians in obscure districts, the agony of the participants in 'the real and awful game of war', 'the ways of the bivouac and the relations between officers and men', the pity of life and the mirth of Mrs Hauksbee, flirting with the officers of the Empire. Her comments on Kipling both extend and fulfil Oliphant's synopsis of what represents good fiction which she set out in an earlier article on Charles Dickens. By 1855 Oliphant had already marked out for approval the type of art which 'works its results by means of common men and women, the ordinary, everyday creatures, who are neither odd nor eccentric'. This is 'certainly the highest art'.⁶⁰ The criteria for good fiction which Oliphant evokes in an 1862 review for *Blackwood's Magazine*, in which she objects to the poor quality of some sensation novels, offers a revealing insight into the strictures she places on her own writing practice in both its realism and its sense of what is obscure and ordinary in life: '[their] effect is invariably attained by violent and illegitimate means, as fantastic in themselves as they are contradictory to actual life.'⁶¹

And yet, despite her opposition to the bullying centrality of the standard romance plot of so many Victorian novels and the deleterious effect of the hegemony of marriage upon narrative structures, Oliphant could never really abandon her faith in the sacrosanct nature of marriage or 'the chosen Two' of husband and wife, as is evidenced in her hostile dismissal of 'New Women' fiction, embodied by Grant Allen's novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895) and Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in her article 'The Anti-Marriage League' in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1896. Worrying about the effect that such fiction would have upon the moral well-being of 'the Young Person', Oliphant found that the source of many of her anxieties lay in the propensity of modern fiction to suggest that, in the case of the heroine, 'it is the indulgence of passion, not the restraint of it,

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 729.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 734.

⁶⁰ Margaret Oliphant, 'Charles Dickens', p. 457.

⁶¹ Margaret Oliphant, 'Sensation Novels', *Blackwood's Magazine* (May 1862), 565-74, from *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* edited by Norman Page, (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 111.

which is considered to be specially characteristic of purity'.⁶² She found the 'stronghold of marriage [...] beleaguered on every side' by the likes of Hardy and Grant Allen, and her chief objections appear directed at the New Woman's apparent need for sexual liberty and her subsequent experimentation with 'free love' unions. Much as she approved of Hardy's fiction Oliphant found the central catastrophe of *Jude the Obscure* disappointingly ridiculous, this 'nauseous tragedy' closes 'at a stroke [in] the regions of pure farce [...] only too grotesque to be amusing'. The death of Sue Bridehead's children Oliphant thought repellent: 'the children themselves, all hanged, and swinging from clothes-pegs: the elder boy having first hanged them and then himself to relieve the parent's hands'.⁶³ Such an episode seemed absurdly apocalyptic to Oliphant, ludicrous and disturbing; 'does Mr. Hardy think this is really a good way of disposing of the unfortunate progeny of such connections,' Oliphant demands, 'does he recommend it for general adoption?'. The collapse of the family unit was vivid and overwhelming, below-the-belt and in bad taste. Oliphant's entire life spelled a commitment to the sanctity of marriage and yet, ironically, she had to raise her children without the security of marriage. Oliphant was essentially an anti-apocalyptic writer, she defends the middle way and the ordinary run of lives in what she felt to be an age of fictional apocalypse and unreason. Although Oliphant's autobiography is a narrative of loss, untimely and sudden death and the hazards which will befall innocent joy, the inner dynamic of her writing is a belief in the ameliorative development of human concerns. The anonymity of suffering does not give a sense of failure but rather, as she wrote in a review of contemporary fiction in 1891, 'our souls are penetrated not by the sense of failure, but of the terrible and splendid warfare of everlasting good against overwhelming yet temporary evil'.⁶⁴

According to Oliphant single, unrepeatable acts of absolute passion seemed to be falsely represented in fiction as the most outstanding incident in the heroine's life and as the most appropriate form of self-expression and fulfilment. It forced an uneven emphasis on the narrative. Oliphant felt that such an anomalous and essentially false view of events could only disturb and exclude those whose lives differed from such fictional prescriptions.

Self-effacement and embarrassment all too frequently characterised single existence for the middle-class woman. She was expected to conscientiously resign herself to living vicariously through others, transposing her desires onto the courses of other lives. But in *Kirsteen* single women such as Kirsteen cannot be defined by

⁶² Margaret Oliphant, 'The Anti-Marriage League', *Blackwood's Magazine*, (January 1896), 135-149, (p. 136).

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 141-2.

⁶⁴ 'The Old Saloon', pp. 729-30.

their usefulness to others as wife, mother, sister or stand-by. Margaret Oliphant will not allow the character of Kirsteen to be drawn into the centre of society, she is not allowed the cliché of becoming a sacrificial angel to a surrogate family. She is, in effect, unable to live through or for others: 'She had taken up, with a heroic sense of having something henceforward to live for' the idea 'that she would be the stand-by of the family [...] But to find herself forsaken and avoided by her young sister, hurried away by the elder [...] were painful things to meet with in the beginning of that mission' (K, 302) and ultimately there 'was no-one now to call Kirsteen, to have the right of weakness to her service and succour' (K, 302).

The single woman takes private and vibrant emotional risks, willing to forfeit security for the lonely intensity of ungratified desires and the need for liberty. Perhaps women would find that there was life apart from marriage? Oliphant said that she was learning to take 'perhaps more a man's view of mortal affairs -- to feel that the love between men and women, the marrying and giving in marriage, occupy in fact so small a portion of either existence or thought'.⁶⁵ Whatever, it is a view of which Mrs Oliphant is one of the pioneers in the novel.

⁶⁵ *Autobiography*, p. 10.

CHAPTER THREE

Maiden Aunt Turns Suitor: Spinsters and the Sex War in *The Bostonians*

One reviewer, surveying the changes which had taken place in the representation of the heroine in later nineteenth century fiction, observed:

She, to begin with, is so much older. She often appears upon the scene at the age of twenty or over, at which advanced period of her life the heroine of the past had retired into marriage and obscurity. The modern heroine is in no haste to seek either. [...] The modern heroine is a robust person, with well-knit frame, broad chest, and developed muscles. She walks far and easily, rides, boats, tricycles, and plays lawn tennis. She has never been suspected of fainting.¹

The turn-of-the-century single woman and the ascendant figure of the 'New Woman' differ enormously from the mid-century spinster who deviated from a pattern of female life history without choosing to do so. The figure of the 'New Woman' was not necessarily celibate and not necessarily a spinster, and, in many of her characteristics, incorporated the features of womanhood advocated by those feminists whose interests centred upon 'free' love and sexual liberty as the key to feminist expression. The eighteen-nineties were one of the most active times in the agitation for women's rights. Representations of female heroism correspond to such change, and show some degree of unity in that the female heroine began to show herself capable of the independent agency available to those who live by their own work. Narratives of the single woman or the 'New Woman', with vocations which took them into professional work outside domestic confines, could more frequently have a happy ending, albeit not the traditional one of marriage and motherhood. The celibate single woman could find fulfilment through feminist communities and activities while the 'New Woman' could achieve satisfying sexual and emotional liberty. These new types of heroine were 'an animated riddle [...] an

¹ Anonymous, 'Past and Present Heroines of Fiction', *The Saturday Review* (28 July 1883), 107-8, (p. 107).

enigma in flounces and furbelows', according to Hugh Stutfield, of 'the woman who did, who didn't; who would, who wouldn't, or would if she could.'²

W. T. Stead placed Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of An African Farm* (1883) as forerunner of the 'New Woman' novel, and the character of Lyndall as an early model of the 'New Woman' in her demand for equal rights with men:

But this in no wise involves or implies any forgetting of her sex, of her destiny, and of her duty as the mother of the race [...] the novels of the modern woman are pre-occupied with questions of sex, questions of marriage, questions of maternity [...] If woman is to suffer and to be sacrificed to the new generation which she must nurse at her breast, she must know and understand all that marriage involves, all that maternity demands.³

Olive Schreiner had arrived in Britain from South Africa in 1881, with the manuscript of *The Story of an African Farm* under her arm and by January 1883 her novel was published. Sales were healthy enough to warrant a second edition in July 1883 until, by the issue of a third edition in 1887, sales had spiralled and the novel was an international best-seller.⁴

Lyndall, the heroine of Schreiner's novel refused her prescribed gender role and, in a series of extended monologues, rejected the primacy of marriage, domesticity and the self-immolation of women. Lyndall's articulations struggle their way out of her but remain, like her independence, isolated and bleak, winning from life nothing other than their own articulation. Lyndall's attitude to the prescribed role which she rejects is characterised by a refusal to participate, with grave emotional cost, in any action which involves the loss her independence. Lyndall, then, anticipates Schreiner's later dictum of 1889 that the first duty of the independent women must be to self-develop, to self-emphasise: 'Our first duty is to develop ourselves. Then you are ready for any kind of work that comes [...] It is not against men we have to fight but against ourselves within ourselves'.⁵

Indeed, Schreiner's description of the divided female self, which splits apart in the friction between ascribed feminine role and desire for activity, can be viewed, to some extent, as an anticipation of Virginia Woolf's murderous verbal charge that,

² Hugh Stutfield, 'The Psychology of Feminism', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 161 (1897), 104-17, (pp. 106, 107).

³ W. T. Stead, 'The Novel of the Modern Woman', *Review of Reviews* 10 (1894), 64-74, (p. 65).

⁴ Vineta Colby, *The Singular Anomaly. Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 61.

⁵ *The Letters of Olive Schreiner, 1876-1920* edited by S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner (London: Unwin, 1924), p. 151.

in order to criticise fiction honestly, she must kill the Angel in the House, her counter-image, whose last refuge is within the individual woman.⁶

The role of the Angel in the House which manifests itself in docility and maternalism is precisely what Lyndall resists: she even refuses to kiss her short-lived child before it dies. She warms its feet, loves it secretively but for her the child symbolises womanly subjection and thus threatens her freedom. She resists entrapment even to the extent of refusing selfless regenerative love. The possession of her own liberty, however grim, is preferable to compromise. Emotionalism must be quelled, at whatever the cost, in favour of the colder virtue of bleak independence.

Both the celibate spinster and the 'New Woman' were in conflict with still dominant perceptions of middle-class womanhood which stressed that women represented self-sacrificing morality to be exercised chiefly within the home. The strong moral influence which women were supposed to wield meant that any selfish tendencies would be quelled. Alas -- female illogicality and the narrowness of women's sphere meant increased susceptibility to selfishness. Judith Rowbotham suggests that the approved way for middle-class Victorian women to avoid the pitfall of self was through self-discipline -- women were supposed to control their emotions and redirect any excess feeling into self-sacrifice.⁷ The existence of so many nineteenth-century homilies directed at a female audience points to the belief that reading could inculcate suitable moral behaviour. Sarah Tytler's account of female heroism and good works, *Heroines in Obscurity* (1890), suggests, as its title indicates, that noble deeds performed by women derive their heroic stature from being obscure, private and selfless. Tytler sets out the qualities which any decent Victorian heroine must arm herself with:

Trustworthiness [...] is seen in the girl who, in the full flush of her girlish occupations and enjoyments, relinquishes the most engrossing of them, because she has kept in mind her father and mother's commission, and must take care that all her engagements be respected, and because, come what may, she must never forget her worship of God her father in heaven, and her service to men and women, her brothers and sisters on earth.⁸

Tytler goes on to relate 'How Polly Culpepper Kept Her Father's Castle' and 'Jane Walton's Ways When Fortune Turned Her Wheel' and yet, although all these heroines show tremendous loyalty to their family ties and womanly modesty, there

⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women', *Collected Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), volume 2, p. 285.

⁷ For further information see Judith Rowbotham, *Good Girls Make Good Wives. Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 57.

⁸ Sarah Tytler, *Heroines in Obscurity* (London: Ward and Lock, 1890), p. 11.

is, running through each narrative, a firm conviction that female heroism also requires independent thought and action, strong resolve and a determination never to give up. And there is a new emphasis on the value of honest female labour in the workplace. Brave mantua-makers and forthright milliners embrace heroism and prove themselves to be far from helpless in the face of adversity.

For many late nineteenth-century feminists personal life was the arena where individualism was to be first practised. One contributor to *The Victoria Magazine* considered that those who view marriage as woman's natural destiny:

... look on the inclination to choose, and especially to reject, as a piece of unaccountable perversity, to be met with inflexible severity [...] there are a hundred daily wants, the privation of which leads to lingering death. These must be gratified. In vain she [woman] [...] may resolve on self-denial. As well might she resolve not to struggle when held over a precipice. She will grasp at something, were it red hot iron.⁹

Late Victorians debated, rallied around, brandished gaily or marched against issues such as the cultural placement of woman, her role in the family, the lot of the single woman, the importance of motherhood, what woman's essential nature and appropriate function was. They asked how she was to approach her duties and were they opposed by her longings and desires?

By the late nineteenth-century the novel of social history had become a popular genre and, Henry James decided, was a suitable vehicle for his novel, *The Bostonians* (1886). In *The Bostonians* James proposed a study of 'our social conditions' and his choice of the single woman, Olive Chancellor, not only as central character but also as heroine of the public domain can be explained by the changed role of single women in society on both sides of the Atlantic. In the later years of the nineteenth century new careers were accessible to middle-class women, the vistas of public life were opening up to the strong-minded spinster and there was a lifting, energetic sense of political and social options. Marriage no longer had the lure or sparkle of fulfilment.

The emerging genre of the social history novel presented women in unique forms, with new ways of defining themselves, those definitions being dependent as much on their relation to other women as to men. Female-female relationships have a greater centrality in many late nineteenth-century texts. In *The Bostonians* or in Gissing's novel *The Odd Women* (1893) the hero is forced into a secondary role at

⁹ Mary Taylor, 'Marriage', *The Victoria Magazine* (January, 1868), pp. 202-3.

times and may be confined to the love plot. He tends to be an isolated and defensive figure, facing the barricades of female-female relationships. For a number of late Victorian heroines singleness was less a state to be rescued from than a choice to be persuaded away from. Like the Prince in Tennyson's extended poem, *The Princess* (1847), the late Victorian hero sighed wearily as he gazed up at Ida's fortifications. His opponent for possession of the heroine was increasingly not to be the heroine's stern and patriarchal father, or the manipulative anti-hero, nor even the heroine's shy heart, but the woman-loving feminist spinster. Maiden aunt had turned suitor. The hero's task was to persuade his lover to change sides in a sex war.

Novelistic commentary on friendships between women could also be used as a means of response to what some commentators perceived as the feminisation of society. Female-female relationships occupied increasing space in late nineteenth century texts along with a radical altering of concepts of femininity as women sought to act as autonomous individuals. Henry James ratifies women as significant individuals in *The Bostonians* as he focuses on the lives of women and the relations between them. Furthermore, he explicitly admits realism as his perspective; *The Bostonians* is described by James as specifically an 'American tale' and James extends this definition further as he states that his novel will focus upon female friendship as a representative feature of American life. Writing to his publisher, J. R. Osgood, he comments of *The Bostonians*:

The relation of the two girls should be a study of one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England. The whole thing as local, as American, as possible [...] an attempt to show I can write an American story [...] the subject is very national, very typical. I wished to write a very American tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions, and I asked myself what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life. The answer was: the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf.¹⁰

S. Gorley Putt considers James's labour on *The Bostonians* to have been enormous, involving 'long and detailed studies of current social themes in his native and adopted countries'.¹¹ James complained to Grace Norton of overwork in 1885, 'I am very, very busy, as *The Bostonians* which you may have looked at in the *Century* [...] is no sooner off my hands than I push on with another and longer production'.¹² Prior to that, in his notebook for August 1884, James was already expressing

¹⁰ *Notebooks of Henry James*, edited by F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 47 (8 April 1883).

¹¹ S. Gorley Putt, *A Reader's Guide to Henry James* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), p. 163.

¹² *Henry James: Letters, 1883-1895*, edited by Leon Edel (London: Macmillan, 1981), volume 3, p. 65.

dissatisfaction at being behind schedule with *The Bostonians* and was still trying to think of a name for it other than the early title of *Verena*. By early October, 1884 James had sent Richard Watson Gilder the first instalment of *The Bostonians* for *The Century Magazine*, and in late August of 1884 had written his essay, 'The Art of Fiction', which would appear to provide an outline of James's writing practice at this time. 'The Art of Fiction' was written in response to a lecture delivered in April 1883 at the Royal Institution by Walter Besant entitled 'Fiction as one of the Fine Arts'. Leon Edel notes that one of James's chief objections to the lecture lay in Besant's remark that a female writer living a quiet rural existence might not be able to write good fiction about, for instance, garrison life.¹³ Besant's point is that the novelist should draw upon empirical experiences for fiction; so the lady novelist ought to write about her village rather than the garrison. James counters this with the insistence that the lady novelist need only be observant and have the ability, as James describes it, to discern the 'unseen' within the 'seen'. Referring to the novel's 'large, free character [and] immense and exquisite correspondence with life',¹⁴ James, as a theorist of fiction, insists that:

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility [...] it is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative [...] it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.¹⁵

Such a statement helps to explain James's response to the furore which was to surround his formation of the character of Miss Birdseye in *The Bostonians*. Following the publication of *The Bostonians* the author's brother William wrote to James upbraiding him for his characterisation of Miss Birdseye. She bore, according to William, an impolite resemblance to Bostonian philanthropist and transcendentalist Elizabeth Peabody, the founder in 1860 of the first Kindergarten in the United States. Peabody was respected throughout reformist circles in Boston, a quality which also characterises the fictional Miss Birdseye. James's response that 'Miss Birdseye was evolved entirely from my moral consciousness, like every other person I have ever drawn', suggests a particular relationship between the novelist's imagination and real persons. According to Leon Edel, James regarded fiction as 'the great repository of life; and he believed that the novel [...] reflects not only the

¹³ Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Middle Years 1884-1894* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), pp. 59-61.

¹⁴ Henry James, 'The Art Of Fiction' in *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 19. All references to 'The Art of Fiction' are from the Oxford University Press edition.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 11.

panorama of existence, but the countenance of the artist in the very act of experiencing the world around him'.¹⁶ James may not have been responding entirely truthfully concerning the Peabody-Birdseye relationship, but it is probable that James felt that wide experience, refined through the workings of the novelist's moral consciousness, reemerges as a type of fiction. This fiction will clearly have many of the features of experience, mediated by the imagination of the novelist.

Ford Madox Ford, writing of James in 1938, places him as, above all else, a social historian, a position which accords with James's earlier claims for the novelist in 'The Art of Fiction'.¹⁷ 'The novel is history', wrote James, this 'is the only general description [...] that we may give of the novel'.¹⁸ In the same essay James criticises Trollope for the use he makes of digression and parenthesis; for those moments when Trollope admits to the reader that he is making things up. James felt that this practice betrayed the fundamental responsibility of the novelist, which is to search for truth, for what James called 'revclation', in the same way as the historian.

However, James insisted that art should never be used simply as an instrument of social change and welfare. In this stipulation lay the root of the disagreement between H. G. Wells and James, which ended on such a sour note in 1914. Wells had always believed that fiction's prime motivation should be its social function, its potential usefulness as a political instrument.¹⁹ Yet although James deprecated the use of the novel as an instrument, there is some justification for reading *The Bostonians* in the light of James's feelings about contemporary social phenomena.

James's vision of Boston in the early eighties was as a city populated by women, who controlled its social life. His impressions of Boston determined James in the selection of the theme of his next novel, and are best indicated at this early stage in James's short story 'A New England Winter' (1884).²⁰ The story deals with an artist, Florimond, on a visit to his mother in Boston. James graphically depicts the feminised Boston through which Florimond wanders. He makes a solitary journey through 'the dense processions of women', dodges the perfumed avalanches of 'women disgorged, surging, ebbing' ('NEW', 140). The main spectacle of Boston is 'the extraordinary numerosity' of women and 'the impression they produced of a

¹⁶ Leon Edel, *Henry James* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 6.

¹⁷ Ford Madox Ford, 'Henry James' in *Mightier than the Sword* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), pp. 13-37.

¹⁸ Henry James, 'The Art Of Fiction', p. 5.

¹⁹ For further information see *Henry James and H. G. Wells*, edited by Leon Edel and G. N. Ray (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), p. 249.

²⁰ Henry James, 'A New England Winter' (1884) in *The Complete Tales of Henry James, 1884-1888*, edited by Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart - Davis, 1963), VI. All references to 'A New England Winter' are from the Hart-Davis edition.

deluge of petticoats [...] They were perfectly at home on the road; they had an air of possession':

He felt at moments that he was in a city of women, in a country of women [...] The talk, the social life, were so completely in the hands of the ladies, the masculine note so subordinate, that on certain occasions he could have believed himself [...] in a country stricken by war. ('NEW', 141-142)

In this passage the masculine signifier 'he' seems to be a frail defence against the proliferation of women. A reappraisal of such impressions occupied James's time as he worked on *The Bostonians* from 1883 through to 1885. Jean Strouse observes that during the American Civil War there were many male fatalities and post-war male migration to the west was high. The thinning out of the male population left a substantial surplus of women in the east. In 1850 women outnumbered men by nearly 20,000 in Massachusetts, and by 1880 numbers had escalated to a surplus of 66,000. As numbers of available men decreased in the east, many women remained single, without the economic security of marriage. Census figures for 1850 and 1860 revealed a decisive drop in the marriage figures in New England.²¹

Describing Boston in the eighteen-sixties Van Wyck Brooks writes that 'the critical spirit gasped for breath in a world of lady-mediums and lady-preachers, of lecturers, editors, writers, mostly women; for the age of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony [...] was on the way'.²²

As late as 1907, Henry James was still expressing a sense of disquiet at the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the sexes in America. His remarks in an essay, 'New England -- An Autumn Impression' (1907) dwell upon the primary impressions of a visitor arriving in New England.²³ The visitor will note the preponderance of the 'business man' face amongst men which is in striking contrast to the finer features of the American woman. James reflects on 'the truth it seems to represent':

The appearance of a queer deep split or chasm between the two stages of personal polish [...] at which the sexes have arrived [...] the imagination at once embraces it as the feature of the social scene, recognising it as a subject fruitful beyond the common [...] with the big vision of the intersexual relation as [...] a prey to it. ('NE', 46-47)

²¹ Jean Strouse, *Alice James: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), pp. 87-88.

²² Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer 1865-1915* (London: Dent, 1940), p. 122.

²³ Henry James, 'New England - An Autumn Impression' (1907) in *The American Scene*, (Granville Publishing, 1987). All references to 'New England - An Autumn Impression' are from the Granville edition.

James suggests that the measure of the social situation should be recounted by a painter or a novelist through 'concrete example', although he warns (perhaps with *The Bostonians* in mind) that the artist may be in danger of being overwhelmed by this feature of American life: 'This apparent privation, for the man, of his right kind of women, and this apparent privation, for the woman, of her right kind of man' ('NE', 47). American life, James contends, may be earnestly viewed as 'a society of women' located 'in the world of men' ('NE', 47). The Victorian doctrine of separate spheres did encourage women to conceptualise themselves as a separate grouping from men, which in its extreme form, encouraged both sexes to view themselves as responsible only to their own kind.

The Bostonians may also have been James's attempt to write about that 'tempting, challenging subject' which he referred to as 'the private history of a public woman' in a letter to Mrs Humphrey Ward.²⁴ However, given that his 'public woman' is also single, James seems to have ignored the fact that most of the 'public women', the leading feminists in Boston, were married. It could perhaps be the case that James was responding to the position of the single women in the feminist movement. In the figure of Olive Chancellor James may in part be recalling British spinster feminists such as Lydia Becker. In 1867 Becker founded the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee and single-handedly edited the *Woman Suffrage Journal*, the popular epigram about her was: 'There are three sexes Male, Female and Lydia Becker'.²⁵

Furthermore, Olive Chancellor may have been James's attempt to delineate the sentiments of the politically active single woman, so often represented as the militant martyr, and whom James may have found indicative of the increasing militancy of both the British and American suffrage movements in the later nineteenth-century. A sense of sex war was common to both countries. 'It is no longer a joke', British M. P. Stanley Bowdler told members of a Pennsylvania anti-suffrage group, 'It is a sex war [...] The whole movement is but part of the effeminate superficiality of this generation. This superficiality finds its consummation in the present masculine abasement now witnessed in America'.²⁶

Leading nineteenth-century American feminist Susan B. Anthony may be taken as an example of militant spinsterhood. Anthony never married, and justified the liberty of singleness through 'preaching a "new epoch of single women"' who

²⁴ *Henry James: Letters, 1883-1895*, volume 3, p. 59 (9 December 1884).

²⁵ quoted in Andrew Sinclair, *The Better Half. The Emancipation of the American Woman* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), p. 282.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 285, from a speech given by Bowdler to the Pennsylvania Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, n. d., N. A. W. S. A. papers, Library of Congress.

would command events.²⁷ Andrew Sinclair notes that Anthony resented the place of marriage in fellow suffragettes' lives; her letters express irritation with their pregnancies and familial obligations. Anthony complains in a letter to Elizabeth Stanton in June 1856: 'Those of you who have *talent* to do honour to the poor -- and how poor -- Womanhood, have given yourselves over to *baby* making, and left poor brainless *me* to do battle alone.'²⁸

James's biographer Leon Edel has pointed out that the novelist had scored the word 'Reformers' across the flyleaf of the *Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson* which James had read and reviewed just after his father's death in 1883. The passage James had noted was Emerson's 1840 comment that 'we are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform'.²⁹ It was in April of 1883 that James wrote to J. R. Osgood outlining the narrative of *The Bostonians*, stressing that his characters were to be for the most part of the 'radical reforming type', especially those interested in female emancipation, suffrage, co-education and release from social constraint. *The Bostonians* brought together the two subjects of the Boston reform movements and the situation of women. It is also pertinent to take into account that James's central male character, Basil Ransom, shares Carlyle's sense of antipathy towards modern liberalism.

In the 1883 letter to J. R. Osgood outlining *The Bostonians*, James also acknowledged a debt to French realist writer Alphonse Daudet, claiming that 'Daudet's *Evangeliste* has given me the idea of this thing'.³⁰ Of the relationship between the two novels Peter Buitenhuis notes that 'critics have ignored a whole series of correspondences between the two novels and [...] James borrowed from Daudet [...] ways of observing and presenting reality'.³¹ James's interest in the work of the French realists contributed to his desire to examine social conditions in *The Bostonians*.³² James had first visited Paris in 1875, and did consider living in Paris. In the one year that he remained in Paris he became acquainted with Turgenev, who introduced him to Flaubert, through whom James met Zola, Daudet and Maupassant. James regarded as too narrow the collective social vision of the writers he encountered in Paris (although he remained fond of Turgenev). However, James's feelings were to change, and by 1883 James was on terms of friendship with Daudet.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 76, quoted from June 1856, Library of Congress papers.

²⁹ *Henry James: The Middle Years, 1884-1894*, p. 74.

³⁰ *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, edited by Leon Edel and Lyall Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 19-20.

³¹ Peter Buitenhuis, *The Grasping Imagination: The American Writings of Henry James* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 143.

³² For further information on the links between James and the French realists see Marcia Jacobson, 'Popular Fiction and Henry James's Unpopular *Bostonians*', *Modern Philology* 73 (1976), 264-75, (p. 266).

So influenced was James by Daudet's *L'Evangeliste* that, after his confession of indebtedness to Daudet in the Osgood Letter, prior to selecting the title of *The Bostonians* for his novel, he rejected 'The Reformers' and 'The Precursors' as titles fearing that they would link the novel too overtly to its origin in *L'Evangeliste*.³³

Between 1880 and 1885 Daudet was engaged on *L'Evangeliste* and from 1882 the novel was serialised, appearing in *Figaro* from December 1882 to January 1883.³⁴ James's essay on Daudet which was written in 1883, a few months before James wrote the outline of *The Bostonians*, and which was to be included in *Partial Portraits*, discusses the plot of *L'Evangeliste*.³⁵ The novel is quite clearly linked to *The Bostonians*: an amiable young girl, Eline, falls beneath the malign influence of a Madame Autheman, and is converted to the cause of extreme Protestantism which leads her to sacrifice all family ties to evangelise for a radical protestant group. James considers Madame Autheman 'the evil genius of poor Eline':

She seems to me terribly almost grotesquely void. She is an elaborate portrait of a fanatic of protestantism, a bigot to the point of monstrosity[...] But Madame Autheman [...] strikes me as quite automatic; psychologically she is a blank. One does not see the operation of her character. She must have had a soul and a very curious one. ('AD', 199)

The Bostonians may thus be in part a reversal of Daudet's lack of psychological detail; Olive Chancellor's soul is 'curious' and James's determination is to reveal 'the operation of her character'. James felt that Daudet had lost control of the character of Madame Autheman, leaving her no more than a 'dusky effigy' of prejudice, whilst the reader cannot even perceive the 'spiritual joints' of Eline's nature. There is 'a general human verity', claims James, 'which regulates even the most stubborn wills, the most perverted lives' ('AD', 237).

Peter Buitenhuis points out that similar plot incidents unite *The Bostonians* and *L'Evangeliste*, Madame Autheman attempts to purchase Eline from her mother in order more fully to claim her as her own, but fails. James allows Olive to buy Verena from Selah Tarrant. Both Eline and Verena have lovers from the South, but while Eline's suitor is too weak an opponent for Madame Autheman, Basil's forcefulness marks him as a real contender for Verena. So James heightens the sexual antagonism which runs through his text.

As important an influence upon the text was the opportunity which James had to observe several real examples of female-female relationships in Boston,

³³ Buitenhuis, p. 144, for further information see Buitenhuis pp. 141-159.

³⁴ For further information see G. V. Dobie, *Alphonse Daudet* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1949).

³⁵ Henry James, 'Alphonse Daudet' in *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1905). All references to 'Alphonse Daudet' are from the Macmillan edition.

crucially that of his invalid sister, Alice James, and her friend, Katharine Loring. While he wrote *The Bostonians* between 1883 and 1884, the two women provided James with the opportunity to observe 'one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England'. Following their father's death in 1883, James shared a household with his sister Alice for some months, and became increasingly aware of the extent to which Alice depended upon her friend Katharine Loring. Katharine was necessary to Alice's well-being, comforting her during her illness. Writing to her friend, Sara Darwin, Alice joyfully describes Katharine's qualities:

[She has] all the mere brute superiority which distinguishes man from woman, combined with all the distinctively feminine virtues. There is nothing she cannot do from hewing wood and drawing water to driving runaway horses and educating all the women in North America.³⁶

But it was in 1884, during Alice's visit to England with Katharine Loring and her invalid sister, Louisa, that James realised the depth of Alice's feelings for Katharine. Alice's health became dramatically worse when Katharine's attentions were focused on her sister, and improved in Louisa's absence. James watched events develop with interest and concern, as he tended Alice with compassion. Alice writing of Henry in 1890, refers to him as 'Henry the patient' and recalls her arrival in Britain: 'Five years ago in November, I crossed the water and suspended myself like an old woman of the sea round his neck'.³⁷

In April of 1885, as James was writing the greatest part of *The Bostonians*, he and Alice stayed in Bournemouth, to allow Alice to be nearer to Katharine. Katharine travelled to London at one point, promising to return to Alice. James realised that Alice dearly loved Katharine, commenting: 'Katharine comes back to Alice for a permanency. Her being with her may be interrupted by absences, but evidently it is the beginnings of a living together, for the rest of such time as Alice's life may last'.³⁸ James repeatedly mentions his irrelevance to their relationship in letters to his family in Boston: 'Alice and Miss L are very independent of me -- & A. indeed seems so extraordinarily fond of Miss L. that a third person is rather a superfluous appendage'.³⁹

Fierce and affectionate relationships between upper or middle class single women in late nineteenth-century America were commonly designated 'Boston

³⁶ Alice James, *The Diary of Alice James*, edited by Leon Edel (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1964), p. 10.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁹ Strouse, p. 199.

marriages' in New England. Henry James knew Sarah Orne Jewett and Mrs Annie Fields, who, having formed this sort of relationship, lived together at 148 Charles Street (the street where Olive has her house in *The Bostonians*) after the death of Mr Fields in 1881. Jewett was fifteen years younger than Annie Fields and they enjoyed a deep and lasting relationship. Both assiduously attended lectures, plays and concerts and so needed to exchange impressions on every aspect of daily life that, when separated, they would write each other journal notes almost daily. When Katharine Loring and Alice James were living together in London, Sarah Jewett wrote from Maine: 'Dear Katharine and Alice [...] I can think of you together in the closest way, and how you think together and know each other's thoughts as only those friends can who are very close and very dear'.⁴⁰

Alice seems almost to embody the common plight of many Victorian single women. She suffered the first of many bouts of violent hysteria in 1867; a sense of rage burns through her accounts of these early attacks, she describes wanting to 'knock off the head of the benignant pater as he sat with his silver locks, writing at his table'.⁴¹ It is perhaps not without relevance that Alice James's early hysterical attacks often occurred when she was trying to do intellectual work, in implicit competition with her brothers William and Henry. During her youth with her brothers she learned to absorb 'into the bone that the better part is to clothe oneself in neutral tints, walk by still waters, and possess one's soul in silence'.⁴² Pat Jalland points out that Victorian attitudes to spinsterhood established a 'cultural framework of rejection', and surrounded the single woman with social assumptions about her sexual, mental or physiological abnormality.⁴³ Herbert Spencer influenced social theorists through his beliefs concerning the unmarried woman:

The not infrequent occurrence of hysteria and chlorosis shows that women, in whom the reproductive function bears a larger ratio to the totality of the functions than it does in men, are apt to suffer grave constitutional evils from that incompleteness of life which celibacy implies.⁴⁴

In her self-characterisation, Alice was increasingly to internalise cultural assumptions about singleness; beneath her breast beats 'the spinsterial heart' which is always gladdened by engagements, spinsterhood is a 'sterilizing process' rendering

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 200. For further information on the relationship between Jewett and Fields see Louis Auchincloss, *Pioneers and Caretakers. A Study of Nine American Women Novelists* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴² quoted in Strouse, p. 81.

⁴³ Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 255.

⁴⁴ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics, 1892-1893*, 1, p. 534, cited in Jalland, p. 256. No fuller reference given.

the spinster a solitary organism rather than a social being: 'I remind myself all the time of a coral insect building up my various reefs of theory by microscopic additions drawn from [...] my inner consciousness, mostly.'⁴⁵

Alice was both energetic and opinionated but trapped in a social situation which seemed either to prohibit the use of her talents or force them into comparison with William and Henry. She was diagnosed at various times as suffering from rheumatic gout, neurasthenia, spinal neurosis and nervous hyperaesthesia. The Philadelphia neurologist Weir Mitchell's 'rest cure' for neurasthenia which gave Alice some relief is, nevertheless, a potential trap in its stress upon inaction and immobility which necessarily results in increased confinement within the domestic sphere. Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote her short fiction, *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, about her experiences under Weir Mitchell's care. Mitchell advised Gilman to follow domestic pursuits, to tend to her child, and to 'have but two hours intellectual life a day, never [to] touch pen, brush or pencil' as long as she lived. Gail Parker points out that this injunction effectively places a ban on all forms of activity which are ostensibly the preserve of men.⁴⁶ Alice recovered health at crucial moments during times of family instability; she nursed her father as he died and cared for Henry when they shared a house together for the months following their father's death. Episodes like these allowed Alice the embrace of family intimacy without compromising her individuality.

Alice James's diary is full of radicalism and shows a diversity of interests. After reading Alice's diary following her death, Henry James writes to his brother:

I find an immense eloquence in her passionate radicalism -- her most distinguishing feature almost -- which, in her, was absolutely direct and original [...] it would have really made her, had she lived in the world, a feminine 'political force'.⁴⁷

Alice's letters and journals document her associations with feminism. Her links with public feminism were few, but nevertheless her writings reveal profoundly feminist sympathies. When Alice overheard a woman giving birth in an apartment above hers at a rooming house in England, she wrote: 'How my heart burned within me at the cruelty of men! I have been haunted by the thought of [...] all child-bearing women ever since'.⁴⁸ She stresses woman's right to self-determination, asking: 'When will women begin to have the faintest glimmer that above all other loyalties is

⁴⁵ *The Diary of Alice James*, pp. 91, 57, 109.

⁴⁶ Gail Parker, *The Oven Birds* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 52.

⁴⁷ Henry James to William James (May 1894), *The Letters of Henry James* edited by Percy Lubbock (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 221.

⁴⁸ Strouse, p. 218.

the loyalty to truth, i.e., to yourself, that husband, children, friends and country are as nothing to that'.⁴⁹

Alice's one fully active involvement with feminist initiatives was during the late 1870s when she worked with a group of Boston women in the 'Society to Encourage Studies at Home', a correspondence school for women. From 1875, Alice was working with Katharine Loring in charge of women studying history and Katharine had an active interest in women's education.

However, issues of female friendship were not the only concerns which affected James's production of *The Bostonians*. *The Bostonians* was serialised, appearing in instalments in the *Century Magazine* from February 1885 to February 1886. During this time the *Century Magazine* published many articles on the course of events which had affected the South and on Civil War conflicts and commanders; its purpose being to inform its post-war readers and to promote the reconciliation of North and South. The *Century Magazine* produced a 'Battles and Leaders of the Civil War' series in 1884, stating its general purpose as being:

... to soften controversy with that better understanding of each other, which comes to comrades in arms when personal feelings have dissipated, and time has proved how difficult are the duties and how changeable are the events of war -- how enveloped in accident and mystery.⁵⁰

The *Century Magazine* consciously sought to serialise the sort of novel which would assist the 'reconciliation' of North and South during the early eighteen eighties. In order to comply with the *Century Magazine's* directives concerning the Civil War, James changed the character of Basil Ransom from a Westerner to a Mississippian. The West had been relatively sympathetic to the enfranchisement of women, and, as a Westerner Basil would not have acted fully as an opponent to Bostonian radicalism. If Basil were to come from the South, James could intensify Basil's sense of alienation from the 'feminized' culture of Boston. Basil's fear of feminism is expressed through his masculinity.

Through the character of Miss Birdseye, James connects abolitionism and feminism; in her youth she agitated for the freedom of slaves and now seeks freedom for women. Olive also links abolitionism and feminism. In *The Bostonians*, following a vision which she has of suffering womanhood, Olive

⁴⁹ *The Diary of Alice James*, p. 60. Other examples of spinsters in a similar situation to Alice James include Lady Constance Lytton, who was to become a leading suffragette and whose chronic invalidism in youth was compounded by the domestic demands of her parents..

⁵⁰ *The Century Magazine*, 28 (1884), p. 943, Herbert Smith and Michael Peinovich make these points about the relationship between *The Bostonians* and the *Century Magazine* in 'The *Bostonians*: Creation and Revision', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 73 (May 1969), 298-308.

chooses to imagine womanhood shouldering an intolerable burden and the terms of her description conflate feminist and abolitionist imagery; she is crushed by 'the intolerable load of fate [...] sat cramped and chained to receive it'.⁵¹ Nor is familiarity with this rhetoric restricted to Olive, for Basil imagines Olive's joy at the public appearance of Verena and Olive's subsequent outburst: "'now do you think that women are meant to be slaves?'" (B, 266).

Leon Edel suggests that the character of Basil Ransom too had a non-fictional counterpart being to some extent based on Southern Conservative, Lucius Q. C. Lamar. James originally informed John Hay that Ransom was made up 'of wandering airs and chance impressions' and was 'rather vague and artificial, quite *fait de chic*'. But when informed by Hay that Lucius Q. C. Lamar, a senator from Mississippi whom James had met previously in Washington, seemed to recognise traits of himself in the character, James conceded that Lamar was: 'in it a little, for I met him once or twice in Washington, and he is one of the very few Mississippians with whom I have had the pleasure of conversing'.⁵²

Non-fictional counterparts have also been suggested for other central characters in *The Bostonians*, for example, Sara de Saussure Davis links the character of Verena with feminist orator, Anna Dickinson, who was the focus of Susan B. Anthony's affections when Anthony was in her forties. Dickinson was a speaker after the Civil War, and was envisaged as a 'Joan of Arc' figure by fellow feminists. Verena and Dickinson share brilliant, overnight success and Davis points out that the terms which were popularly used to describe Dickinson's effect on her audiences such as 'magic', 'charm', 'mesmerism', act as synonyms for those James applied to Verena such as 'enchanting', 'charming' and so on.⁵³ Andrew Sinclair makes the point that Verena also bears some resemblance to feminist Victoria Woodhull, who similarly originated in a poor family and mesmerist groups, was married to a conservative Southerner and supported free love.⁵⁴ Woodhull involved the women's rights movement in the obloquy of being associated with free love, and was president in the early 1870s of the American Association of Spiritualists.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Henry James, *The Bostonians*, 1886 (repr. London: Penguin, 1986) p. 191. All references to *The Bostonians* are from the Penguin edition.

⁵² Henry James: *The Middle Years, 1884-1894*, p. 77.

⁵³ Sara de Saussure Davis, 'Feminist Sources in *The Bostonians*', *American Literature* 50 (1978-9), p. 581.

⁵⁴ Sinclair, pp. 191-4.

⁵⁵ Howard Kerr discusses Victoria Woodhull more extensively in *Mediums and Spirit-rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

American reviewers were outraged by *The Bostonians*; Mark Twain declared that he would rather be damned in John Bunyan's Heaven than read *The Bostonians*.⁵⁶ Having written to his brother William of *The Bostonians* in 1885 that 'the story is, I think, the best fiction I have ever written', James was distraught at the reception his novel received. He wrote to W. D. Howells in 1888:

I am still staggering a good deal under the mysterious and (to me) inexplicable injury wrought -- apparently -- upon my situation by my last two novels, *The Bostonians* and *The Princess* [...] They have reduced the desire, and the demand, for my productions to zero.⁵⁷

Lucia T. Ames, reviewing *The Bostonians* for *The Woman's Journal* in 1886, commented that 'although we do not wish to be unduly sensitive, we must submit that had Mr James entitled his novel "The Cranks" [...] we should have found no fault'. Ames also objected to the depiction of that 'morbid, abnormal, disagreeable enthusiast, Olive Chancellor':

Our sixty thousand 'surplus' women in Massachusetts have accustomed us to the sight of many thoughtful, self-supporting, unmarried women to whom frequently marriage comes only as an abstract question, and whose relation to all men other than their kinsmen is that of supreme ignorance and considerable indifference. All this, however, may coexist with a perfectly rational frame of mind.⁵⁸

Even as late as 1916, Rebecca West was expressing irritation at the novel's 'nagging hostility to political effort'.⁵⁹ James was writing to William again on the subject of the novel in June of 1886, humorously suggesting that he should write a sequel called 'The Other Bostonians' as a means of assuaging critical resentment at what was felt to be the unfairly representative nature of the book's title. 'I hadn't a dream of generalizing', James wrote, 'and thought the title simple and handy, and meant only to designate Olive and Verena by it, as they appeared to the mind of Ransom, the Southerner and outsider, looking at them from New York'.⁶⁰

The Bostonians is largely concerned with the loss of sexual difference; the central male character, Basil Ransom, dreads chiefly the feminisation of men and more generally culture. He vows that he will protect his own sex from:

⁵⁶ Henry James: *The Middle Years, 1884-94*, from Justin Caplan, *Mr Clemens and Mark Twain* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1966), p. 139.

⁵⁷ Henry James to W. D. Howells (2 January 1888), *Henry James: Letters, 1883-1895*, volume 3, edited by Leon Edel (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 209.

⁵⁸ Lucia T. Ames 'The Bostonians' in *The Woman's Journal* 17 (13 March 1886), 82-83.

⁵⁹ Rebecca West, *Henry James* (London: Nisbet, 1916), pp. 71-72.

⁶⁰ Henry James: *Letters*, III p. 121.

... 'the most damnable feminization! [...] The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases [...] I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt!' (B, 327)

Basil's interpretation of the threat posed by the 'feminization' of American culture can be analysed as a response to the tremendous changes which had a huge impact on the Victorian gender system by the turn of the century; the women's movement, the increased visibility of female subcultures and the altering gender structure of the economy all had an influence upon gender relations. Questions about the character of female friendship surround the two central female characters of *The Bostonians*, Olive and Verena, when their union challenges the traditional marriage bond, and such intimacies are further complicated by the entry of the hero, Basil Ransom, whose tender severity jars against the determined will of his adversary, Olive. Basil and Olive compete for Verena as if she were a prize. The evangelising Olive believes that Verena's potentially charismatic appeal needs the kind of direction she can provide and that Verena's oratorical abilities could advance the women's cause. Also their passionate attachment seems to Olive an ideal representation of feminist solidarity, she finds in Verena: 'what she had been looking for so long -- a friend of her own sex with whom she might have a union of soul' (B, 101). As has been noted the term for such relationships was 'Boston marriage', a descriptive term current in late nineteenth century New England to denote a long-term monogamous relationship between two single women. The collocation 'marriage' is perhaps unfortunate as it does not suggest the general asexuality of such relationships. However, a 'Boston marriage' enabled the defence of female domestic companionship in that it implies that the union of two women has a both a social place within New England society and that such a union could continue over an extended period of time. In feminist terms a 'Boston marriage' has the potential to subvert the sombre geography of heterosexual marriage structure and legislative boundaries; such marriages were apparently founded upon concord and choice. A 'Boston marriage' further allowed for a feminist need for some sort of institutional structure for relationships between women and provided a legitimate and solid base for personal relations. It could reduce the state of isolation which many single women felt and, in a limited sense, allow them to integrate with the given social order in its expectations of an individual's cultural expression of life.

But James does not choose to present a 'marriage' of equals in his fiction. His Verena has the prescribed sexual consciousness of the Victorian middle-class

woman and the lack of genuine male influence in her life allows space for involvement with Olive. And yet Verena does seem committed to their union to some degree.

While the transgressive part which Olive plays in the narrative of *The Bostonians* lies in her anomalous assumption of 'male' privilege embodied in the act of wooing Verena, Verena is protected by her 'femininity', which is chiefly characterised as relative and dependent and is apparent in her lack of resistance to what is fundamentally the 'male' role of her pursuer. In this sense, Olive is Verena's seducer; she is a wealthy single woman who chooses a female partner, and so her privileges can be interpreted as almost masculine. She disturbs and usurps male prerogatives as she tutors and woos Verena.

Olive's imagination is vulnerable, occupied by powerful and evocative images of women's suffering; young women with life stolen from them, kept in ignorance without education or profession; sexually exploited and politically disenfranchised wives, women whose only existence is as a property:

... that dreadful image [...] was always before her [...] the image of the unhappiness of women [...] They were her sisters, they were her own, and the day of their delivery had dawned. This was the only sacred cause; this was the great, the just revolution [...] it must sweep everything before it; it must exact from the other [...] the last particle of expiation! It was not clear [...] what manner [...] [of] sacrifice [...] would be required of her, but she saw the matter through a kind of sunrise-mist of emotion which made danger as rosy as success. (*B*, 64)

Olive's 'sacred hope' is that she may 'be a martyr and die for something' (*B*, 43) but what she forgets is that suffering is never congenial, that it takes what one would keep, is difficult to appropriate, and that the price of metaphoric death is the life which follows it. Olive comes to recognise, in the course of the narrative, the uncomfortable reality that revolutions begin with personal sacrifices and the execution often of what is most dear. Even though the goal that is being pursued may be represented as impersonal, it is impossible to leave one's personality out of the pursuit. Olive's hope is that through suffering she may bear witness to her belief, thus her longing for one act of selflessness which would focus all that her sex had endured. In symbolic terms, she associates Verena with Joan of Arc, who as an icon of feminist martyrology symbolises noble feminist martyrdom. For Olive, such martyrdom must be virginal, celibacy is necessary to pure leadership, "Priests [...] never married", and "what you and I dream of doing", she tells Verena, "demands of us a kind of priesthood" (*B*, 151). At one point, Olive sensualises martyrdom as an 'aroma' which surrounds Miss Birdseye.

The events of *The Bostonians* move towards Olive's loss of Verena to Basil. Elizabeth McMahan makes the point that Verena's defection is prefigured by Olive's experience of attempting to evangelise amongst working-class women, whom she found always had a ubiquitous lover and 'cared far more about Charlie than the ballot' (B, 62): 'In her researches among her young townswomen she had always found this obtrusive swain planted in her path, and she grew at last to dislike him extremely' (B, 62).⁶¹ It is from such sources that Olive's hatred of the 'usual' stems: 'The usual things of life [...] filled her with silent rage [...] to her vision, almost everything that was usual was iniquitous' (B, 42).

Olive's cousin, Basil, is her main opponent, but neither character is directly presented as antagonist or protagonist; patriarchal male and radically feminist spinster compete to successfully woo youthful American femininity. Olive is the restorer of the 'great feminine element' to society whilst Basil is the recover of its "masculine character" (B, 327). It is interesting that Olive regards Basil's advances to Verena as a covert persecution of herself; Olive feels like a 'hunted creature' in the presence of Basil (B, 276) and James tells us that Olive considers there to be 'no menace so great as the menace of Basil Ransom' (B, 311). The underlying structure of the story is conventional enough, but, as James would put it, 'the story of the story' is another matter: Olive, who is 'morbid', entraps Verena, a healthy young woman in an 'unnatural' relationship from which she is delivered by Basil, who then re-establishes her in the 'natural' world of heterosexual marriage. However, the fine network of meaning within the novel supports a far more interesting and uneasy interpretation -- the conflicts which troubled post-Civil War America are expanded into the area of sex-antagonism; there is 'war to the knife' between Olive and Basil and 'it was a question of which should pull hardest' in the contest for Verena and her voice (B, 373). Basil Ransom, poor conservative Southern male, opposes a member of the liberal and feminist Bostonian gentry, Olive Chancellor. They are cousins and both are in their own way idealists; Olive's martyrdom to the feminist cause is built of the same selflessness which encouraged Basil to serve the South during the war, and yet James plays with the similarities between them: 'Their cousinship -- that of Chancellors and Ransoms -- was not very close; it was the kind of thing that one might take up or leave alone, as one pleased. It was in "the female line"' (B, 43).

On the occasion of their first meeting Olive is perceived by Basil as frigid, the very shape of her mouth does not welcome a lover (or at least not a male one) and she seems remote from sensuous experience:

⁶¹ Elizabeth McMahan, 'Sexual Desire and Illusion in *The Bostonians*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 25, 2 (1979), 241-51, (p. 241).

A smile of exceeding faintness played about her lips -- it was just perceptible enough to light up the native gravity of her face. It might have been likened to a thin ray of moonlight resting upon the wall of a prison. (B, 39)

The privacy which characterises Olive disguises powerful political intentions. She is radically feminist, seeking no community with men:

Basil Ransom [...] perceived [...] that Miss Chancellor was a signal old maid. That was her quality, her destiny; nothing could be more distinctly written. There are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are unmarried by option; but Olive Chancellor was [...] a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry. She was so essentially a celibate that Ransom found himself thinking of her as old. (B, 47)

Her feminism is firmly in place beneath her colourless hair and the shutters of her plain dark dress which lacks all ornament -- Basil observes that: 'Miss Chancellor's hand was at once cold and limp; she merely placed it in his, without exerting the smallest pressure' (B, 39).

The struggle for possession of Verena in *The Bostonians* encompasses the difficulties of unifying post-Civil War America. Of the years immediately following the Civil War Henry Adams wrote: 'Society in America was trying, almost blindly as an earthworm, to realize and understand itself; to catch up with its own head and to twist about in search of its tail'.⁶² Before the Civil War, America was a nation of small enterprises and hierarchically-organised and autonomous communities which were determined by family, community and religion. As society diversified and became ostensibly more egalitarian, the defining features of American culture seemed to shift. Individuals could no longer be placed using traditional categories, and by the late nineteenth-century, gender classification represented a last remaining insurance against social disorder. Feminist Margaret Fuller, commenting on gender in the nineteenth-century, recognised that although

... male and female [apparently] represented two sides of a great radical dualism [they] in fact [...] were perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes into fluid, there is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman'.⁶³

⁶² Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Random House, 1931), p. 236.

⁶³ Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) quoted in *The Norton Anthology of Literature*, edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: Norton, 1985), pp. 301-302.

Feminism was commonly perceived as blurring the distinction between the sexes, traversing the boundaries of difference. The uneasiness felt by anti-feminists was summed up in 1888 by Dr Morgan Dix, head of Trinity Church in New York City. 'I disapprove,' claimed Dix, 'of unwomanly tactics, of creatures who are not men and certainly are not women'.⁶⁴

In *The Bostonians*, relations are unstable, the sexes cross boundaries and invade each others' territories. Louis Auchincloss, who claims of Basil's masculinity that James 'knew [...] that what he had created was a man, a real man', is perhaps correct in the limited sense that Basil can be read as the representative of the last vanguard of American anti-feminist manhood.⁶⁵ Lionel Trilling considers a crucial scene of the novel to be when Basil takes Verena on a tour of the Memorial Hall in Boston, as during this visit he is trying to persuade her of the gloomy and undeserved fate of the young men who had died in the Civil War. As Northerners, they would have opposed Basil in the recent war and yet Basil feels bound to them by the common ties of sex. Through emphasising Basil's sense of emotional closeness to the war dead, James links the danger of the Civil War to the sexual danger Basil faces in post-war America.⁶⁶ Basil's beliefs bear some similarity to those expressed by Henry Adams. Adams claimed:

... the woman's axis of rotation had been the cradle and the family [...] if her force was to be diverted from its axis, it must find a new field, and the family must pay for it. So far as she succeeded, she must become sexless like the bees.⁶⁷

Conservative observers of the American scene like Adams could recognise only one response to feminism; society must ensure the maintenance of traditional relations between the sexes or disastrous and anarchic consequences would result.

Henry James's short story 'The Death of the Lion' (1894) depicts the late nineteenth-century as an age in which there are no clear sexes. The narrator, a book reviewer, is confused by the pseudonyms of authors whom he comes into contact with; Guy Walshingham, the author of *Obsessions* turns out to be a woman, while Dora Forbes, the author of the ironically named, *The Other Way Round*, is in fact a

⁶⁴ Dr. Morgan Dix, quoted in Theodora Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices. Women's Study Clubs* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 120.

⁶⁵ Louis Auchincloss, *Reading Henry James* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1975), p. 76.

⁶⁶ Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self. Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: Viking, 1955), pp. 114-5.

⁶⁷ W. D. Howells, *Henry Adams. The Myth of Failure* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980), p. 212.

man. Exasperated, the narrator concludes from all this that 'in the age we live in one gets lost among the genders and the pronouns'.⁶⁸

In *The Bostonians*, Olive Chancellor finds that both her singleness and financial security enable her to participate fully in feminist struggle. Feminist militancy is the logical way for her to protest women's condition. She has no immediate family -- her parents are dead -- and her sister, Mrs Luna, is repulsive to her, has glazed curls like bunches of grapes and balances her self-esteem on precarious high heels. Society does not seem to require Olive: she is superfluous, does not reproduce as a wife does, nor sexually satisfy as would a prostitute, nor does she love men in any conceivable way. Both Olive's tragedy and her redemption lie in the fact that she is capable of loving women passionately; when she asks Verena to be her companion her face is 'full of eagerness and tenderness' (B, 102). She may want to possess Verena exclusively, but unlike Basil, whose aim is the same, Olive is willing to share Verena with a public, albeit a female public.

Olive's singleness is congenital; she has grown on crisp, white lines and appears bloodless and anaemic, with seamless pale skin and sharp features, she has no figure, 'and presented a certain appearance of feeling cold' (B, 48). She has all the suitable attributes of spinsterhood and is of 'a fastidious, exclusive, uncompromising nature' (B, 157). Everything about her seems to imply celibacy: 'she never once laughed [...] she was a woman without laughter; exhilaration, if it ever visited her, was dumb' (B, 48). Olive is biologically celibate -- nature differentiates her, she is predisposed to spinsterhood. There seems to be no heterosexual destiny for Olive to resist and towards men she feels icy disdain: 'she thought most of them palterers and bullies' (B, 154).

When Olive negotiates privacy from Verena's father, with 'extravagant orders on her bank' (B, 177) and the stipulation to Dr Tarrant that she and Verena must be entirely alone for a year, the transaction amounts to a purchase of Verena. Their relationship is an exclusive one, a partnership which will become 'an organic whole' (B, 169), and takes on a marital character as Olive attempts to extract a promise of unending fidelity from Verena -- it is ironic that Olive, in order to secure Verena and fend off male admirers, cannot employ marriage to do so: 'Olive wished more and more to extract some definite pledge from her [...] something that would have an absolute sanctity for Verena and would bind them together for life' (B, 129). Olive is haunted by the possibility of Verena's marriage; she suspects nearly every male acquaintance of having designs on Verena. In some instances Olive's desire for possession directly engages with Basil's; both feel that Verena is surrounded by the

⁶⁸ Henry James 'The Death of the Lion', in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, edited by Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), p. 111.

sex they oppose -- Olive attempts to watch Verena between the broad male backs which encircle Verena's early attempts to speak publicly:

She had a strange sense [...] that her friend had neglected her for the last half-hour, had not been occupied with her, had placed a barrier between them -- a barrier of broad male backs, of laughter that verged upon coarseness, of glancing smiles directed across the room [...] They were treating her as a show, as a social resource [...] She was not meant for that, and Olive would save her. (*B*, 144-5)

Basil feels dismayed by his sensation that Verena is boxed in by her fellow feminists' expectations: 'He kept talking about the box [...] He said that he had come to look at her through the glass sides, and if he wasn't afraid of hurting her he would smash them in' (*B*, 313).

Olive anxiously fends off Verena's suitors, from her financial arrangements with Dr Tarrant to the vows of the 'Boston marriage' which she desires but cannot in conscience enforce. The scenario of the marital ending to women's stories jangles as repetitively in Olive's imagination as in the Victorian novel itself:

She was afraid Verena would give in to some man, and she wanted to make a break. Of course, any such giving in would be very awkward for a young woman who shrieked out on platforms that old maids were the highest type. (*B*, 212)

Olive's veracity becomes progressively more in doubt. Verena is eventually described as Olive's 'precious inmate' through 'the severe and constant duality of our young women' (*B*, 186).

Verena also dreams of friendship but her most truant dreams are of another kind. The first 'little secret' which she keeps from Olive is a fugitive desire to imitate, not Olive, but her worldly and feminine sister, Mrs Luna -- this admiration marks a fault line along which relations with Olive will split (*B*, 126). The second secret, which Verena perceives as personal rather than political, is Basil and their conversations together in Cambridge. The 'priesthood' of feminism, with its necessary celibacy, which Olive proposes to Verena, closes Verena off from the problematic, unruly and glittering world towards which her spirit is inclined:

... she had given one long, fixed, wistful look, [...] at the bright tumult of the world, and then had turned away, solely for her friend's sake, to an austerer probation and a purer effort; solely for her friend's, that is, and that of the whole enslaved sisterhood. (*B*, 160)

The asceticism, self-mortification and monasticism of militant celibacy is antithetical to Verena; Olive must be her 'keeper' with all the severity of that role, and by the time they cohabit in Charles Street, the 'fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense as a suit of golden mail' (*B*, 178), an armour which is ambiguously protective and immobilising. Verena's relationship to Olive depends upon entrapment and possession and did not begin with full willingness. Verena wonders why she does not escape, but is spell-bound by Olive's possessive affection:

Olive asked of her [Verena] [...] that [...] she should regard Charles Street as her home. There was no struggle about this, for the simple reason that [...] Verena was completely under the charm. The idea of Olive's charm will perhaps make the reader smile; but I use the word not in its derived, but in its literal sense. (*B*, 178)

Despite the aspect of coercion which James suggests, Verena flourishes during her time with Olive and they are shown working fruitfully together. Yet there is some conflict between the intensity of their relationship and the possible limitation of its context. Verena becomes a reverent follower:

Verena was thoroughly interested in their great undertaking; she saw it in the light of an active, enthusiastic faith [...] she expanded, developed, on the most liberal scale [...] Her share in the union of the two young women was no longer passive, purely appreciative; it was passionate, too, and it put forth a beautiful energy. (*B*, 178)

Trained in Olive's personal definitions, Verena learns to scorn commercialism and the dollars which her voice could earn her; success is measured through feminist achievement.

The mutual dependency of Olive and Verena is envisaged in James's use of the parable of Daedalus and Icarus, offered as an explanation of Verena's fall. Olive takes Verena up into the open spaces of feminist critique:

Olive had taken [Verena] up, in the literal sense of the phrase, like a bird of the air, had spread an extraordinary pair of wings, and carried her through the dizzying void of space. Verena liked it, for the most part; liked to shoot upward without an effort of her own and look down upon all creation, upon all history, from such a height. (*B*, 100)

Olive's 'elevation of view' (*B*, 153) carries Verena with it, not simply in its broad dimensions and weightless motions, but also in the form of conscience and duty.

Unfortunately, as James makes clear, Olive's teaching appeals more to Verena's sense of pleasure than to her intellect, so it is 'without an effort', or full commitment. Verena has a light, bright texture, is of an ornamental cast, and is too fragmentary to support the dialectic of their flight: 'Verena was of many pieces, which had, where they fitted together, little capricious chinks, through which mocking inner lights seemed sometimes to gleam' (*B*, 160). Whereas Olive is stream-lined, 'all of one piece' (*B*, 160), and so can only lament Verena's plunge towards the heterosexual centrism which has never tempted Olive:

She thought of her innumerable talks with Verena, of the pledges they had exchanged, of their earnest studies, their faithful work, their certain reward, the winter nights [...] when they thrilled with previsions as just and a passion as high as had ever found shelter in a pair of human hearts. The pity of it, the misery of such a fall after such a flight. (*B*, 398)

By the time that Verena is in love with Basil, Olive's earnestness has all the disharmony for Verena of 'a broken saw' (*B*, 294). Verena, after all, is made not for suffering but for enjoyment, she is childlike, instinctive and believes that the strongest feeling is the one to surrender to, as when she stops loving Olive in favour of Basil:

It was simply that the truth had changed sides; that radiant image began to look at her from Basil Ransom's expressive eyes. She loved, she was in love -- she felt it in every throb of her being [...] she was framed, apparently, to allow it the largest range, the highest intensity. It was always passion, in fact; but now the object was other. (*B*, 374)

Yet Basil's pursuit of Verena is no less coercive than Olive's. He tries to convince her that it is inevitable that she will lose interest in feminism -- that it is instinctual -- that to leave Olive is no worse than obedience to nature. Her fall into 'feminine' sexuality unites with her fall from the heights of feminism.

Verena balances on the line of her innocence between dangerous alternatives; she is imagined in the narrative as a 'rope dancer', a tight-rope performer. She wears brilliantly-coloured rags of clothes and is described as crossing the path between her house and the rest of the city on a frail line of wooden planks over a slippery and freezing road, which others cross cautiously 'in the attitude, and with a good deal of the suspense, of a rope-dancer' (*B*, 131). Verena's success as an orator confounds her by its brilliance, which she distantly admires; it is like learning to speak Chinese and is a dazzling trick:

... all her artlessly artful facilities, were not a part of her essence, an expression of her innermost preferences. What *was* a part of her essence was the extraordinary generosity with which she could expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her. (*B*, 370)

Basil enjoys Verena's public performances as though she were no more than a spectacle. During their private conversations Basil feels a:

... hilarity charmed into stillness by the fear of losing something. There was [...] a sweet comicality in seeing this pretty girl sit there and, in answer to a casual, civil inquiry, drop into oratory as a natural thing [...] She had the same turns and cadences [...] as if she had been on the platform; and the great queerness of it was that [...] she should escape from being odious [...] No wonder she was a success, if she speechified as a bird sings! (*B*, 232)

Verena lives in anticipation of a gaze or an audience, and yet is unspoiled by this since her artifice is paradoxically artless: she had watched lectures as a child, had 'sat on the knees of somnambulists', was familiar with unorthodox 'cures' and was held by trance-speakers. She had grown up in the company of 'lady editors of newspapers advocating new religions' and those individuals who promoted 'free love', and, James adds more ominously, she even 'talked of the marriage-tie as she would have talked of the last novel' (*B*, 105), as an amiable fiction.

Olive miscasts Verena as a tragic figure; the Joan of Arc analogy which settles in Olive's mind of Verena 'armed at all points' is as fantastic as Basil's vision of her as an Arcadian maiden. Their imaginings coil about her and she has an air of costume and publicity. But whether she wears Olive's golden mail or is inside Basil's box or the frame of his Arcadian maiden, she is an inert substance. Each weaves their own fantasy around Verena, according to their inclinations.

Ultimately, Verena is no more than the prize for whichever proves victorious, the glittering girl who is a configuration of desire. She has 'no worldly pride, no traditions of independence, no ideas of what was done and what was not done' (*B*, 183). Her innocence characterises her and she recites her speeches as if they are lessons learned in advance. Her feminism is rote-learned, and is paralleled by her obvious physical immaturity; she has a pale complexion and a flat young chest. Her easy generosity and lack of offence reflect her lack of self: 'She was too rancourless [...] too free from private self-reference' (*B*, 183).

Her wooer, Basil, on the other hand, is clearly politically placed as a reactionary. He espouses the beliefs of Thomas Carlyle and is conservative in every

aspect of his nature. His zealous opinions are chiefly indicated in his response to women who, he insists, should be domestic and meek:

... women were essentially inferior to men, and infinitely tiresome when they declined to accept the lot which men had made for them. He had the most definite notions about their place in nature, in society, and was perfectly easy in his mind as to whether it excluded them from any proper homage [...] He admitted their rights; these consisted in a standing claim to the generosity and tenderness of the stronger race [...] he hated to see women eager and argumentative, and thought that their softness and docility were the inspiration, the opportunity (the highest) of man (*B*, 202).

One editor rejects an article Basil has written on the grounds that Basil's beliefs are 'about three hundred years behind the age; doubtless some magazine of the sixteenth century would have been very happy to print them' (*B*, 198).⁶⁹

Basil is surrounded by masculine signifiers; he looks 'like a column of figures' (*B*, 35) and:

... his head had a character of elevation which fairly added to his stature; it was a head to be seen above the level of a crowd, on some judicial bench or political platform, or even on a bronze medal. His forehead was high and broad, and his thick black hair, perfectly straight and glossy, and without any division, rolled back from it in a leonine manner. These things, the eyes especially, with their smouldering fire, might have indicated that he was to be a great American statesman. (*B*, 36)

Basil has a profile one could stamp coins with; he is aggressively male from his towering form to his direct, statesmanlike gaze and possesses all the characteristics of authority. He seems almost designed to occupy public space with emphasis. He has all the trappings of a victor, which James ironically notes:

This lean, pale, sallow, shabby, striking young man, with his superior head, his sedentary shoulders, his expression of bright grimness and hard enthusiasm, his provincial, distinguished appearance, is, as a representative of his sex, the most important personage in my narrative. (*B*, 36)

Basil is also exotic; he speaks in warm Southern tones, which distinguish him from his Northern counterparts and which, along with his old-fashioned views on contemporary issues, mark him as a peculiar and isolated 'representative' of his sex. He has come to New York and left behind his beloved Mississippi in search of the 'haunts of men' (*B*, 43) but, in the opening chapters of the narrative, appears luckless

⁶⁹ Elizabeth McMahan makes this point in 'Sexual Desire and Illusion in *The Bostonians*', p. 245.

in his quest; as 'representative' of his sex, he is a rare and solitary example of the 'masculine tone'.

James informed Edmund Gosse in 1915 that he considered *The Bostonians* remarkable for its objectivity and this is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his narrative technique; James provides an unreliable narration which loosely identifies with various figures at different points in the narrative.⁷⁰ Authorial commentary can direct the interpretation of events. Perhaps because of this, James avoids addressing the reader openly nor does he provide clear authorial commentary in *The Bostonians*. Instead, James relies upon parenthesis to escape from authorial commitment or makes authorial interventions which do not express full commitment and which are carefully placed at points which are separate from the overall narrative. His descriptions of Basil tend to parody and expose this figure, enabling James to emphasise distinctions between himself and the character. James thus implicitly argues for an alternative concept of feminism and the single woman from that which Basil projects. James's comments never fully reveal his sympathies nor are they declarative, as he tends to retreat from insights before they bear the stamp of conviction. Yet he does to make some effort to discredit Basil's view of women. For instance in the scene in which Basil first meets Olive:

... it was as plain as day that she was morbid. Poor Basil announced this fact to himself as if he had made a great discovery; but in reality he had never been so 'Boetian' as at that moment. It proved nothing of any importance, with regard to Miss Chancellor, to say that she was morbid; any sufficient amount of her would lie very much to the rear of that. Why was she morbid, and why was her morbidness typical? Ransom might have exulted if he had gone back far enough to explain that mystery. (B, 41)

In this passage the gulf widens between 'narrator' and 'hero'. James as narrator very self-consciously debunks Basil's clumsy and 'Boetian' interpretation of Olive and is in deliberate tension with the limited perceptions of Basil.

James moves between the identities of all the central characters in *The Bostonians*, and his narration never fully endorses the viewpoint of any one character. There is a definite sense of play in his handling of the character of Olive: throughout Olive is presented as as questionable a protagonist as Basil. However, James's intention is not to negate Olive's mode of self-definition; her celibacy means that she is never considered an object in the way that Verena is. Elizabeth Allen claims that 'the satire directed at Olive [...] is very much tempered by the sense

⁷⁰ Henry James: *Letters 1895-1916*, edited by Leon Edel (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984), volume 4, p. 778.

of her ultimate powerlessness, even in so-called 'feminised' Boston, to combat the *status quo* of marriage, family and heterosexual love.⁷¹ I would add to Allen's point that, given the ending of the novel, Olive's powerlessness is never fully complete in the same way as Verena's. Olive's status in Bostonian society is as a property-owning and powerful single woman and she even surprises Dr Tarrant through her offer to purchase the 'property' that is Verena. Allen also notes that Basil's recognition of Olive as the opposition marks her culturally as an active subject.⁷² Basil realises as much when they first meet:

The women he had hitherto known had been mainly of his own soft clime, and it was not often they exhibited the tendency he detected (and cursorily deplored) in Mrs Luna's sister. That was the way he liked them -- not to think too much, not to feel any responsibility for the government of the world, such as he was sure Miss Chancellor felt. If they would only be private and passive, and have no feeling but for that, and would leave publicity to the sex of the tougher hide! (B, 41-42)

It is tempting to view Miss Birdseye as the character who is treated with the most respect. She is portrayed as selfless and good, but her 'eighty years of innocence' have left her hopelessly short-sighted. When Basil follows Verena to Cape Cod to continue his pursuit of her, James presents Miss Birdseye's perspective on their conversation: 'it warmed her heart to see the stiff-necked young Southerner led captive by a daughter of New England trained in the right school, who would impose her opinions in their integrity' (B, 358). The reader, however, is aware that Basil, rather than being awestruck by a convincing and preliminary talk on the just cause of feminism, is making every effort to woo Verena away from the feminist movement. Throughout the narrative Miss Birdseye's public work has been distinguished by the impersonality of her reformist schemes and she seems incapable of a fully personal engagement with life:

There was a legend that a Hungarian had once possessed himself of her affections, and had disappeared after robbing her of everything she possessed. This, however, was very apocryphal, for she had never possessed anything, and it was open to grave doubt that she could have entertained a sentiment so personal. She was in love, even in those days, only with causes, and she languished only for emancipations. (B, 56)

⁷¹ Elizabeth Allen, 'Women in the Public World: *The Bostonians*, *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Tragic Muse*', *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 83-116, (p. 88).

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 88.

Unlikely or apocryphal as the narrative of Miss Birdseye's betrayal is, it does partly prefigure Basil's far greater 'robbery' of Verena's potential political autonomy.

Miss Birdseye's proliferating interests in causes recall the comments of Kate Gannett Wells, a Back Bay reformer who, in eighteen-eighty, cautioned her sex that a future generation would perhaps look upon their likenesses as having the 'woman's mission look', and that they would appear like a 'gallery of photographed "causes"' ⁷³ At the outset of *The Bostonians* Olive's passion for other women is distinguished by its overly theoretical nature; her relationship with Verena teaches her practical lessons in suffering and similarly Verena's marriage to Basil will teach her essential lessons in feminism. It is only when Olive personalises her love of women, becomes intimate and humble, and comes to understand that she does not have the right to possess Verena that she earns Jamesian approval.

All of the negative experiences which relate to Basil, the defeat of the South, the failure of his legal ambitions or the rejection of his journalism, emphasise how embattled Basil's economic and political status is. However, such experiences also reveal how fundamentally effective his masculinity is -- he is still capable of reclaiming the central area of sexual power. His presumed gallantry towards the opposite sex comes not from respect but from rancour, as he admits: 'Chivalry had to do with one's relations with people one hated, not with those one loved' (B, 381). His method of bringing Verena closer to him is 'to drag her former standard in the dust' (B, 377), she is to endure humiliation and will live a life centred upon lonely domesticity: 'he let her know that she should be poor, withdrawn from view, a partner of his struggle, of his severe, hard, unique stoicism' (B, 375). While Verena is at the mercy of a sexual desire which seems inflammatory: 'She was to burn everything she had adored; she was to adore everything she had burned' (B, 374). The radiant image of her true vocation as domestic private wife is embodied in the person of Basil:

... she felt that his tall, watching figure, with the low horizon behind, represented well the importance, the towering eminence he had in her mind -- the fact that he was just now, to her vision, the most definite and upright, the most incomparable, object in the world. (B, 375)

Elizabeth McMahan notes that the set of narrative devices which James employs validate the sexual nature of Verena's illusion -- that it is an illusion is confirmed by the insertion that Basil appears glorious 'just now, to her vision'.⁷⁴ Sexual desire is the bridge along which Verena can cross into authentic womanhood, taking care to step over the remnants of Olive's sterile idealism which:

⁷³ Arthur Mann, *Yankee Reformers in the Urban Age* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 203.

⁷⁴ 'Sexual Desire and Illusion in *The Bostonians*', p. 250.

... crude and thin and artificial, had interposed itself; but in the presence of a man she should really care for, this false, flimsy structure would rattle to her feet, and the emancipation of Olive Chancellor's sex [...] would be relegated to the land of vapours, of dead phrases. (B, 324)

Basil prays to be delivered from 'new old maid[s]' and their feminist inclinations and recalls instead, with fond patriarchal nostalgia, : "'The *old* old maids [...] were delightful; they had always plenty to do, and didn't wander about the world crying out for a vocation'" (B, 329). This sentiment in part accords with Olive's fear that Basil's interest in Verena amounted to an assault on Olive and what she represents.

As Verena refutes her former loyalties, Olive submits to shattering visions of Verena's ruin, which culminate during their visit to Cape Cod, when Verena goes sailing with Basil and fails to return at the expected time. Olive walks along the empty shoreline for hours, watches boats returning 'freighted only with the figures of men' (B, 398) and imagines: 'the body of an unknown young woman, defaced beyond recognition, but with long auburn hair and in a white dress, washed up in some far-away cove' (B, 398-9). From the water rise images of a woman's death and the narrative implies sexual conflict and devastation -- Verena's hair is loosened, her white dress is wet -- but furthermore implies the loss of identity of women crushed by sexual relations with men, Verena becomes 'an unknown young woman, defaced beyond recognition'.

With 'merciless devotion' Basil attempts to secure Verena's dependence upon him, which, he feels, will symbolise his victory over the invading force of feminism:

He didn't care for her engagements, her campaigns, or all the expectancy of her friends; to 'squelch' all that, at a stroke, was the dearest wish of his heart. It would represent to him his own success, it would symbolize his victory [...] When she laughed and said she didn't see how he could stop her unless he kidnapped her, he really pitied her for not perceiving [...] the firmness of his resolution. He felt almost capable of kidnapping her. It was palpably in the air that she would become 'widely popular' and that idea simply sickened him. (B, 382)

This aspect of Basil is unpleasant and he reshapes Verena at will and wants to take her voice from her. Olive observes that:

... he didn't love Verena [...] he hated her, he only wanted to smother her, to crush her, to kill her -- as she would infallibly see that he would if she listened to him. It was because he knew that her voice had magic in it, and

from the moment he caught its first note he had determined to destroy it.
(B, 369)

It is only when Verena's voice expresses nothing and is reduced to sound that Basil can enjoy it: 'Verena's golden voice, with her words indistinct, solicited, tantalized his ear'(B, 263). He is a possessive listener, who will silence whatever he cannot bear to hear. Ultimately, he prefers women not to be silent, but just to be songbirds with golden empty voices, politically bereft.

When Basil imagines the Women's Convention which Verena attended, he can almost hear the pitch of voices, screeching in demand, and Verena in the midst of the vulgar grouping, perverted by its contact:

... he seemed to [...] hear flushed women, with loosened bonnet-strings, forcing thin voices into ineffectual shrillness. It made him angry [...] to think of the charming creature at his side being mixed up with such elements, pushed and elbowed by them, conjoined with them in emulation, in unsightly strainings and clappings and shoutings [...] Worst of all was the idea that she should have expressed such a congregation to itself so acceptably, have been acclaimed and applauded by hoarse throats [...] he saw only the fact that his companion had been odiously perverted. (B, 241-2)

Embedded within Basil's description of the Convention is his chief objection, that Verena's voice can be used to express feminism so acceptably to feminists; that it is precisely because she is an articulator for feminism that Basil must steal her voice. Olive had warned Verena of this when she told her:

'There are gentlemen in plenty who would be glad to stop your mouth by kissing you! If you become dangerous some day to their selfishness, to their vested interests [...] it will be a grand thing for one of them if he can persuade you that he loves you.' (B, 151)

The image of a woman speaking on a public platform is at the centre of *The Bostonians*. Hitherto silent in the public realms of discourse and action, woman is given a field and context on the platform. The demand for female suffrage was radical as it represented an explicit assault on the all important distinction between public and private. All the male characters in *The Bostonians* seek publicity; Matthew Pardon is a keen journalist, Basil wants to make his fortune through journalism, and Selah Tarrant's regard for publicity means that he seeks it at every turn. The sex war in *The Bostonians* results in the battle over the right to possess the public platform.

In America the years between 1860 and 1900 witnessed the participation of women in publicly visible vocations on a large scale. Such moves were fostered and supported by feminist speakers who demanded a different cultural position for women. As early as the eighteen-thirties the Quaker Grimké sisters found it necessary to defend woman's right to speak publicly. Angelina Grimké stressed the connection between silence and subordination; if denied the right to speak and act 'may we well be termed "the white slaves of the North," for, like our brethren in bonds, we must seal our lips in silence and despair'.⁷⁵ At the first national anti-slavery convention held in New York in 1837, a resolution had to be passed upholding women's right to engage in political, and hence public, work.

In the late eighteen-forties Margaret Fuller held her famous *Conversations* on literature and culture in Elizabeth Peabody's bookshop in Boston. Rather than stand, Fuller remained seated, to avoid being considered a public lecturer. So profound were the strictures on the separation between the public and private spheres and the allocation of men to the former and women to the latter, that the yearbooks of many early women's clubs did not list the names of their members.⁷⁶ Fuller's tactic of remaining seated when addressing an audience and other strategies to emphasise women's continued domesticity and privacy, were used by female speakers. Caroline Howard, writing to her sister from Savannah, Georgia, in eighteen-nineteen, describes watching a female singer called Mrs French, who had performed at several concerts:

Her public concerts are marked by this peculiarity that she enters a room with a private party, for she is greatly noticed and seats herself with the other ladies. When the company has assembled, she is led to the piano by a private gentleman of the first respectability, and after every song, again takes her place among the ladies, one of whom keeps a shawl, ready to throw over her.⁷⁷

In her unwillingness to be regarded as participating in the public sphere, Mrs French used several symbolic devices to stress her respectability; she entered the room with a private group, was escorted by a respectable male and modestly placed a shawl over her head immediately after the performance. She displayed a respectable reluctance to depart from the private sphere and returned rapidly to her role as domestic woman after each performance.

⁷⁵ Sinclair, p. 45, quoted from Catherine Birney, *Sarah and Angelina Grimké* (Boston, 1885).

⁷⁶ Theodora Martin discusses American women's study clubs in *The Sound of Our Own Voices* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

⁷⁷ Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. vii.

There are few recorded instances in which Henry James may be found listening to women speakers on a public platform. In a letter written from New York in November 1863 James reports listening to the colourful twenty-three year old medium, Mrs Cora V. L. Hatch, preach. James and his cousin Bob Temple paid five pence each to listen to Cora Hatch in the Clinton Hall basement lecture room:

She holds forth in a kind of underground lecture room in Astor Place. The assemblage, its subterraneous nature, the dim lights, the hard working, thoughtful physiognomies of everyone present quite realised my idea of the meetings of the early Christians in the catacombs. Three individuals from the audience, formed themselves into a committee to select a subject for Cora to discuss -- and they were marshalled out of the room, by a kind of fat showman who, as I wittily suggested, was probably Mr Chorus V. L. Hatch. They chose 'the Evidence of the continued existence of the Spirit after death.' For some moments Cora remained motionless: probably as Bob Temple said 'silently invoking her maker.' Then she began to speak. Well, the long and short of it is that the whole thing was a string of such arrant platitudes, that after about an hour of it, when there seemed to be no sign of a let-up, we turned and fled. So much for Cora.⁷⁸

James's description of Cora Hatch seems almost a preliminary sketch for one of Verena's appearances in *The Bostonians*; like Cora, Verena has a background in spiritualism and mesmerism. In her first speech before an audience in *The Bostonians*, which takes place in Mrs Farrinder's house, Verena's powers are invoked inspirationally; Dr Tarrant lays hands upon her head and a long silence pervades. When Verena does begin to speak it is 'slowly' and 'cautiously'; 'as if she were listening for the prompter, catching, one by one, certain phrases that were whispered to her a great distance off, behind the scenes of the world' (B, 84). Similarly, Cora Hatch was, later in her career, controlled by spirits to speak out for the emancipation of women. During the early eighteen-seventies she was on friendly terms with the radical suffragettes led by Victoria Woodhull.

In 1881 Henry James and his sister Alice returned to Boston from a trip round Europe, in a period when women's suffrage was the leading political question in Boston. The city was filled with female lecturers in the spring of 1881 as the feminist separatist organisation, the National Women's Suffrage Association was convening in Boston. At the Boston convention, assembled feminists were addressed by prominent speakers including Elizabeth Stanton, Matilda Gage and Susan B. Anthony. Leading feminists were invited to meet the governor and the mayor and to dine with local dignitaries and reformers at the Parker Hotel in

⁷⁸ Henry James, *Letters, 1843-1875*, edited by Leon Edel (London: Macmillan, 1974), 1, pp. 44-45.

Boston.⁷⁹ Alice James's biographer Jean Strouse reports that Katharine Loring had supported the feminist cause at the 1881 convention and that Alice, Katharine and Henry all 'watched the flurry of feminist activity with interest'.⁸⁰

In *The Bostonians* Basil's self-importance depends on writing, not his voice, and provides another reason for his lack of sympathy with feminist volubility. Among the various consequences of public feminism was the rise of the articulate feminist, which counts to Basil as an intrusion on the public domain. Basil objects to the incipient celibacy of the 'thin voices' of feminists, whom Basil imagines as a flushed, complaining mass of unsightly enthusiasm. His imaginative refuge is that Verena 'was meant for something divinely different -- for privacy, for him, for love' (B, 269). The ruin which Basil envisages for Verena is not that of marriage to a man but rather that of publicity in her new role as a disseminator of feminist ideology. One of the implications of the description of the swarming feminists who crowd the Women's Convention is that their liveliness negates life in that it perverts life's courses, removing women from the domestic sphere and placing them within a public context. Her fellow feminists will provide Verena with a system of belief which can exclude a union with Basil, and create in its place new and acceptable unions between women. Basil, as representative of his sex, must prevent feminism from taking possession of those public areas that seem signally designed for men. Basil, as the physical embodiment of the statesman or the born leader, seems designed to hold social power, and yet he appears unable to dominate public life.

Verena's voice is seductive and pours pleasantly into the ears of the anti-feminist opposition; James playfully centres the reader within that opposition when he says of Ransom that it is he 'through whose ears we are listening' (B, 268-9) and we follow Basil's upward glance as he watches the fantastically dressed Verena perform:

[She] stood there like an actress before the footlights, or a singer spinning vocal sounds to a silver thread [...] he was watching her [...] as if she had been performing, high above his head, on the trapeze [...] she seemed to speak and survey the whole place from a much greater height. (B, 264-265)

Confirming its location in public speech, feminism appropriates its own areas; projecting feminism is the linguistic project of the female orator -- it is a form of self-fashioning.

But Verena cannot resist the gravitational pull of heterosexual union and submits to Basil who chooses to assert his masculinity by reinterpreting Verena's

⁷⁹ J. F. Yellin *Women and Sisters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 159.

⁸⁰ Strouse, p. 217.

voice as a type of music, an erotic silver thread, or a fragment of bird song. The significance of her words is discarded:

He took for granted the matter of her speech was ridiculous; how could it help being, and what did it signify if it was? She was none the less charming for that, and the moonshine she had been plied with was none the less moonshine for her being charming. (B, 266)

Marriage to Verena will allow Basil to silence her and Verena's increasing inability to speak as his demands become more determined, prefigures his arrival at this goal. Furthermore, Verena is naturally submissive and will be silent if so demanded: 'it was in her nature to be easily submissive, to like being overborne. She could be silent when people insisted, and silent without acrimony' (B, 322). Olive also bears a peculiar relation to speech, she is articulate in private and voiceless in public and James describes her as 'condemned' to silence as shyness disables her voice: 'the blur of her shyness, the conscious, anxious silence to which she was so much of the time condemned' (B, 165). Her later encounters with Basil leave her 'voiceless' (B, 355) and it is only when Basil takes Verena from her that she finds a voice. After submitting to Basil, Verena loses her ability to speak and so publicity must become Olive's province. She finds the strength to speak on her own.

It is the symbolic power of Verena's voice which Basil seeks to destroy. He finally drags Verena from the auditorium as she is about to make the most important speech of her career. As he waits to do so he imagines himself as an assassin:

There were two or three moments during which he felt as he could imagine a young man to feel who, waiting in a public place, has made up his mind, for reasons of his own, to discharge a pistol at the king or the president. (B, 414)

As Judith Fetterley writes in *Provisions*, 'the corollary of invisibility is silence' and the text forecloses on the possibility of Verena articulating, primarily because Verena represents 'feminine' womanhood.⁸¹ Throughout the narrative Verena appears gentle, appealing, pliant in the face of authority and dependant. In the closing chapter of *The Bostonians* she is relocated in traditional womanhood. The humiliation and misery that unequal marriage entails is about to be experienced by Verena. It is to be Olive, militant spinster and active female subject of the text, who emerges as feminist articulator. Elizabeth Allen concludes from this that

⁸¹ *Provisions* edited by Judith Fetterley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 22.

Verena's function in the text is ultimately to signify 'the blank passivity of the [...] feminine principle':

The Bostonians is in part a final reduction of the way in which society manipulates and appropriates the female as sign, so that each and every active, voracious individual can reinterpret and claim the American girl for his own. Verena can be anything to anyone [...] The possibility of her standing apart from her function as sign is never really raised at all.⁸²

Verena is going to do no more than speechify from the platform of the Victorian home with the walls for an audience. David Howard points out in his essay on *The Bostonians* that the ambiguity surrounding the union of Basil and Verena does not simply spring from the novel's last sentence concerning Verena's future unhappiness, but continues and confirms what all the other unions of the novel direct the reader to; the dominance and power of one partner depends upon the defeat of the other.⁸³ The conclusion of *The Bostonians* undercuts the marital resolution provided by the surface text. Such an ending is in keeping with James's directives for good quarrelsome fiction in his essay 'The Art of Fiction':

The 'ending' of a novel is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of dessert and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes.⁸⁴

It is also relevant to recall James's remarks to Grace Norton in a letter of November 1884: 'if marriage is *perfectly* successful it is the highest human state; and [...] if it fails of this it is an awful grind, an ignoble, unworthy condition. I have never regarded it as a necessity.'⁸⁵

Feminist Elizabeth Stanton feared that literary realists who presented anti-heroines in their novels would undermine the ability of American girls growing up in the post-Civil War era to imagine woman's full potential. In 1883 Stanton wrote in her diary that although novelist William Dean Howell's 'women [...] may be true to nature [...] as it is nature under false conditions, I should rather have some pen portray the ideal woman, and paint a type worthy of our imitation'.⁸⁶ Stanton felt

⁸² Elizabeth Allen, *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 86.

⁸³ David Howard, 'The Bostonians' in *The Art of Reality* edited by J. Goode (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 60-80, (p. 72).

⁸⁴ Henry James 'The Art of Fiction', p. 7.

⁸⁵ *Henry James: Letters 1883-1895*, volume 3, p. 54.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*, edited by T. Stanton and H. Stanton Blatch (New York, 1922), volume 2, p. 213, quoted in *The Oven Birds* edited by Gail Parker, (New York: Anchor Books, 1973).

that the reform of literary representations of women could influence the future of American feminism. She preferred novels which idealised emancipated womanhood, as she felt that more ambivalent representations compelled the female reader to support traditional 'feminine' womanhood. Similarly, orthodox representations of 'submissive' female heroism within which the heroine's selflessness is rewarded by marriage, would hardly inspire women to struggle for feminist liberation. Stanton's position appears to be that in the absence of direct experience of independent womanhood, the female reader was dependent upon representations of independence in fiction in order to extend her sense of women's potential. Stanton implies that fiction participates in the socialisation of women and that without representations of independent and feminist women as heroic, female readers would feel no encouragement to realise their feminist potential. Henry James's approach differs from this, as is evidenced in his dispute over the 'function' of fiction with H. G. Wells; James would never concede that the novel should function primarily on a political level. However, in *The Bostonians* James does reveal a concern with woman's 'nature' which he could not fail to recognise as political: the 'feminine' woman must fight her 'nature' to make feminist gains; while the feminist woman, in order to gain heroic stature, must personalise her objectives and must prove herself capable of entering the 'male' domains of culture without adopting the corrupt strategies of 'maleness'.

At the end of *The Bostonians* it is Olive, the single woman, who emerges as a sustaining presence for the women's movement. Following Basil's abduction of Verena, Olive seeking 'fierce expiation' in exposure to the mob (B, 431) mounts the stage to confront a disaffected audience who are impatient for Verena to speak. Taking public responsibility for her beliefs, she has finally learned to sacrifice more personal desires for the sake of active, feminist commitment towards, and recognition of, the real substance of women's lives, and James suggests that, had Basil had the opportunity to observe her, he would have likened Olive to: 'some feminine firebrand of Paris revolutions, erect on a barricade, or even the sacrificial figure of Hypatia, whirled through the furious mob of Alexandria' (B, 432). The association of Olive with revolutionary violence and with the oratorical skills of Hypatia delineates the sexual anxieties and apprehensions of the patriarchy -- it is after all Ransom whom James suggests would envisage Olive in this way. Furthermore, Olive's voice, which provides a backdrop to the activities of Basil Ransom, echoes around the social imperatives from which Verena cannot escape, and provides a concurrent final scene to Verena and Basil's concluding episode.

The conclusion of *The Bostonians* possesses a marked degree of ambivalence which deliberately disturbs and denies any happiness or coherence which the marital

ending ascribes to it. Verena shrieks for Olive as Ransom drags her away 'by muscular force' (*B*, 432), he swathes her face in a hood 'to conceal her face and her identity' (*B*, 433). Though Olive and Basil each seek to enshroud Verena, Basil intends to infantilise her whilst Olive will at least enable her expansion as an articulate woman, albeit initially as a mouthpiece. Furthermore, Olive surmounts the dilemmas of selfishness, and retracts the pledge or vow of unity which she had so longed for from Verena whilst Basil chooses not to respect Verena's separate existence from himself. Verena's heterosexuality is on his side but as Basil leads Verena away, confined at last, exhausted and fallible, shut in biological destiny and kept there by Basil's manly grasp, Olive ascends the stage to realise a new eloquence. In losing Verena, Olive gains the power of voice. She has overcome silence. The reader may preserve an ambivalent response to this ending as it is a subversive interpretation of the conventional marriage plot:

'Ah, now I am glad!' said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, [Basil] presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed (*B*, 432)

James divorces the marital resolution from happiness so that whilst appearing to valorise the heterosexual ending he strips it instead of facile optimism, introducing ominous instability. The compulsorily heterosexual plotting of the Victorian novel, ending as it does in stabilising marital union, is rocked by Verena's cry, for the heroine has emotional affiliations in both directions between the two types of self-representation which Olive, the marriage-hating spinster, and Basil, the born-again patriarch, offer.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sexual Anarchy and the "'green bay-tree'" of Political Spinsterhood in Gissing's *The Odd Women*

The results of long-term feminist struggle became apparent towards the end of the century; the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts had been carried to a successful conclusion, the Acts were suspended in 1883 and finally repealed in 1886; the energy which had been devoted to improving married women's property rights and custodial rights to their children during separation and divorce, bore fruit -- the first Divorce Act was passed in 1857, the Married Women's Property Act in 1887, the Matrimonial Causes Act in 1878, and the Guardianship of Infants Act in 1886. The middle-class single woman gained from efforts to improve women's access to education, resulting in improved pay in the professions which they entered, and an increasing variety of opportunities for independent life outside the family. The apex of change was the struggle for the vote which climaxed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not only in the militancy of the Women's Social and Political Union, but also in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. In 1897 women's suffrage societies were reorganised and grouped together within the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies which was under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett for almost all of its duration. The militant organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union, was formed by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. The dictatorial style of Pankhurst's leadership of the W. S. P. U. was to lead to division in the militant movement in 1907 which resulted in the formation of the softly-militant splinter group, the Women's Freedom League in 1908: this was more democratically led by Charlotte Despard.

By 1911 there was a sharp rise in the number of women in each age group from 25 upwards who remained single. Sheila Jeffreys sees the increase as the outcome of feminist agitation in the preceding two decades and represents this as the point, between 1801 and 1931, when marriage had become least popular.¹ Indeed, Gerd Bjorhorde points out that one indicator of the impact which suffrage made upon British social, political and cultural life was the common use of the term 'The

¹ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1987), p. 88.

Cause', a popular signifier of the women's cause, but which required no modifier to indicate this.²

The eighteen-eighties and nineties were characterised by massive capitalist production, when a new sexual distribution of labour emerged. Women became active in service industries, as clerical workers, book-keepers, cashiers, and in all areas of printing. While such areas of work were at first exhilarating, they did eventually form underpaid and devalued areas of female labour. The money earned for clerical work was initially far better than the remuneration for governessing or needlework, but as women became the chief occupants of these posts the wage gap widened and opportunities for better pay and advancement became scarce. Indeed, a review of working-class and lower middle-class female labour, carried out in the eighteen-nineties as a first attempt by the government to make a systematic enquiry into the conditions of women's industrial work, found that:

In most of the trades inspected there is little evidence of women's employment in any of the more skilled departments, if we except decorative work in the potteries [...] and the highest class of mantle, dressmaking and millinery work.³

The need for employment remained, but feminist concerns with the types of employment available for women also persisted. The right to work, however, still retained its status as one of the middle-class woman's highest freedoms. Theresa Billington-Grieg addressed the need for economic independence for middle-class women in 'The Old Eve in Suffragist Colours':

Without the capacity for self-support the pressure of economic control either looms as an ever-present and imminent interference with liberty or functions to preclude liberty altogether. No creature that requires the economic support of another in order to subsist can be free from constraint in relation to that other. If women are to be free and to prove themselves fully human they must fulfil this inexorable law of life: they must win for themselves by their own exertions a sufficiency of the fruits of labour; they must demonstrate that they are self-sufficient economic units and not parasitic or semi-parasitic appendages of men.⁴

² Gerd Bjorhorde, *Rebellious Structures. Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, Oxford: distributed by Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 3.

³ Miss Bulley, 'The Employment of Women', *Fortnightly Review* (January 1894), 39-48, (p. 40). Miss Bulley is analysing the statistical results of the most recent Lady Assistant Commissioners' Report.

⁴ Fawcett Library, Theresa Billington-Grieg, 'The Old Eve in Suffragist Colours', Box no. 404, n. d.

In *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) and *Kirsteen* (1888) two very different responses towards dressmaking emerge, which perhaps indicate the extent of change in approaches to middle-class female labour. For Kate Nickleby work in Madame Mantalini's sweatshop is temporary, she fits in poorly with her fellow workers who are hardened creatures compared to the soft and feminine Kate. The girls work under the jurisdiction of the elderly, coquettish and obsequious Miss Knag. Driven by a mercenary uncle into trade, Kate's endurance of work is used to prove her fitness as a heroine, whereas in *Kirsteen*, Kirsteen's pride in her work proves hers. As a middle-class woman working, Kate Nickleby's stay in employment is a trial intended to valorise the heroine and can indeed be viewed as extension of her selfless duties. Whereas Kirsteen's permanent work is invoked very differently. Indeed, Kirsteen finds it difficult to hold in check her delight in her labour -- work suffuses her cheeks with colour and tempers her negotiations with others with pride.

The title of George Gissing's novel *The Odd Women* (1893)⁵ derives from a central contradiction of Victorian society: the conflict between an appropriate domestic setting for women and the ambient social and economic pressures which challenged this. Conservative assumptions about the inadequacy of the lives of women who did not marry were counterbalanced by an increased reluctance among some feminist single women to fulfil their 'appropriate' functions through traditional marital structures.

Gissing explained to his friend Eduard Bertz that the novel was to be about women 'who are odd in the sense that they do not make a match; as we say "an odd glove"'.⁶ Gissing's writing had persistently focused on those who occupy the margins of society: the aspiring lower middle-class, displaced intellectuals and unintegrated spinsters. Within his fiction, he habitually identified with oddness, difference and alienation as social characteristics, viewing himself as a perpetual outsider. Urban life did not suit Gissing: as he found that the struggle for subsistence pitched individual against individual. He wrote to his sister Ellen in 1881:

Struggling for a living in London is very much like holding yourself up, after a shipwreck, first by one floating spar and then by another; you are too much taken up with the effort of saving yourself, to raise your head and look if anyone else is struggling in the waves, and if you do come into

⁵ George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, 1883 (repr. London: Virago Press, 1987). All references to *The Odd Women* are from the Virago edition.

⁶ George Gissing, *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903*, edited by A. Young (London: Constable, 1961), p. 166.

contact with anyone else, ten to one it is only to fight and struggle for a picce of floating wood.⁷

Since the mid-nineteenth century, then, single women had remained a focus of public concern as both a social anomaly and a social problem and the plight of marginal women proved an attractive subject for Gissing.

Within the framework of *The Odd Women*, Gissing's personal convictions are difficult to determine. He bewilders critics when his opinions divide confusingly between radical theorising on the role of female celibacy with regard to heterosexual relations and on the structure of those relations in themselves, and what appears to be a more reluctant and conservative scepticism about the 'nature' of the Victorian woman and her ability to realise the promise of self-respect which emancipation offered. The issue of whether Gissing was an anti-feminist has continued to engage critical attention. *The Odd Women* has been variously considered as a feminist and an anti-feminist text. Gissing has been paradoxically described by David Grylls as a 'women-worshipping misogynist with an interest in female emancipation'.⁸ Grylls attempts to justify his description through biographical detail, describing Gissing's personal approach to women as 'idealistic and cynical'. It is an approach which Grylls considers became more analytical when translated into Gissing's fiction, although he concedes that Gissing's 'unsteady temperament' means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate his approach in any fixed sense. Grylls writes, 'the truth is that from first to last Gissing's emotional reaction to women was strangely compounded of romantic desire and disenchanted repulsion'.⁹ Gissing's fiction is, as it were, a compound of reactionary and progressive impulses, which Grylls suggests is a result of the perpetual involvement of Gissing's personal feelings with his social theories. Grylls considers that Gissing's propensity to glorify women led him into inconsistencies in his fiction, as, for example, in the incompatibility which develops between Gissing's ideal of domestic virtue and his sense of the need for an adequate education for women. Grylls concludes that 'the pedestal on which he wished to place women was not only fractured in itself, but attached to a vast and immovable rock of hard misogyny'.¹⁰

Alice B. Markow also asks the question which has plagued Gissing's critics: 'Was he an advocate of women's rights or a critic and provocateur?' She replies by firmly placing Gissing as an anti-feminist 'provocateur' who nominally proposes the

⁷ *The Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, edited by Algernon Gissing and Ellen Gissing (London: Constable, 1927), p. 166.

⁸ David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p. 141.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 151

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

rights of women only in order to reveal their 'basic, often biological' inequality: 'Whenever he goes to the trouble to establish a positive concept of female emancipation through verbal debate, he almost always fails to support it through narrative action.'¹¹

Markow does appear to be justified in her suggestion that Gissing manipulates the action of the plot and its chain of consequences to examine the feminist claims and potentialities of the late Victorian spinster, but is not necessarily justified in her belief that Gissing does so in order to undercut or subvert feminist initiatives. Rather, it may be that Gissing seeks to negotiate a workable connection between feminist theory and the experiential reality of the single woman. Markow's view of Gissing resembles Lloyd Fernando's assertion that Gissing's writing practice in the depiction of women and women's issues is of an 'undeniably hostile cast'. Fernando finds that the close detail which Gissing provides of Victorian feminism may lead the reader wrongly to assume that Gissing's sympathies lie with that cause: the detail functions rather as a disguise for the 'reasoned animosity' of Gissing's approach to the women's movement.¹²

Gissing found it necessary to defend himself against his literary reputation for misogyny to Gabrielle Fleury. He wrote to her in August 1898 admittedly in terms which try to remove one cause of offence while suggesting another:

Do you really imagine that I could forbid you to speculate on the deepest subject because you are a *woman*!! Gabrielle, once for all let me tell you that I recognize no restraint whatever upon a woman's intellect. Don't judge me in this respect from my wretched *books* -- which deal, you know, with a contemptible social class, for the most part.¹³

Much criticism of Gissing has explored and stressed the connections between his life and art, using biographical detail to analyse his fictional narratives. John Halperin believes that to read a Gissing text without biographical knowledge is 'to read blindfolded' and that Gissing's novels are 'extracts from the story of his own existence'.¹⁴ A clue to Gissing's writing practice is provided by an essay, 'The Place of Realism in Fiction', which he wrote for *The Humanitarian* in May 1895. In this Gissing engages with the concept of 'reality' in fiction and the writer's relationship to his text; he describes the process by which the writer's imagination warms and

¹¹ Alice B. Markow, 'George Gissing: Advocate or Provocateur of the Women's Movement?', *English Literature in Transition*, 25 (1982), 58-73, (p. 59).

¹² Lloyd Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 107.

¹³ *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury* edited by Pierre Coustillas (New York: The New York Public Library, 1964), p. 36.

¹⁴ John Halperin, *Gissing. A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 6.

revives the 'dead material' of literature. Gissing reaches the conclusion that the 'reality' of any given fictional text is impossible to define in that 'every novelist beholds a world of his own' and so 'the supreme endeavour of his art must be to body forth the world as it exists for him.' The novelist, in effect, 'works and must work, subjectively'.¹⁵

Dorothy Zaborzsky notes that critics cannot agree on the ideological stance of many Gissing texts. She feels Gissing has suffered from critical over-reliance upon biographical detail. Critical interpretations of his fiction are, she claims, typified by the extrapolation of personal opinions from the fiction and the use of biographical detail to support evaluations of his fiction. Zaborzsky suggests that it would be more relevant to concentrate on the relationship between textual content and social context, than upon the relationship between the author and the text. Concentrating on the former relationship, Zaborzsky finds that *The Odd Women* provides a detailed and accurate rendition of late Victorian feminist issues and that 'given Gissing's political conservatism, *The Odd Women* is a surprisingly complete and fair treatment of the major topics of Victorian feminism'.¹⁶ Ironically, the result of Zaborzsky's critical strategy is that her contextually-based reading of Gissing does no more than shift the onus of explanation from Gissing's personal life to the cultural backdrop of the author's fiction and creates an unconvincing divide between personal context and cultural context, although this may prove enlightening as a short-term strategy.

Katherine Linehan finds in *The Odd Women* evidence that Gissing temporarily gained 'transcendence' over the personal concerns which had so frequently complicated his fiction and limited his imagination. What Linehan designates Gissing's 'feminism' was the result of 'an essentially negative experience of women':

... the irritation which he felt in the face of female 'imbecility' often threatened to eclipse the tolerance he could command when objectively viewing women as the victims of social restrictions. Much as he grew to value the idea of intellectual equality between men and women, he could rarely shake off a suspicion of women's inherent weakness of mind and body, or a nostalgia for an old-fashioned ideal of feminine submissiveness and domesticity.¹⁷

¹⁵ quoted in Halperin., p. 221.

¹⁶ Dorothy Zaborzsky, 'Victorian Feminism and Gissing's *The Odd Women*' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 8, 5 (1985), 489-496, (p. 492).

¹⁷ Katherine B. Linehan, 'The Odd Women: Gissing's Imaginative Approach to Feminism', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40 (1979), 358-375, (p. 359).

Linehan also finds that any open-minded examination of the possibility of new forms of heterosexual relationship, which the text initially appears to promise, collapses beneath the force of Gissing's 'antifeminist prejudices'.¹⁸

Yet *The Odd Women* was written at the peak of Gissing's sympathy with feminism, despite his shifting responses to central feminist issues within the novel: consequently the text does appear to be a strange mix of reactionary and progressive opinions. After *The Odd Women* Gissing's sympathies with the women's movement decline.

It is perhaps useful to consider the attitudes expressed in *The Odd Women* as a temporary representation of the progression of Gissing's responses to culture and society. Indeed, each novel is a brief and fragmentary projection of Gissing's changing beliefs and throughout the corpus of his fiction Gissing altered and revised his opinions, retreated from positions, and discarded some enthusiasms, the result of which constant process explains the complexity and equivocality of Gissing's position at any one time.

The restless movement of narrative perspective in *The Odd Women*, the way in which Gissing's position, or indeed any consistent narrative position, tends to elude the reader -- Gissing refrains from expressing consistent authorial opinion -- and his use of multiple focus in the narrative, seem to reflect an overall ambivalence on the part of the author towards his subject of sexual relations.

Criticism which promotes an interpretation of *The Odd Women* based on Gissing's 'feminist' impulses tends to rely too heavily upon a notion of the consistency of Gissing's opinions, and on too unambivalent a reading of his fiction. Jacob Korg, Gissing's biographer, writes of his relationship to feminism that Gissing's 'opinions were clear and consistent'; 'an enemy of the Victorian myth of the inferiority of women, he believed firmly that women were the intellectual and spiritual equals of men'.¹⁹ Gillian Tindall also appears to align herself with Korg in her overly optimistic claim that within *The Odd Women* Gissing 'was able to demonstrate the problems of women's existence without contradictory undertones'. However, with reference to Gissing's life and work, Tindall does admit some degree of ambivalence. She suggests that the extent of Gissing's emotional investment in the *idea* of heterosexual fulfilment through love and marriage, hindered his ability to apprehend the reality of those structures (as dismal and unsatisfying): 'His marked lapses of judgement were due not to shaky ideals as such, but to a lethal tendency to idealise a situation or person without sufficient regard for reality'.²⁰

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 360

¹⁹ Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle, 1963), p. 185, quoted in Fernando, p. 107.

²⁰ Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile. George Gissing* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), pp. 195, 69.

Wielding enormous influence over Gissing's view of women was his construction of the feminine paragon of the middle-class woman, whose dextrous grace Gissing could only admire from afar. His letters to Gabrielle Fleury indicate the nature of his idealisation. Writing to her in 1898 Gissing tells Fleury that in her he divines the qualities which approach his ideal of womanhood, and later in the same year he provides her with a sketch of the ideal woman:

I saw her, to begin with, a much nobler being than myself; I saw her, before all, a true woman, endowed with every grace of mind and heart which is characteristically feminine. Her face represented my own ideal of personal beauty [...] And her voice -- a woman's voice is perhaps the first thing that attaches one to her; her voice was soft and varied, always mystical. Then she was capable of passion; one divined in her an infinite tenderness. Her mind was open to the world of art; she loved music especially. And with all that, she had domestic instinct, so seldom found with the other qualities.²¹

In *The Odd Women*, Gissing's response to male-female relations can be taken as largely pessimistic, in that the novel's celibate heroine, Rhoda Nunn, proves successful through her celibacy and her liberation does not depend upon satisfactory male-female relations, but indeed, upon her avoidance of any heterosexual union. Despite this, Gissing does appear to retain some hope for heterosexual relationships since Rhoda's commitment to celibacy is intended as temporary, and is tempered, at the close of the novel, by her newly-developed understanding of women's requirements and the possibility of their need to fulfil heterosexual desires. Rhoda's celibacy is a necessary step towards the creation of an improved future for male-female union, although Gissing stops short of imagining any appropriate model of such a union within *The Odd Women*. It is likely, however, that Gissing can only endorse the 'sexual anarchy' which Rhoda's demand for a radical restructuring of sexual roles represents, with any confidence at all, because of his belief in, and emotional need for, a viable future for heterosexual union. Through the term 'sexual anarchy' Gissing intends to suggest the social inclusion of new types of union between man and woman, albeit with the possibility of incorporating a new, equitable form of the marriage contract, and, as an extreme preparation, the temporary segregation of the sexes. He can anticipate a positive outcome of 'sexual anarchy' since he hopes that instability will result in the demise of 'the typical woman' whom Gissing tends to characterise as foolish, uneducated and an unsuitable mate for the middle-class man. He confesses to Eduard Bertz his confidence that the forces of nature, embodied by heterosexual union, will not fail to reassert

²¹ Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury, p. 27.

themselves, for through sexual anarchy; 'Nothing good will perish; we can trust the forces of nature, which tend to conservation'.²² Adrian Poole suggests that Gissing approaches the prospect of 'sexual anarchy' with an eagerness which can be accounted for by the difficulties he met in his own marital relationship with his second wife, Edith Underwood, difficulties expressed in Gissing's search for a means to effect a 'general transformation of relationship'.²³ If Poole's explanation is extended a little further, it becomes apparent that he has located the source of Gissing's paradoxical response to heterosexual relationships in *The Odd Women*; Gissing's hope for such unions is born through desperation out of personal circumstance and even as he attempts to form some projection of harmonious and equitable heterosexual unions, any vision he approaches is undermined by the mire of domestic misery in which personal circumstances placed him. Gissing's life circumstances both promote and defeat his own vision but, despite this, he manages to retain some optimism as he endorses the 'sexual anarchy' which figures as the preliminary stage to new relationships between the sexes. During the early eightennineties Gissing was able to produce positive fictional representations of single women largely because much of his faith in traditional domesticity had been shattered.

The disenchantments of Gissing's life experience can account, to a considerable extent, for any bitterness he may have felt towards women. Gissing's search for a marital partner was always complicated by the conviction that no middle-class woman would find him lovable (following his loss of respectability when he was charged with theft at Owen College) and, in any case, that he could not afford a middle-class wife. Instead Gissing chose to form liaisons with working-class women whom he considered his inferiors. David Grylls interprets Gissing's whole approach to women as dominated by two ideals; that of 'modestly-draped refinement' (the middle-class ideal) and that of 'franker earthiness' (the working-class woman whom Gissing would 'improve').²⁴ Gissing's relations with women plummet from his tragic attachment to the prostitute, Marianne Harrison, to the loveless depths of his expedient marriage to Edith Underwood, in which Gissing's search for domestic solace failed. Henry James, meeting Gissing in 1901, commented with characteristic insight and circumlocution that Gissing appeared 'quite particularly marked out for what is called in his and my profession an unhappy ending'.²⁵

²² *Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, p. 171 (2 June 1893).

²³ Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 186.

²⁴ Grylls, p. 142.

²⁵ quoted in Halperin, p. 7.

As early as 1889, on Tuesday 15 October, Gissing records in his diary: 'Worked at Museum on Woman Literature'.²⁶ His detailed and intensive work at this time involved the listing of books, journals and organisations concerned with female emancipation, an entire section of notes on the women's movement and further detailed records on higher education for women. Two days later, Gissing's diary reveals that he has sketched out a novel called *The Headmistress*,²⁷ which was to be set in a girl's school and whose subject was to be female education. However, by March of the following year Gissing had decided not to continue with *The Headmistress* and noted that the 'materials for that will lie over'.²⁸ His research was later to be utilised in *The Odd Women*. *The Odd Women* was eventually written in 1892 about a year after Gissing's second ill-fated marriage to Edith Underwood. He and Edith quarrelled frequently and gloomy statements punctuate his diary during this period. Gissing records in a diary entry for New Years Eve 1892:

The year 1892 on the whole profitless. Marked by domestic misery and discomfort. The one piece of work, *The Odd Women*, scribbled in six weeks as the autumn drew to an end; and I have no high opinion of it.²⁹

Household tension interfered with Gissing's work and in a diary entry for July 1892, Gissing notes that *The Odd Women* was his seventh attempt at beginning a new novel and eventually he had to resort to renting a room away from home in order to work.³⁰ Gissing's earliest statements of intent about the novel suggest a preliminary scaffolding upon which *The Odd Women* could be constructed:

It will present those people who, congenitally incapable of true education, have yet been taught to consider themselves too good for manual, or any humble work. As yet, I have chiefly dealt with types expressing the struggle of natures endowed *above* their stations; now I turn to those who are *below* it. The story will be a study of vulgarity -- the all but triumphant force of our time. Women will be the chief characters.³¹

Following its publication in 1893 *The Odd Women* received largely favourable reviews. Its realism seemed so intense that a reviewer suggested that one was in danger of brushing against Gissing's characters in the Strand. Yet the characters of *The Odd Women*: 'Are transfigured by the artist, who shows [...] the exact

²⁶ *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England. The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, edited by Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 169.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 211.

²⁹ *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, p. 331.

³⁰ *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 280.

³¹ *Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, p. 144, (16 Feb. 1892).

significance of each life. *The Odd Women* is a great vindication of realism from the charge of dullness.³² The vigorous narration of Gissing's novel seemed to fit well with the new realism; an impression further assisted by the author's intensive use of the newspapers and periodicals which he had studied in the British Museum. The various discourses presented within the novel appear to draw upon the discourses which inform debate about the women's movement throughout the late nineteenth century. Gillian Tindall mentions Gissing's attendance at Ethical Society lectures on the woman question.³³

The novel even appears to support large areas of nineteenth-century feminist theory in its insistence on self-worth, independence and autonomy. The strategies of the plot result in the affirmation of fresh possibilities for women and, it can be argued, approve the definitions of feminism which many *fin-de-siècle* radical feminists sought to assert. The novel displays a rare closeness to some Victorian feminist discourses. Alice Markow appears to underestimate the longevity of feminist projects when she argues that by the time Gissing was writing *The Odd Women* during the 1890s, the subjects of women's education and equal employment rights 'were either on their way to solution or considered dead issues'.³⁴ Markow's response to *The Odd Women* does seem to place the novel wrongly as a sociological curiosity rather than an active fictional response to a living and fluid women's movement.

Documentary evidence of any actual contact Gissing may have had with feminism is sparse. Joyce Evans in 'Some Notes on *The Odd Women* and the Women's Movement' does suggest that Gissing may have been familiar with the Ladies Institute founded by Bessie Parkes.³⁵ Gissing himself records one memorable Sunday in July 1888 when he stood listening to Annie Besant and Clementina Black (who was later to review *The Odd Women*) address the public at a strike meeting of Bryant and May's match girls. Besant's persuasive rhetoric motivated a successful campaign about the conditions of work for female employees at the factory and she was unanimously elected honorary secretary of a newly formed Matchmakers Union after the strike.

On a personal level, Gissing's acquaintance with single women is most marked in his relationship with his two sisters, Margaret and Ellen, neither of whom married. The sisters remained in Wakefield in Yorkshire, running the local school

³² Reprinted in Pierre Coustillas, *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 219 - 20.

³³ Tindall, pp. 169-170.

³⁴ Markow, p. 58.

³⁵ Joyce Evans, 'Some notes on *The Odd Women* and the Women's Movement', *George Gissing Newsletter* 2 (1966), 1 - 3.

during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The spinster sisters were eventually to rear Gissing's two sons by Edith Underwood. In his study of Charles Dickens, Gissing complains about the tradition which presumed that the middle-aged single women would be 'full of rancour against both sexes [having] failed in her chase of men'. Gissing asserts that, on the contrary, 'Nowadays, things are so different; it is common to find spinsters who are such by choice, and not a few of them are doing good work in the world'.³⁶

The opening chapter of *The Odd Women* entitled 'The Fold and the Shepherd' is set in 1872 and provides a brief glimpse of the origins of the narrative's unfortunate Madden sisters. Their mother has been dead for two years and Gissing ironically and abruptly states the purposes of Mrs Madden's life: 'Mrs Madden having given birth to six daughters has fulfilled her function in this wonderful world' (*OW*, 1). Crushed by the burden, not only of maternity, but also of Dr Madden's thoughtless idealism, 'secret anxieties' have marred 'her countenance long before the final collapse of her health' (*OW*, 2). The shortened course of her life contrasts bitterly with Dr Madden's vision of the Victorian home. As he expounds to his daughter Alice:

'The house must be guarded against sordid cares to the last possible moment. Nothing upsets me more than the sight of those poor homes where wife and children are obliged to talk from morning to night of how the sorry earnings shall be laid out. No, no; women, old or young, should never have to think about money'. (*OW*, 2)

A benevolent but improvident patriarch, Dr Madden does not believe in educating his daughters beyond the polite accomplishments required of dependent middle-class women. The books of poetry which stack the shelves of the Madden home prove to be no insurance against the penury which the girls face when left without any financial provision. Dr Madden recites Tennyson's *Lotus-Eaters* to his assembled daughters, in a state of blissful forgetfulness, but the tomorrow when he intends to insure his life never comes. Death jolts him from his familial idealism when he is thrown from a horse.

Set fifteen years later, chapter two of the novel gives a brief account of the years of penury suffered by his daughters. Three of Dr Madden's six daughters have died: one of tuberculosis, another by drowning on a pleasure boat accident and one commits suicide, having been driven into melancholia by unbearably hard work in a Board School. The remaining three sisters have grown thin on the 'deprecatory gentility' which Dinah Mulock Craik claimed characterised the decayed

³⁶ quoted in Linehan, p. 372.

gentlewoman; their gentility can provide no defence against hard fortune.³⁷ Having been brought up to be dependent on male authority and having lost their father, they are under pressure to find husbands but find this by no means easy.

Alice is a ineffectual governess, whose only consolation is to read *The Christian Year* and to abandon herself to religious daydreams. Her sister Virginia acts as a companion to invalid ladies, but takes refuge in gin and brandy and walks to the Strand for a 'sense of holiday' (*OW*, 17). She can only find life fragrant with the help of a restorative brandy and water, and Gissing describes her afterwards as walking through Trafalgar Square with a 'delightful animation' (*OW*, 18). Gissing is aware that the brandy-tipping spinster is the victim of a wide social pattern of injustice to single women. His overall method in the novel is to offer a representative survey of the options available to both voluntary and involuntary spinsters. The fragmentary education which Alice and Virginia have received is of little economic worth; they can only afford to inhabit cramped lodgings and debate whether one can support life on fourpence a day. As they eat a dinner of mashed potato and milk Alice croaks "The Irish peasantry live almost entirely on that and they are physically a fine race" (*OW*, 21). Gissing subverts the sisters' gentility through key images: Virginia's choice of fiction is the popular novel, her vegetarianism masks alcohol addiction whilst Alice walks as if pursued, and pimples lace her forehead beneath her thin brown hair.

The sisters have no access to a feminist base from which to interpret the condition of spinsterhood and can only view their singleness as a demoralising state. Their only purpose is to evade ruin in a free enterprise market. Without husbands or an independent vision, they are fit only for the overstocked occupations of harassed governess, quelled companion or hard-worked shop girl. Alice and Virginia's one remaining hope is that Monica, the youngest sister, may catch a husband.

Monica is unpoliticised, sexually appealing and works in a drapery shop in Walworth Road. The security of her job is dependent upon productive output, despite the physical ailments which many fellow workers incur through the demands of the job. Throughout the novel, Monica's attempts to escape the spinsterhood which her sisters anticipate lead her into more dire circumstances; Monica does not realise that marriage may be detrimental to female autonomy until it is too late.

Into these lives comes the resilient Rhoda Nunn, whom they had known in childhood. Rhoda, with her colleague Mary Barfoot, runs a school where women can learn commercial skills. In an unsigned review of *The Odd Women* in the *Saturday Review*, Rhoda is described as an 'advocate of celibacy' -- she is a pioneer spinster who joyfully anticipates the death of marriage and seeks to preside instead

³⁷ Dinah Mulock Craik, *Plain Speaking* (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1882).

over a heroic future of vocation for empowered single women. The review goes on to stress the typicality of both Rhoda and the Madden sisters who are: '[...] in no way single specimens of their kind, nor are they meant to be. No more is the harder, more successful Rhoda Nunn.'³⁸

Rhoda is an active feminist, involved in the attempt to give 'odd women' like the Madden sisters enough practical education to lead fulfilling lives. Rhoda is radically celibate, directing her dislike of men into a bold social vision. The women whom she trains will learn not only commercial skills, but also self respect. Marriage depends on the social vulnerability of women and rather than admit its necessity, Rhoda would reject it and looks forward to a transitional period in which the sexes will separate in order to create equality. Rhoda is convinced that: "'[...] before the female sex can be raised from its low level there will have to be a widespread revolt against sexual interest'" (*OW*, 61). Her sentiments reflect the emotional position which Gissing had arrived at as early as 1885; as he advised his brother Algernon of the relation between the sexes: 'Keep apart, keep apart and preserve one's soul alive -- that is the teaching of the day'.³⁹

Rhoda's celibacy derives authority from its contrast with the male-dependent lives which Gissing describes; the dreary lives of rented governesses, the ungainly florid jealousy of the fallen woman, Miss Eade, or that reminder of the jeopardy of marriage, Monica's monstrous alliance with Widdowson. And yet Rhoda is not without fault; she has all the blind unreason of the partisan and is, as Jenni Calder describes her, a 'prig and a puritan',⁴⁰ although she does develop beyond this in the course of the novel. Her limitations are apparent in her inability to convince Monica that the institution for training women in viable employment at Great Portland Street is anything other than 'an old maid factory' (*OW*, 50). She inspires dread rather than discipleship in Monica:

This energetic woman had little attraction for her. She saw the characteristics which made Virginia enthusiastic, but feared rather than admired them. To put herself in Miss Nunn's hands might possibly result in a worse form of bondage than she suffered at the shop; she would never be able to please such a person and failure, she imagined, would result in more or less contemptuous dismissal. (*OW*, 36)

³⁸ Anonymous, *Saturday Review*, (29 April 1893), 459-60, (p. 75), reprinted in *Gissing. The Critical Heritage* edited by Pierre Coustillas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 216.

³⁹ quoted in Halperin, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Jenni Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1976), p. 201.

What makes Rhoda's verve so uncongenial, is that she lacks a full understanding of the emotional lives of women; she has never been tempted from her ideals by love. Like Olive Chancellor in *The Bostonians*, Rhoda sets herself up as an example of feminist celibacy, but misses the point that one cannot encourage women to forego the security of marriage without having resisted the temptation oneself. It has been too easy for Rhoda explicitly to name herself as odd or to self-declare single women as an elite who must set an example to others. She is intolerant of those women who stray from celibacy, including those who are seduced and abandoned by men. She too casually recommends revolutionary behaviour, as when she scolds the docile Virginia: "Self-sacrifice may be quite wrong, I'm afraid" (*OW*, 21).

She is polemical, offers controversial opinions, disputes, launches aggressive attacks, and challenges the opinions of the anti-feminist opposition. Rhoda uses her oddness to fuel her rhetoric. She sees herself as empowering through her example:

'My work is to help those women, who by sheer necessity, must live alone -
- women whom vulgar opinion ridicules. How can I help them so
effectually as by living among them, one of them and showing that my life
is anything but weariness and lamentation?' (*OW*, 182)

Women must become hard-hearted and not allow emotion to blur their intellectual perceptions. After all "it isn't personal feeling that directs a great movement in civilisation" (*OW*, 133). Rather than accept that women should die quietly within their homes or their hearts, Rhoda would "like to see their dead bodies collected together in some open space for the crowd to stare at" (*OW*, 35). Her comments form a counter-discourse as she argues against the Victorian notion that women's power is in the way they relate to others, through childcare and reproduction. Single women, Rhoda feels, are uniquely powerful. Subject neither to the legal jurisdiction or economic support of men, they need not fear reprisal for their transgressive social behaviour. The spinster is not the grateful beneficiary of feminism but its motivator.

Rhoda's vow of chastity and service is an attempt to create a functioning class of ascetics for the women's movement, parallelling the celibacy of the Christian saints. Unfortunately, Rhoda's non-sexual love of women demands their faultlessness. Robert Selig points out: "The choice for Rhoda is far more stringent than simply work versus marriage; it is work versus sex itself and she votes for work every time."⁴¹

⁴¹ Robert Selig, 'The Gospel of Work in *The Odd Women*: Gissing's Double Standard', *Gissing Newsletter*, 15 (1979), 19-25, p. 23.

Rhoda's perspective is not uniformly endorsed by Gissing, but from time to time there appears to be authorial weight behind her statements. Through Rhoda, Gissing criticises an aspect of the double standard of Victorian society: its novelists' false emphasis upon romance. Gissing works to correct this false emphasis within *The Odd Women*, having Rhoda exclaim:

'If every novelist could be strangled and thrown into the sea, we should have some chance of reforming women [...] Love-love-love; a sickening sameness of vulgarity. What is more vulgar than the ideal of novelists? They won't represent the actual world; it would be too dull for their readers. In real life, how many men and women fall in love? Not one in every thousand [...] Not one married pair in ten thousand have felt for each other as two or three couples in every novel [...] There is the sexual instinct of course, but that is quite a different thing; the novelists daren't tell the one truth that would be profitable. The result is that women imagine themselves noble and glorious when they are most near the animals'. (*OW*, 58)

Rhoda complains that the popular novel perpetuates the exploitation of women through sentimentality, placing a false emphasis on romantic love, which is no more than a vehicle for the satisfaction of male lust. Adrian Poole appears to misread Rhoda's function in Gissing's narrative when he describes Rhoda as purchasing independence only negatively through 'the sterility of singleness' and an exclusion from 'woman's whole entanglement in the process of relationship, with birth and death'.⁴² Poole's analysis begins with the assumption that Rhoda does not recognise what she sacrifices, which is perhaps true at the beginning of the novel, and then Poole moves from what Rhoda is missing out on, to what he conceives as necessary to woman's being, heterosexual relationships or 'entanglement'. Poole appears to overlook the pleasure, fulfillment and indeed 'entanglement' which Rhoda derives from relationships with other women such as her colleague Mary Barfoot, relationships which have been formed by the context of her single state. Instead Poole disregards such detail and chooses instead to define Rhoda's social exclusion as formed by her singleness and what he designates the 'sterility' or non-reproductive nature of that state. Underestimated too are the wider implications of Gissing's depiction of Rhoda's celibacy, which indicate that, when mixed with generous compassion it can be fruitful. Rhoda is involved in the reproduction of new forms of womanhood by the end of the narrative.

Rhoda appears immune to the charms of male-female romance. But she is led fatally to form a relationship with Everard Barfoot, precisely because of an

⁴² Poole, pp. 191-2.

awareness that her singleness has never been fully tested. She seeks a suitor whom she can scorn, thus affirming her credentials as a militant feminist and making her a more persuasive figure. Mary Barfoot ponders over Rhoda's relationship with Mary's cousin Everard:

Was she capable of the love which defies all humiliation? Or, loving ardently, would she renounce a desired happiness from dread of female smiles and whispers? Or would it be her sufficient satisfaction to reject a wealthy suitor and thus pose more grandly than ever before the circle who saw in her an example of woman's independence? Powerful was the incitement to curiosity in a situation, which however it ended, would offer such matter for emotional hypothesis. (*OW*, 213)

Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot are the organisers of a professional training school on Great Portland Street:

In one of the offices, typewriting and occasionally other types of work that demanded intelligence, were carried on by three or four young women regularly employed [...] In the second room Miss Barfoot instructed her pupils, never more than three being with her at a time. A bookcase full of works on the Woman Question and allied topics, served as a circulating library. (*OW*, 54)

Typewriting is Rhoda's occupation but she is also adept at shorthand, book-keeping and commercial correspondence.⁴³ A clerk's labour is vigorously embraced by the feminists; they view such labour as personally liberating and as part of a moral endeavour to give women access to new and useful forms of work. Gregory Anderson points out in *Victorian Clerks* that the three decades between 1880 and 1910 represent the era of the clerk, and not coincidentally, the beginning of women's participation within the urban white-collar workforce. The number of male clerks increased five-fold during this time while numbers of female clerks, most of whom were unmarried, increased by as much as five-hundred fold.⁴⁴ Employment was linked to new roles for single women allowing greater independence and release from the obligation to marry, although there was a price to pay for the new forms of employment. Clara Collett pointed out the unfairly detrimental effect that middle-class women's participation in industry had on their social status: they were 'constantly called upon to balance an industrial gain with social loss.'⁴⁵ Sian

⁴³ Remington introduced the typewriter in the 1870s and the women who used it were named after the machine and called typewriters.

⁴⁴ Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), p. 56.

⁴⁵ Clara Collett, 'Prospects of Marriage for Women', *Nineteenth Century* 31 (1892), 537-52, (p. 537).

Reynolds notes that typesetting was reputedly light work and required literacy and manual dexterity. The soft brush of a woman's fingers, conservative commentators felt, was particularly suited to this industrial employment. Gladstone, amongst others, eulogised women's 'nimble fingers'. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he commented: 'We all know that women are peculiarly adapted from their small fingers, to the delicate handling of type.'⁴⁶ Typesetting, although a manual trade, was directly related to the more traditional female employment of governessing, in its similar emphasis on literacy.

Enlarged economic sufficiency, work opportunities and feminist activity worked together to create a large group of female clerks. The concept of freedom became more certain and new attempts at female community accommodated the emotional needs of single women. In *The Odd Women* Monica Madden lives with Mildred Vesper and works at typewriting, while studying at Great Portland Street: 'She experienced a growth of self respect. It was much to have risen from the status of a shop-girl, and the change of moral atmosphere had a very beneficial effect on her' (*OW*, 70). Monica feels as if her social circumstances as a single woman appear less deviant when located in a welcoming social orbit and since this includes social interchange and many other compensatory satisfactions, Monica's loneliness seems to diminish. Such communities of women provide a complete repertoire of reciprocal satisfactions and obligations.

The institute at Great Portland Street bears many similarities to Emily Faithfull's Victoria Press, a publishing organisation which was partly responsible for the journal which Gissing relied on so extensively for his research in the British Museum, *The Englishwoman's Journal*. Both the Victoria Press and its fictional counterpart of Great Portland Street possess the same animating spirit. When the twenty-five year old clergyman's daughter, Emily Faithfull, opened the Victoria Press in 1860, she was both eager to open the compositor's trade to women and more specifically to single women who must support themselves. Faithfull's colleague, Bessie Rayner Parkes, bought a small press and some type and the two women received instruction in the trade. A property was acquired in Great Coram Street and the Victoria Press was launched in March 1860 with five women compositors. By October of the same year nineteen compositors occupied the office. The Victoria Press survived into the 1880s and paid its women workers a wage which accorded with union rates. Furthermore, Faithfull ensured that the women enjoyed excellent

⁴⁶ Sian Reynolds, *Brittania's Typesetters. Women Compositors in Edwardian Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), p. 149, note 15 cites as source *S.T.C.*, (April 1860), p. 213.

working conditions and short hours.⁴⁷ Typesetting initially redeemed women from the familiar prisons of unpaid or low paid employment as housekeepers, companions and so on. The exuberance surrounding a new employment contrasts with despondent male views of employment in *The Odd Women*. While women march into the office, men abandon it; Monica's future husband Widdowson gives a dreary account of the damp souls of clerks and of his occupation:

'I have always hated office work and business of every kind; yet I could never see an opening in any other direction. I have been all my life a clerk -- like so many thousands of other men [...] A clerk's life -- a life of the office without any hope of rising -- that is a hideous fate!' (*OW*, 43)

Mary and Rhoda thus define the limitations of their gender by the joyfulness they experience when one of their trainees achieves a clerkship. Similarly, the visionary efforts with which Victorian figures like Elizabeth Blackwell or Sophia Jex-Blake attempted to enter the medical profession and struggled against the imperfect authority of male practitioners, contrast starkly with Gissing's portrayal of Dr Madden, who is a doctor only in name: 'Elkanah Madden should never have entered the medical profession; mere humanitarianism had prompted the choice in his dreamy youth; he became an empiric, nothing more' (*OW*, 2).

Similarly, the distinction between the sexes is emphasised by the way in which different Gissing characters treat their inheritances. Both Everard Barfoot and Widdowson inherit money from wealthy brothers, Barfoot uses his unearned income to enjoy travel; he spends three years touring Japan with shorter excursions to Egypt and Turkey. Widdowson uses his inheritance rapidly to discard a miserable working life in favour of indolent retirement. Mary Barfoot, on the other hand, uses her income to facilitate work by financing the Great Portland Street project. Mary's private means allow her to combine benevolence with business.

The professional training school at Great Portland Street supplements the practical education of women with regular lectures on feminist concerns. Among the unmarried women in the novel, Rhoda and Mary are doubly 'odd' in the sense that they are feminists. Their arguments and goals replicate the popular polemics of Victorian feminists. Mary is liberal and humanitarian and considers the individual to be more important than theory; Rhoda's insistence upon celibacy aligns her with radical feminism, which would encourage women to revolt against dominant Victorian sexual mores and marriage. Mary considers the type of feminism which sacrifices compassion to the desire for power inadequate, while Rhoda views Mary's

⁴⁷ William Fredeman, 'Emily Faithfull and the Victorian Press: an Experiment in Sociological Bibliography', *The Library* 29, 2 (June 1974).

generosity as a billowy sentimentality which could undermine the purpose of their work.

Mary believes that marriage is, in the end, the most appropriate occupation for women. She remains emotionally responsive to marriage: she warns Rhoda to modify her hostility:

'You have come to dislike the very thought of marriage and everything of that kind. I think it is a danger you ought to have avoided. True, we wish to prevent girls marrying just for the sake of being supported and from degrading themselves [...] but surely between ourselves we can admit that the vast majority of women would lead a wasted life if they did not marry'.
(*OW*, 59)

To which Rhoda responds heatedly: "'I maintain that the vast majority of women lead a vain and miserable life because they do marry'" (*OW*, 59). Adrian Poole quite rightly suggests that Gissing's characterisation of Rhoda and Mary is intended to reflect a central division in late nineteenth-century feminism; Mary's approach to change is 'gradualist' and functions as a foil to what Poole describes as Rhoda's "'revolutionary" militancy'; Poole continues: 'Unlike Mary, Rhoda actively encourages the girls in the organisation to forego the prospect of marriage, and sets herself up as an example of militant chastity'.⁴⁸ Alice Markow claims that the character of Mary escapes the usual Gissing irony because 'she represents his own view concerning woman's place' and that furthermore 'she comes perilously close to the antifeminist arguments of the day'.⁴⁹ Markow's description of Mary as 'somewhat misogynist' is an analysis which stands in peculiar relation to the obvious connections between Mary's feminism and the views espoused by a substantial section of the late Victorian women's movement; indeed, the character of Mary is in many ways representative of the non-militant Victorian feminist, and if she is perceived as failing in her feminism, she fails our contemporary expectations of what feminism should entail, rather than failing in the context of Victorian feminism. David Grylls points out that any ambiguities generated by Mary's feminism can be located in late Victorian feminist discourse and not in Gissing's representation of that discourse, a point which Grylls strengthens by placing Mary's statements alongside those of Emily Davies, the spinster pioneer of women's education in the Victorian era and founder of Girton College, Cambridge. Davies wanted an end to the assumption that girls were 'by nature' intellectually inferior to men. At no point did Davies deny that women may be intellectually inferior, but

⁴⁸ Poole, p. 190.

⁴⁹ Markow, p. 65.

suggested instead, in her 1866 treatise *The Higher Education of Women*, that should improved educational opportunities for women become a reality, women would be able to realise what they were in fact capable of:

If we look at the great mass [of women], we shall find much to be ashamed of [...] This almost complete mental blackness [is] the ordinary condition of women [...] I believe I may say [...] that any objector is welcome to assert anything he likes about the inferiority of the female intellect, if only he does not rate it so low as to be incapable of improvement by cultivation. We are not encumbered by theories about equality or inequality of mental power in the sexes. All we claim is that the intelligence of women [...] should have full and free development. And we claim it not specifically in the interest of women, but as essential to the growth of the human race.⁵⁰

The character of Mary Barfoot also seems to reflect Gissing's opinions on female education, which based the need for female education upon its ameliorative influence within male-female relations. Gissing wrote to his sister Ellen in 1882; 'If only you could know how much of the wretchedness of humanity is occasioned by the folly, pigheadedness, ignorance and incapacity of women'.⁵¹ Women are primarily responsible for corrupt marital relations, Gissing seems to assert, through their inability to provide intelligent companionship for men. As Mary Barfoot explains to her female audience in her talk 'Woman as the Invader':

'We are educating ourselves. There must be a new type of woman, active in every sphere of life; a new worker out in the world, a new ruler of the home [...] We must carry out an active warfare -- must be invaders [...] our rational growth has been stunted. The mass of women have always been paltry creatures, and their paltriness has proved a curse to men. So, if you like to put it in this way, we are working for the advantage of men as well as our own'. (*OW*, 137)

Mary Barfoot's moderation contrasts with Rhoda's extremism and anti-marriage diatribes. Yet Mary continues to characterise herself as "a troublesome, aggressive revolutionary person" (*OW*, 135) by virtue of the feminist initiatives which she encourages and describes:

'The world must look to its concerns. Most likely we shall have a revolution in the social order greater than any that yet seems probable. Let it come, and let us help its coming. When I think of the contemptible

⁵⁰ Emily Davies, *The Higher Education of Women* (London and New York: Alexander Straton, 1866), p. 101, quoted in Grylls, p. 167.

⁵¹ *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, p. 107 (3 February 1882).

wretchedness of woman enslaved by custom, by their weakness, by their desires, I am ready to cry. Let the world perish in tumult rather than go in this way'. (*OW*, 136)

In all earnestness, Gissing wrote to William Blackwood: 'Everything that concerns the education of women, -- the one interest of our time, the one thing needful -- strongly appeals to me'.⁵² Gissing's resolve is compelling, but he was not attracted to an education for women which would enable them to compete with men in the workplace, but rather one which would restore Ruskinian educational directives. Ruskin advises in 'Of Queen's Gardens',⁵³ that knowledge attained by women should function as a vehicle to greater kindness and, in accord with female characteristics, should extend the limits of womanly sympathy. A girl's education could bear similarities to that of a boy (except that she dare not touch theology) but must be directed differently: his command of knowledge should be 'fundamental and progressive' ('QG', 64) whilst hers is 'for daily and helpful use' ('QG', 64). In relation to single women, Gissing would extend Ruskin, to provide spinsters with training in a specific vocation as a means of self-support.

Gissing offered conservative advice to his sisters Ellen and Margaret concerning the type of education appropriate to their sex. In 1881 he urged Margaret to unite 'intellectuality with domestic efficiency'⁵⁴ and in a letter to Ellen in 1882, he suggests that women should seek a moderate understanding of specific subjects, but that Ellen should use education for its 'only real end':

... improvement of character [...] Who can *really* study Shakespeare and not be the gentler, wiser, nobler for it? I have vast faith in imaginative literature of all kinds. If the choice had to be made, I would rather have a girl well acquainted with Dickens, George Eliot, Shelley and Browning than with all the science in all the textbooks. These writers show you what is meant by life and teach you to distinguish the good and the bad in it.⁵⁵

The keynote of Gissing's impatience for female emancipation lies in a petulant letter to Eduard Bertz, in which he stresses that equality does not concern him. It is the educational aspects of emancipation which he considers important as they will make of women 'fit companions for men':

⁵² quoted in Halperin, p. 184.

⁵³ John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies. The Two Paths Etc.* edited by Ernest Rhys (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1928). All references to 'Of Queen's Gardens' are from the Dent edition.

⁵⁴ *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, p. 105 (9 November 1881).

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

My demand for female equality simply means that I am convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the misery of life is due to the ignorance and childishness of women. The average woman pretty clearly resembles, in all intellectual considerations, the average male *idiot* -- I speak medically. That state of things is traceable to the lack of education, in all senses of the word [...] I am driven frantic by the crass imbecility of the typical woman. That type must disappear, or at all events become altogether subordinate.⁵⁶

Both Mary and Rhoda criticise marriage as an institution and *The Odd Women* as a whole supports such criticisms as Gissing provides florid pastiches of marital unions, glimpses of domestic hell in Monica's and Widdowson's home at Herne Hill and shows the dilemmas surrounding the 'free union' which Rhoda and Everard almost embark upon.

Free unions were promoted by some 'New Woman' supporters as a new type of sexual partnership (Gissing himself was to eventually form such a union with Gabrielle Fleury). Grant Allen's novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895)⁵⁷ was published two years after *The Odd Women*. In his novel Allen sought to associate feminist liberation with a revolution in sexual ethics. *The Woman Who Did* was an enormously successful anti-marriage novel, with a tentative line to 'free love' in its advocacy of freedom in selecting sexual partners. The novel proved so popular that it earned Allen £1000 a year in royalties from its publication in 1895 to his death in 1899. The restrictive nature of its non-conformity perhaps in part accounted for its popularity with what was a often conservative female reading population. After all, Allen's heroine, ex-Girton girl Herminia Barton, though maritally non-conforming, does enjoy a monogamous relationship. Her bond with her lover, Alan Merrick, is traditional in everything other than its legality and when her lover dies, she proves incapable of surviving unaided, and eventually takes her own life when she is rejected by her prim daughter -- which incidentally counters the narrator's injunction that 'Every good woman is by nature a mother, and finds best in maternity her social and moral salvation. She shall be saved in child-bearing' (*WWD*, 145). Indeed within the boundaries of the novel, Allen consciously distanced Herminia from the type of feminist radicalism which sought to fully subvert women's social function:

Herminia was far removed indeed from that blatant and decadent set of 'advanced' women who talk as though motherhood were a disgrace and a burden, instead of being, as it is, the full realisation of women's faculties,

⁵⁶ *Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903*, p. 171 (2 June 1893).

⁵⁷ Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (London: John Lane, 1895). All future reference to *The Woman Who Did* will be taken from the John Lane edition.

the natural outlet for women's wealth of emotion. She knew that to be a mother is the best privilege of her sex. (*WWD*, 145)

Herminia simultaneously pities those 'unhappy beings doomed to the cramped life and dwarfed heart of the old maid' and despises 'those unhealthy souls who would make of celibacy, wedded or unwedded, a sort of anti-natural religion for women' (*WWD*, 146). Motherhood remains the natural source of womanliness, health and purity. On reading *The Woman Who Did* Millicent Fawcett found Herminia's supposedly feminist affiliations doubtful in the extreme, given that the self-sufficiency which she espouses appears to vanish abruptly following the death of her lover and that she anxiously conceals both the illegitimacy of her child and her own non-marital status.⁵⁸

In *The Odd Women* Rhoda's suitor, Everard Barfoot, is a *fin-de-siècle* advanced young man. When the reader first meets him, he is twenty-nine years old, a moral cynic with independent means and a sort of hedonist yet with a residual conscience. He tempts Rhoda with an offer of equality within a free union (behind which is concealed an intended proposal of marriage) and a world tour which will begin with the Orient Express in Constantinople. Realising that Rhoda's imagination is romantically furnished, not with kitchen and cradles and work-baskets, but with liberty, Everard entices her with an vision of travel and movement. When he proposes their journey Rhoda colours and gasps "'By the Orient Express'" (*OW*, 260).

Everard's intentions are however more circumspect as he has challenged himself with the wooing of Rhoda Nunn who is 'armed at all points' (*OW*, 143): 'It would delight him to enrage Rhoda and then detain her by strength, to overcome her senses, to watch her long lashes droop over the eloquent eyes' (*OW*, 143). Everard regards Rhoda as a challenge to his manhood; even her surname has intimations of the cloister, but yet, he suspects, heterosexual fires burn beneath this exterior.

As feminist and sceptic respectively, Rhoda and Everard have in common a hostility to the conventions of marriage and romance, which forms part of their mutual attraction. Everard does seek to marry Rhoda, but as a preliminary test of her affections, proposes a 'free union'. Both characters view Rhoda's femininity as representative of the new forms of womanhood and hence challenging. Rhoda wants a suitor to test her commitments, but does develop an interest in both the sexual autonomy which 'free unions' are supposed to attest to, and in equality within marriage. Everard wants to quell her independence and to try her celibacy with love.

⁵⁸ Millicent Fawcett, 'The Woman Who Did', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 625-31.

He believes that 'free union' will demand greater social defiance from Rhoda than formal marriage, failing to comprehend the complex significance of spinsterhood:

... he refused to entertain a thought of formal marriage. To obtain her consent to marriage would mean nothing at all; it would afford him no satisfaction. But so to play upon her emotions, that the proud, intellectual, earnest woman was willing to defy society for his sake -- ah! that would be an end worth achieving. (*OW*, 177)

The society from which Everard draws his values is the Victorian patriarchal one to which 'free union' represents a new rebellious structure, whereas Rhoda draws her values from a feminist celibacy which doubts the equality of any sexual relationship with a male. Nevertheless, Rhoda can perceive some advantage in having a suitor, insofar as it joins her to the common lot:

Secretly she deemed it a hard thing never to have known that common triumph of her sex. And, moreover, it took away the merit of her position as a leader and encourager of women living independently. There might be some who said, or thought, that she had made a virtue of necessity. (*OW*, 174)

Rhoda is something of a strategist and recognises that the contract of free union, if accepted, could function as a feminist credential:

It seemed to her an easier and nobler thing to proclaim her emancipation from social statutes, than to announce before her friends, the simple news that she was about to marry [...] A sure way of averting [...] ridicule was by furnishing occasion for much graver astonishment. If it became known that she had taken a step such as few women would have dared to take -- deliberately setting an example of new liberty -- her position in the eyes of all who knew her remained one of proud independence. (*OW*, 264)

Even though Everard is attracted to Rhoda's power and intellect, he still comforts himself chiefly with exquisite images of dominated and crushed femininity, recalling fragments of Keats's poetry: 'Of if thy mistress some rich anger shows,/ Imprison her soft hand and let her rave' (*OW*, 142). Her impregnability signifies her value as a collector's item and her surrender will be all the sweeter as it is ideological as well as sexual: 'Delighting in her independence of mind, he still desired to see her in complete subjugation to him, to inspire her with unreflecting passion' (*OW*, 261). Rhoda, in a decision which she immediately begins to regret, refuses the offer of a 'free union' and insists upon legal marriage. Everard, who had never intended any other form of relation with Rhoda, complies with her demands, but bitterly regrets

that 'he had not triumphed' in his desire that she go along with his insincere suggestion that they engage in a 'free union' and that Rhoda 'had overcome his will' (OW, 268).

Rhoda's eventual rejection of Everard can be read as leaving her heroically perfected in dedication to other women, reaching a greater understanding of women's needs and a commitment to social good which transcends her potential happiness in marriage. She realises that she is capable not only of vigorous desires, but also of jealousy; she is as susceptible to love as the shop girls she had scorned:

... she too had fallen among those poor of spirit, the flesh prevailing. But the soul in her had finally succumbed. Passion had a new significance; her conception of life was larger, more liberal; she made no vows to crush the natural instincts. Wherever destiny might lead, she would still be the same proud and independent woman, responsible only to herself, fulfilling the nobler laws of her existence. (OW, 290)

In *The Odd Women* Gissing's temporary attraction to a feminist critique of marriage can appear deceptively conciliatory because, although he endorses many of the feminist explanations of marital failure, he makes women rather than men responsible for the failure of marital relationships. The essence of Gissing's attitude to feminism in *The Odd Women* is contained in Everard Barfoot's response to Rhoda: "'You are bitter against the average man for his low morality; but that fault, on the whole, is directly traceable to the ignobleness of women'" (OW, 102).

Gissing's stance effectively reversed nineteenth century feminist discourse, which located responsibility for the inequality of women within the low morality of men in all areas of social, economic and political life. But the consequence of both perspectives is the same: friction between the sexes, hostility towards marriage and an agenda which incorporates the improved welfare and education of women.

Yet Gissing's position on feminist issues remains ambivalent: for instance, why should it be that Gissing persistently stresses that education will socialise women to be compatible with men, yet he allows the educated Rhoda to refuse Everard's proposals for union? Could it be that Gissing loads the dice by ensuring that Everard is an inadequate mate for Rhoda? Are more radical reforms necessary? Does Gissing find it difficult to visualise the outcome of his proposed reforms? Furthermore, the February 1892 correspondence with Eduard Bertz, in which Gissing states that his primary intention in *The Odd Women* is to present those women who are 'congenitally incapable of true education', proves to be a problematic starting point for analysis.⁵⁹ In his emphasis upon the innate,

⁵⁹ *Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, p. 144, (16 February 1892).

'congenital' incapability of certain women to cope with education, Gissing has well-nigh negated the point of the educational reforms which he urges within the text; the education of women proves to be, if not entirely pointless, then at least limited in its goals.

Gissing contrasts the relationship between Rhoda and Everard with the parallel plot of unhappily married Monica Madden who, in an attempt to escape drudgery and provide for her indigent spinster sisters, has married the reclusive older man, Edmund Widdowson. Their marriage proves to be a travesty of the Victorian domestic unit and Monica finds her husband's possessiveness unbearable. The couple undergo a dismal marriage service at Herne Hill:

Depression was manifest on every countenance, not excepting Widdowson's; the man had such a stern, gloomy look and held himself with so much awkwardness, he might have been imagined to stand here on compulsion. For an hour before going to the church Monica cried and seemed unutterably doleful; she had not slept for two nights; her face was ghastly. (*OW*, 121)

The experience of married life demonstrates the gap between the ideal and the reality. Like Monica's hapless father, Dr Madden, Widdowson is nostalgic for old-fashioned ideals of marriage and the family. His escapism is paternalist, which is characterised as unbearable, if unconscious:

... in his view of their relations he was unconsciously the most complete despot, a monument of male autocracy. Never had it occurred to Widdowson that a wife remains an individual, with rights and obligations independent of her wifely condition. Everything he said presupposed his own supremacy; he took it for granted that it was his to direct, hers to be guided. (*OW*, 152)

Widdowson's favourite reading is Ruskin and he believes that a woman should create a garden of her sphere, that the home should be undivided in Ruskinian terms, rather than a site of negotiable claims. Like Ruskin, Widdowson believes that ideal womanhood:

... must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise -- wise not for self development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with

the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service -- the true changefulness of woman.⁶⁰

Widdowson's first step to enforce the joyfulness of Monica's sphere is to segregate her from public life. He is nervous about her taking the district railway alone. He spies on her lodgings before to their marriage and his possessiveness becomes increasingly unreasonable. Eventually he requires 'ocular proof' whenever Monica visits her friends, scouting about the streets awaiting her departure 'as though he feared Monica might have some project of escape' (*OW*, 150). Through his critical treatment of Widdowson, Gissing confirms both Monica's and the reader's sympathy with Rhoda Nunn's call for female independence. Gissing pointedly fails to support Widdowson's views through the narrative action.

Widdowson is always solemnly reviewing Monica's wifely status and the expected duties of matrimony:

Without much trouble, he had brought her into a daily routine which satisfied him. During the whole of the morning she was to be absorbed in household chores. In the afternoon he would take her to walk or drive, and the evening he wished her to spend either in the drawing room or library, occupied with a book. Monica soon found that his idea of wedded bliss was that they should always be together. (*OW*, 152)

Inspired by Todd's *Student Manual* which 'had formed his method and inspired him with zeal' (*OW*, 154), Widdowson studies the formative tracts of the Victorian man; with notebook at his elbow he spends hours dutifully perusing history, political economy and even metaphysics. On Sunday evenings before his marriage he indulges in Barrow's *Sermons* which, although unorthodox, are Church of England, but after marriage his tastes become more cautious:

He abhorred unorthodoxy in a woman and would not on any account have suffered Monica to surmise that he had his doubts concerning any article of the Christian faith. Like most men of his kind, he viewed religion as a precious and powerful instrument for directing the female conscience. (*OW*, 154)

Gissing satirises Widdowson by exposing his grey commitment to routine. Routine is a passion of the precise and Widdowson insists that they retire each night at half-past ten, closing his book at this time 'glad to be relieved from the pretence of reading' (*OW*, 155). He then performs the same stiff tasks in exact order each night:

⁶⁰ John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens', p. 60.

'he did a number of little things in unvarying sequence -- changed the calendar for next day, made perfect order on his writing table, wound up his watch, and so on' (OW, 155).

As Widdowson winds his watch and changes the never-ending calendar, Monica yearns for trips abroad and lively mixed *soirées*. Monica only realises her own being through her need to resist her husband's will. She had foolishly agreed to marry Widdowson, whose name implies bereavement, but soon longs to be single:

She wished to be alone. The poorest bed in a servant's garret would have been twice as welcome to her; liberty to lie awake to think without a disturbing presence, to shed tears if need be -- that seemed to her a precious boon. She thought with envy of the shop girls in Walworth Road; she wished herself back there. What unspeakable folly she had committed! And how true was everything she had heard from Rhoda Nunn on the subject of marriage! (OW, 201)

Searching for the support that only Rhoda and Mary can give, Monica embarks on a disastrous romance with the youthful wine merchant, Bevis. Bevis is vapid and has none of the heroism of moral revolt which would enable him to spirit Monica off to an imagined suburb in Bordeaux. Furthermore, he is imprisoned by the demands of his mother and three sisters, whom he has supported for the past seven years. These 'odd women' were all: 'invalidish persons, the mother somewhat lackadaisical, the girls with the look of unwilling spinsterhood' (OW, 169).

At moments Widdowson's marital situation forces him into radical speculation on the future of marriage:

How many marriages were anything more than mutual forbearance? Perhaps there ought not to be such a thing as enforced permanence of marriage [...] perhaps someday, marriage would be dissoluble at the will of either party to it. Perhaps the man who sought to hold a woman when she no longer loved him would be regarded with contempt and condemnation [...] What a simple thing marriage had always seemed to him and how far from simple had he found it! Why, it led him to musings which upset the order of the world and flung all ideas of religion and morality into the wildest confusion. (OW, 239)

Widdowson even experiences momentary joy at Monica's projected vision of what equal marriage can entail:

For a moment he thought himself capable of accepting this new change in their relations. The marvellous thought of equality between man and wife,

that gospel which in far-off days will refashion the world, for an instant smote his imagination and exalted him above his native level. (*OW*, 168)

Through such significant authorial asides, Gissing is himself attempting to both express and entertain a moderate view of male-female relations. Widdowson's brief longing for equality between man and wife guarantees him a share of the reader's sympathy and indicates a possible resolution of tension. But Widdowson's ideal projection of purified traditional marriage does not allow him permanent refuge in this ideal as an escape from disillusionment.

The unhappy bond between Monica and Widdowson is counterpointed not only in the Rhoda-Everard relationship, but also by the equivocally happy union of Everard's friends, the Micklethwaites. Certain aspects of this marriage seem to be projections of Gissing's idealism. Micklethwaite is a mathematician, who delays marriage to his loyal fiancée for seventeen years, while they both work as teachers. The length of the engagement is not really necessary but although the income from their joint labour would allow the couple to marry, Micklethwaite believes that a husband must support his wife: "It is the duty of every man, who has sufficient means to maintain a wife. The life of unmarried women is a wretched one; every man who is able, ought to save them from that fate" (*OW*, 93). By the time she walks down the aisle, his bride, Fanny is hollow-cheeked and in poor health:

She looked much older than Mary Barfoot, though they were just of an age. And all this for want of a little money. The life of a pure gentle, kind-hearted woman, worn away in hopeless longing and in hard struggle for daily bread. (*OW*, 124)

Everard visits the Micklethwaites on New Year's Eve and their union so sways the progressive Everard that his own home seems derelict after witnessing theirs:

Well, that was one ideal of marriage. Not his ideal; but very beautiful amid the vulgarities and vileness of ordinary experience. It was the old fashion in its purest present; the consecrated form of domestic happiness, removed beyond satire, only to be touched, if touched at all, with the very gentlest irony. (*OW*, 176)

Micklethwaite, like Widdowson, acknowledges his affiliation to the Ruskinian ideal: that the proper place even of his educated wife is in the home and he attempts to create an appropriate domestic haven for her. However, while Widdowson's conservatism is negatively portrayed and functions appropriately alongside the anti-

marriage purposes of the novel, the Micklethwaite union does appear to complicate the novel's leanings towards radical feminism in Gissing's emphasis upon the 'consecrated' nature of its beauty. The Micklethwaite marriage has serious emotional appeal for Gissing and he decorates the occasion of their union with richly sentimental and religious associations: the house is sacred, Fanny is angelic, and there is no division of self between husband and wife. As Micklethwaite says of his fiancée: "I have never thought of Fanny as a separate person. Upon my word now I think of it, I never have. Fanny and I have been one for ages" (*OW*, 123).

It is reasonable to suppose that fragments of the Micklethwaite union are the projection of Gissing's emotional allegiance to an ideal of traditional marriage. The Micklethwaite marriage offers a contrast to the union of Monica and Widdowson which it shortly follows. It is presented with no more authorial irony than is admitted through Everard's critique. But despite this, David Grylls's claim that Gissing experienced a sense of 'fundamental disbelief in the probability of the Micklethwaite union would appear to be justified.⁶¹ Opposed to the Micklethwaite union are the anti-marriage anecdotes which pepper the narrative and work to maintain the thrust of Gissing's scepticism about marriage; Gissing provides *vignettes* of failed unions and the fault, in these instances, always lies with the female partner. As Barfoot recounts, his joke-loving friend, Mr Poppleton, married a very dull woman:

'Mrs Poppleton not only never made a joke, but couldn't understand what joking meant. Only the flattest literalism was intelligible to her; she could follow nothing but the very macadam of conversation -- had no palate for anything but the suet-pudding of talk'. (*OW*, 79)

Mr Poppleton apparently had to laboriously explain jokes to her but she no more understood a pun than a binominal theorem and Poppleton was driven mad by her literalism, eventually taking cover in a lunatic asylum. Everard's brother Tom Barfoot is gradually deprived of the will to live by his childless, invalid wife who always: 'spoke of herself as a sad sufferer from mysterious infirmities and had [...] a tendency to hysteria, which confused itself inextricably with the results of evil nature and the impulses of a disposition originally base' (*OW*, 187). The final refugee from matrimony is Everard's friend Mr Orchard, who has to choose between flight and suicide, in order to escape from a vulgar wife, who can only "'discourse unceasingly [on one] subject'" (*OW*, 81).

All these unions serve as *caveats* about marriage, but both Widdowson and Everard retreat from the radicalism offered by women and without which Gissing

⁶¹ Grylls, p. 169.

appears to feel marriage is beyond repair. Everard rejects Rhoda's standards despite the glimpse of the truth she offers him; Rhoda represents the possibility of a finer relationship than he will ever know.

A discourse of hostilities runs through the text, in, for example, the recurrence of military metaphors, which Gissing uses to suggest that the sexes are opposing forces, bound only by perpetual combat. Mary Barfoot urges women to wage 'active warfare', to rally together in an 'invasion' upon the workplace and other 'male' domains. Rhoda is 'armed' with celibacy and seeks to lead a women's movement which is 'revolutionary'. Everard wants to dominate and crush Rhoda, and is motivated in his pursuit of her by the longing to compel her to submit to him. Widdowson tracks Monica and secludes her at Herne Hill. The relation between the sexes is one of captives and captors, Gissing implies, and heterosexual relationships are locked in a power struggle in which one partner must dominate and one submit. Although the novel seems to anticipate eventual reconciliation between the sexes, it does so in a language which is couched in metaphors of warfare.

The religious imagery which informs much of the Rhoda Nunn story coalesces during the confession and counsel scene of chapter twenty-nine. Monica's needs and difficulties are met with unique submission and compassion by Rhoda, in keeping with her new consciousness of service to women. Monica is afraid of dying in childbirth and feels that before facing such a possibility, she must narrate the history of her downfall to Rhoda. Gissing intends her confession to be alleviatory for her, but it also provides Monica both with the opportunity to articulate her own experience and to be welcomed back to the feminist fold. The pride which had hitherto separated the women crumbles beneath the force of their new relationship.

Rhoda is filled with a sense of sisterhood towards those weak and vulnerable women whom she had previously scorned. Her advice to Monica involves a recognition of all that animates womanhood: feminist independence is tempered by the recognition that female dependency upon others may be a motivating force for life and can, at best, be transformed into assured responsibility. Rhoda presents Monica with the idea of motherhood as a reason for caring about the self, and Gissing tells us that 'she had never given counsel of such significance' (*OW*, 315), experiencing power in a wholly new way.

The piquancy of Rhoda's counsel stems from her sense of similarity to Monica: she also feels as though she has fallen through relations with men; both women were tempted by desire, even though neither acted upon her desires. Rhoda can provide Monica with hope and a cause to pursue. Both women display a selfless maternalism which Gissing obviously approves; Monica's mothering is protective: she sends letters to Widdowson, petitioning for his compassion towards their child,

and Rhoda murmurs, 'Poor dear', as she cradles Monica's child. Monica does suffer the classic fate of the adultress in the Victorian novel -- death, here in childbirth -- but Gissing implicitly contradicts the notion that this is a punishment for Monica's transgressions; the aspect of social disapprobation is to a large extent removed when Rhoda comforts Monica:

'Your life isn't wrecked at all -- nonsense! You have gone through a storm, that's true; but more likely than not you will be all the better for it. Don't talk or think about sins; simply make up your mind that you won't be beaten by trials and hardships'. (*OW*, 316-317)

Gissing seems to suggest that celibacy has attained its most reasonable outcome in Rhoda. She may do proper service to women, through a personal understanding of their sexual peccadillos and the snares of heterosexuality: 'She felt her power in quite a new way, without touch of vanity without posing or any trivial self-consciousness' (*OW*, 315).

In the final chapter of *The Odd Women*, 'A New Beginning', Monica's baby daughter represents hope in the lives of her spinster aunts, the uncertain Alice and the alcoholic Virginia, as they must learn to care for her. The public life of feminism also expands with fresh potential. Symbolically, Monica, the reproductive woman, dies as a kind of sacrifice to facilitate the birth of other women's lives. The hope for any vestige of conventional Victorian domestic structure dies with Monica. Widdowson has failed to retain his wife and the orthodox family appears incapable of unified life. With grim irony, Gissing buries Monica in the graveyard where her mother was placed twenty-two years earlier, soon after Monica's birth.

An alternative vision of hope is represented by the widening circles of the idea of the family, one of which is community. During Rhoda's visit to the Madden sisters in the final scene of the novel, Gissing stresses that as the sisters are educators, and Rhoda is a feminist, they will together have the opportunity to "'make a brave woman'" of Monica's daughter. Their chances of success will be ensured by vigorous public feminism: "'we flourish like the green bay-tree'", Rhoda assures Alice, "'Miss Barfoot was never in such health and spirits -- nor I myself. The world is moving!'" (*OW*, 336). Single women control the future because they are suitable for the task; they may not have reproduced, but they are excellent substitute mothers. In order for the movement of 'odd women' not to appear sterile, Gissing emphasises their collective and individual maternity. Gissing suggests that the dilapidated familial past and the welcoming vistas of women's future will gain a new dimension as Monica's daughter grows up in the company of single women. As one reviewer of *The Odd Women* enthused in *Nation*: 'If half that Mr Gissing affirms

and predicts about them is true, the hope of the future certainly lies in our old maids'.⁶²

Rhoda's demand for a revolution in sexual relations is realised by the end of the novel and Gissing has remained relatively faithful to his pleas for sexual anarchy. Rhoda's cold celibacy has thawed, not through marriage, but through the larger maternalism which she has pledged to serve. As she dabs her eyes in the nursery of the future, Gissing's single woman confirms the ambitions of Victorian, Emily Burton, commenting on the 'New Woman' in 1896:

The whole world with more of our women in it, will become more homelike when they are no longer shut away from all but those immediately surrounding them, and when they learn that to be a mother, it is not necessary to have children of their own, but that they may just let the mother-heart in them have its way in the broad and needy world. Fewer women marry now, not only I think because there are fewer men, but because their hearts are even larger than could be satisfied with their own family circle.⁶³

Ultimately, Gissing is unable to resolve the outcome of 'sexual anarchy' despite his conviction that a stabilising natural order would spring forth from the disorder of new relations between men and women (including the segregation of the sexes). Gissing's emphasis on 'natural order' can be taken as a euphemism for heterosexual union. One can clearly recognise that a central preoccupation of Gissing's in the text of *The Odd Women* is the search for a viable model for heterosexual union and that all the male-female unions in the narrative represent wholly or partially discarded models for such a union; Gissing proves unable to project a genuinely new relationship between the sexes without reproducing the inequalities and battle for power of the current relationship between the sexes. Nor can he convince himself of the viability of 'ideal' unions between men and women (as in the Micklethwaite example) since these collapse even as he creates them.

The Odd Women is largely sympathetic to feminism and Gissing obviously held a passionate conviction that the relationship between the sexes must be radically altered; he could not, however, fully endorse Rhoda's dry asceticism which is joyless and repressive at the start of the novel, involving as it does not only self-denial but the denial of others' frailty; nor could he successfully create any attractive heterosexual union which could be offered as an option. David Grylls writes in *The*

⁶² Anonymous, *Nation* (New York), (13 July 1893), 30-1, reprinted in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 220 - 221.

⁶³ Emily Burton, 'The New Woman', *Woman's Signal* (30 April 1896), p. 276.

Paradox of Gissing 'part of the problem was that woman's liberation was dependent on her intimate relations with man; and about these Gissing was gloomy'.⁶⁴

Several themes come together in Gissing's novel: an intense sentimentality about women and a constant desire for domestic stability. John Halperin concedes that 'Gissing, like the rest of the Victorian audience, needed an angel of the hearth to worship'.⁶⁵ In his work a nagging sense of loneliness combines with the recognition that loneliness may be necessary for peace. Hence the profuse examples of domestic discord or vain attempts at harmonious heterosexual union.

In the world of *The Odd Women* equal and harmonious heterosexual relationships appear impossible of achievement. Despite having proposed viable employment for single women as well as the means of constructing a 'feminine' identity which is benignly maternal and draws comfort from other single women, Gissing seems unable to project any hopeful vision of male-female relationships. Rhoda and Everard's 'progressive' attempt at relationship fails as dismally as the plainly unsuitable marital connection between Monica and Widdowson. Pessimism about the future of heterosexual relationships courses beneath Gissing's narrative and almost negates the idea that alleviatory social change can be translated into heterosexual personal relations. Gissing does cast a tentative line to reproduction in the form of Monica's child, although with characteristic gloom the child's biological mother is dead and its biological father is a broken and reduced figure.

Many contradictions within *The Odd Women* remain unresolved and the author's attitude remains ambivalent, refusing to permit the reader a settled position from which to assess the material. That Gissing was clearly perceptive about changing social mores and invested hope in social change, and yet shadowy areas remain explains more fully than the easy term 'misogynist' much of his approach to women in fiction. Gillian Tindall concludes:

Intellectually, he inclined to enlightened views on the 'woman question', but emotionally he was attracted to the idea of an older, simpler mode of life in which women inevitably played a subservient role [...] his 'good housekeeper' daydream.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Grylls, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Halperin, p. 264.

⁶⁶ Tindall, p. 223.

The turn-of-the-century was characterised by an impassioned examination of cultural change. Max Nordau found only chaos and instability in the world of the eighteen-nineties:

... there is confusion among the powers that be; the million, robbed of its leaders, knows not where to turn; the strong work their will; false prophets arise [...] Men look with longing for whatever new things are at hand without presage whence they will come or what they will be [...] What shall we know tomorrow -- what believe in? What shall inspire us? How shall we enjoy?⁶⁷

Nordau's view of the later nineteenth-century emphasises its discordancy and there is a strong sense in his writing of apocalypse and of civilisation as diseased. The degeneration he anticipated was perhaps the result of urban anxieties. Would society hold together? Nordau uses popular late-Victorian terms -- 'degenerate', 'neurotic', 'decadent' -- to describe the characteristics of a changing society. The realism of Ibsen and Zola had arrived with translations of their work, labour was in revolt, the Irish Home Rule dispute threatened to plunge Ireland into civil war, there was a reorientation of the political landscape. The first Russian revolution was to occur in 1905.

Political combat again mobilised around marriage. Mona Caird hoped for change through a 'bloodless revolution' and claimed that: 'An increasing number of women are refusing a life of comparative ease in marriage, rather than enter upon it as a means of livelihood, for which their freedom has to be sacrificed!'⁶⁸ The choice of abstinence from marriage was becoming more of a reality for middle-class women as wider opportunities presented themselves for economic independence.

Links between feminism and spinsters were often used by anti-feminist groups to show that strong feminist consciousness was the result of thwarted natures, the cause or effect of the possessors failure to find a husband. Many feminist agitators chose to explain their political commitments cautiously, emphasising that their attempts to redress the wrong done to women were fired by a maternal fondness for less fortunate women. Christabel Pankhurst, reviewing the sentiments which had inspired her militancy, explained her feminism in these terms:

I look at the past, spread like a great picture before my mind's eyes, and I say -- yes, it was worth while. Worth while, if only for the sheer human,

⁶⁷ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1895), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women* (London: George Redway, 1897), pp. 59, 109.

motherly joy that has been mine of seeing so many women develop gifts and powers they hardly knew, but I knew, were theirs.⁶⁹

It is indicative of social prejudice that a woman's movement, the majority of whose members were single women, should use as an explanation of its activism the principles of maternalism, rather than the dilemmas attached to the non-marital status of many of its members. However this was perhaps part of a drive to normalise feminist objections as much as was possible.

A member of the Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, George Barlow, went so far as to claim that female enfranchisement would result in the disintegration of the British Empire -- a sentiment which was neither so rare nor so quirkish as it first appears.⁷⁰ Karl Pearson was certain that the 'woman question' would only resolve itself through revolutionary change the necessary accompaniment of which was, he feared, 'the entire reconstruction of the family, if not of the state.'⁷¹ During the eighteen-nineties a renewed ideological emphasis upon the importance and joys of motherhood was tied to the crisis of imperialism, the prolonged agonies and uncertainties of the Boer War, and a renewed emphasis was placed on breeding a healthy imperial race to colonise the British Empire and to further the interests of the Empire. To a considerable extent reproductivity was socially enforced, for example, the use of abortifacients was a criminal offence; the secrecy and illegality of women attempting to control their fertility or reduce family size has been documented.⁷²

According to Eliza Lynn Linton independent women would break up cradles for firewood,⁷³ were cataclysmic, vitriolic, a threat to family life, their purpose to dismember the political machinery of Britain -- Mrs Humphry Ward, who was to promote the anti-suffrage campaign and who opposed the enfranchisement of women from at least the eighteen-eighties onwards expresses the anxieties of an increasingly coherent opposition: 'were women admitted to this [party] struggle, their natural eagerness and quickness of temper would probably make them hotter partisans than men.' Mrs Humphry Ward was the moving spirit behind the proposal

⁶⁹ Christabel Pankhurst, 'Confessions of Christabel: Why I Never Married', *Weekly Dispatch* (3 April 1921), 1 and 7, p. 7.

⁷⁰ George Barlow, 'Why I Oppose Woman Suffrage', (Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage: n.d.).

⁷¹ quoted in Lloyd Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 15.

⁷² For further information on birth control see Angus McLaren, 'Abortion in England 1890-1914', *Victorian Studies*, 20 (1976-1977), 379-400, (pp. 381-7), Barbara Brookes, 'Women and Reproduction 1860-1939' in *Labour and Love* edited by Jane Lewis, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 149-171, and Peter Fryer, *The Birth Controllers* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966).

⁷³ quoted in Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York, Morrow, 1981), p. 445.

to found the Anti-Suffrage League, which came into being in early 1908, and was based at Caxton House in Westminster. According to Ward, should the franchise be extended to women its result would inflame antagonism between the sexes and encourage a warfare which might 'easily bring women into direct and hasty conflict with men'.⁷⁴

Anti-suffragist Arthur Chas. Gronno, extends Ward's fears of national revolution to the empire -- the reverberations of a projected women's revolution would, he feels, be so emphatic as to be heard in the furthest reaches of the empire, disturbing the paternalism and authority which was at the heart of the ideology of Britain's expanding colonial interests.⁷⁵ The link between women and the empire is summed up in a simple equation by Marie Corelli:

If the mothers of the British race decide to part altogether with the birthright of their simple womanliness for a political mess of pottage, then darker days are in store for the nation than can yet be foreseen or imagined. For with women alone rests the Home, which is the foundation of the Empire.⁷⁶

Reactionary forces attempted to re-emphasise and resurrect the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. Their assessment of social and economic realities did not depend on any empirical investigation but could only be sustained by a determined resistance to the realities of life which ran counter to Victorian domestic ideologies.

Yet the anti-suffragists were by no means implacably orthodox -- Eliza Lynn Linton's notion of 'femininity' was interpreted with great dexterity within her own life. Although she idealised domestic femininity, Linton enjoyed a profitable and prolific career as a journalist and writer. Her marriage to William James Linton was childless and collapsed after a few years. Both her profession and her private life allowed her to diversify from the role she so celebrated.

Marie Corelli was an anti-suffragist who felt that women best exercised their abilities in a domestic setting yet Corelli was also single and her writing gave her voice and visibility and was fundamentally empowering. Her writing is full of metaphors, similes and direct statement about men, the possession of, and trade in, men:

⁷⁴ quoted in William Thesing, 'Mrs Humphrey Ward's Anti-Suffrage Campaign', *Turn-of-the-Century Woman* 1, 22-35, (p. 24), from Mrs Humphrey Ward, 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage', *The Nineteenth Century* 25 (June 1889), 781-88.

⁷⁵ Arthur Chas. Gronno, *The Woman M. P. A Peril to Women and the Country* (Manchester: Manchester Branch of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, n. d.).

⁷⁶ Marie Corelli, *Woman, or -- Suffragette? A Question of National Choice* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1907), p. 4.

From very early years I have had to work hard and continuously for myself; and I have never been indebted to any man for the least assistance or support in the making of a career [...] I earn every pound I possess; I am a householder [...] and I employ men who depend upon me for their wage.⁷⁷

A primary reason for resistance to the formation of an anti-suffrage league was a reluctance to accustom women to what Frederic Harrison called 'the mechanical artifices of political agitation'.⁷⁸ Mrs Ward felt that the concerns of women were best expressed through local politics and education for national politics could only engage with the masculine interests in foreign policy, defence and economics. Mrs Ward's position is understandable; women were to a large extent to relinquish control over the private sphere without yet having achieved equality in the public sphere. It is also worth reflecting on the scepticism about public life that is revealed in Mrs Ward's response to the public aims of feminism. Political division should mirror the division between home and the public sphere, so social structure was to be a just reflection of the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. Therefore, although Mrs Ward was an active opponent of the national enfranchisement of women from 1889 to 1918 she was reluctant to organise at a national level.

Mrs Ward preferred to resort to petition and influence rather than organisational complaint. It was in this spirit that in June 1889 one hundred and four women appended Mrs Ward's polemical article 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage' in *The Nineteenth Century*. Signatures included Mrs Leslie Stephen, Mrs Matthew Arnold, Mrs Arnold Toynbee, Mrs Randolph Churchill and Mrs Walter Bagehot. All concluded that an extension of the female suffrage would be 'distasteful', 'unnecessary' and 'mischievous'. The article ran together women's procreative function with her place in society and stressed that a fundamental difference must remain between women's occupations and those of men.⁷⁹

In the halcyon days of the suffragette movement, advances in the feminist cause were made weekly. In the course of one week *The Vote* reported that a Miss Sheilah O'Neill had partly invented an aeroplane -- the same Miss O'Neill who had applied for a licence to drive a motor-cab in London. Or there was the case of Miss Ina Richmond, who had just been appointed the manager of Magherafelt Gas Works in Dublin, the first woman to occupy such a position! Many feminists regarded the advances made by single women in the field of employment as a prelude to wider

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁸ quoted in Janet Penrose Trevelyan, *The Life of Mrs Humphrey Ward* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1923), p. 228.

⁷⁹ Mrs Humphrey Ward, 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage', *The Nineteenth Century* (June 1889), 781-788.

opportunities for changing the status of women. As early as 1892 Clara Collett argues the case for the industrial training of single women, enabling them to earn a competency through the active years of life:

If only we can secure good pay and decent conditions of life, the lot of all women may be immensely improved by this compact band of single women. It would be difficult to overrate the industrial effect of a number of well-instructed, healthy-minded, vigorous permanent spinsters.⁸⁰

A lack of manliness had often been defined as an inability to offer material bodily service to the state and had often been presented by anti-suffragists as a final reason for not rendering the vote to 'recreant' womanhood. And yet the very representatives of 'recreant' womanhood were proving themselves to be more than capable of many forms of active and physical service to the state.

The integrity of the middle-class family as a social unit seemed to be under threat, depending as it did upon the concept of separate spheres. Bessie Rayner Parkes writes in 1862 that the family is:

The primary unit in social organization. The man alone, or the woman alone, is not strictly speaking that primary unit. With marriage and family life begins the great social chain which ascends from house to the street [...]. The wife [...] is the centre of domestic but also social life [...] When sensible men say that the vast majority of women are destined to marriage [...] the idea which [...] lies at the bottom of their minds, is, that were it otherwise the whole constitution of modern society would literally go to pieces.⁸¹

The family was 'the great social chain', linking home to social life to state, but also worked as an interpretative unit which enabled individuals to respond socially to Victorian experience, and a source of metaphor and value which could be used to exclude non-participating individuals. As an agent of socialisation the family could transmit cultural patterns and norms. Any assault on the family would, therefore, leave many Victorians bewildered. Mona Caird in her series of essays on marriage and the status of women, expressed familiar concerns: 'We are living under a slowly disintegrating patriarchal system, and we find it difficult to realize any condition of family life wherein its main sentiment is absolutely non-existent.'⁸²

⁸⁰ 'Prospects of Marriage for Women', p. 542.

⁸¹ Bessie Rayner Parkes, 'The Balance of Public Opinion in Regard to Woman's Work', *The Englishwoman's Journal*, 9 (1862), p. 344.

⁸² Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women* (London: George Redway, 1897), p. 26.

After all, the middle-class nuclear family provided an ideology of household order, gender relationship and economic structure which was maintained by a wage-earning husband and dependent wife and children. As a symbol of social order any loosening of its patterns of dependence and responsibility heightened anxiety about social disintegration.

Many feminists sought to lessen the threat their feminism appeared to pose to the family. It was in this vein that *The Vote* ran a photo competition asking for photographic representations of suffragettes at home, perhaps as part of a drive to counter photographic coverage in the national newspapers of the arrest of suffragettes and more generally of wild-looking militancy in the public sphere. The photographs that were displayed in the pages of *The Vote* depicted homely suffragettes performing domestic tasks; they smiled cheerily as they bathed children, cooked and mended clothes. It is also indicative of the public profile which *The Vote* was attempting to project of the militant sisterhood that the prize photograph for 1910-11 was of a fresh-faced young suffragette washing her baby, her sleeves rolled up and her face aglow with healthy maternalism.

The family was a receptacle for the primary heterosexual paradigm of Victorian life, it represented the proper relation of male to female. Marriage tied the knot between diametrically opposite but parallel characteristics, in which men prevailed and women submitted. Thus the protection of the family was often a euphemism which promoted female relativity. Theresa Billington-Grieg chafed against these restrictions in her article 'The Trade in Sex':

Woman is regarded by law and custom always in her relation to man -- her legal name depends upon her relation to man -- she is either a man's daughter, a man's wife, or a man's widow, or a man's mistress -- she is rarely allowed to be herself and to own herself and to be accountable for herself. The woman of the future will be woman, the individual.⁸³

Disregarding caution, Billington-Grieg breezily extended her analysis to imagine the end of the family: 'The woman's movement will be driven inevitably to reject the family as the unit of society and to demand the recognition of the individual as the true unit.'⁸⁴

⁸³ Fawcett Library, Theresa Billington-Grieg, 'The Trade in Sex', Box no. 404, p. 4, n. d.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8.

CHAPTER FIVE

"'You'll die of hunger in the end'": Lesbian Vampires and Heterosexuality in Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women*

George Barlow, writing for the Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, gives as one reason for resisting female enfranchisement that 'the suffragettes are, deliberately and of set intention, bringing about a sex antagonism; and also deliberately permeating politics with the dangerous principle of sex'.¹ The earlier conservative Victorian assumption had been that the celibacy of the portionless middle-class spinster had been tolerable and even conducive to cultural harmony; it encouraged women to accept potential or realised spinsterhood gracefully and positively, to live vicariously or in snatched fantasies, and to deny self in favour of the family and the church. However, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the new militant discourse of central feminist groups, such as the Women's Social and Political Union, politicised the concept of spinsterhood and many spinster feminists wilfully thrust the possibility of matrimony beyond reach. Spinsterhood had chosen its own battleground and had at last formed its own collective politics. Such improvements in the status of women as are enjoyed by wives and mothers originate, according to spinster feminist Cicely Hamilton, from the feminist activities of 'the formerly condemned spinster', who represents a new mode of interpreting femininity:

In many ranks of life the lack of a husband is no longer a reproach; and some of us are even proud of the fact that we have fought our way in the world without aid from any man's arm [...] By sheer force of self-assertion we have lifted ourselves from the dust where we once crawled as worms and not women; we no longer wither on the virgin thorn -- we flourish on it.²

Christabel Pankhurst says that female singleness is a tactical choice and temporary goal, made in response to what she perceives as gross sexual inequality in late Victorian and Edwardian culture: "There can be no mating between the spiritually

¹ Fawcett Library, George Barlow, 'Why I oppose woman suffrage', (n. p. : The Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, n. d.), Box no. 281.

² Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (1909), (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p. 134.

developed women of this new day and men who in thought and conduct with regard to sex matters are their inferiors'.³ This was feminism in one of its more unacceptable forms; it was aggressive, unladylike, riotous -- Lloyd Fernando describes the shift in emphasis within turn-of-the-century feminism: 'the challenge of the movement for the freedom of woman had at last become a challenge on sexual issues'.⁴

Pankhurst's stance represents a vital new approach to female singleness. The W. S. P. U. image-making machinery, which brandished Christabel Pankhurst as its 'militant maiden warrior' did not use the grammar of celibacy without good cause. In its stress on Pankhurst's maidenhood, her escape from male capture, militant discourse structured a new mode of political female celibacy. To be single, feminist and virgin was a first building-block in the personal and social practice of sexual politics: singleness and celibacy were part of the W. S. P. U. polemic. David Mitchell reports in *Queen Christabel* that Mrs Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, the W. S. P. U. treasurer, hails Christabel as the 'Maiden Warrior', calling on her to 'go forth with the fiat of the future, strong in the gladness and youth of your dauntless spirit, to smite with your sword of destiny the forces of stupid and unreasoning prejudice and blind domination'.⁵

This unites more generally with the feminist movement's symbolic repertoire. Joan of Arc runs through much of the movement's discourse as a paradigm for the imprisoned militant and the persecuted feminist. Both Joan's virginity and her transvestism subvert acceptable femininity. Joan, prominent in feminist iconography, is regularly invoked during the W. S. P. U. campaign which the suffragettes thought of as a holy war. They emphasised Joan's gender and her obscurity. For both militant and non-militant suffragettes, Joan signified purity in decadent times. For the militant suffragettes, however, Joan's virginity and martyrdom were most important. On the other hand, the qualities that non-militant Millicent Fawcett emphasises in her book about the saint are firm but non-aggressive: she writes that 'with all her gentleness she could be as strong as steel' and praises Joan's ability to retain her femininity even when she is imprisoned.⁶ Fawcett's account of Joan's life is one of a number of contemporary accounts in the feminist press of militant women from history and myth, although Joan remains the

³ Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge and How to End It, Plain Facts about a Great Evil* (London: Women's Social and Political Union, 1913), p. 98.

⁴ Lloyd Fernando, *'New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 42.

⁵ quoted in David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977), p. 3, no source given.

⁶ Millicent Fawcett, *Joan of Arc* (London: National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1912), p. 16.

favourite example. When feminist S. D. Shallard writes of warrior women in *Votes for Women* she joins a concerted effort to change the identificatory practices of feminists, to recover the lost voices of female militancy and to establish a mythology and a history which will enable feminists to reinterpret heroism.⁷

W. S. P. U. processions were often led by armoured women riding astride white horses. Christabel Pankhurst's biographer, David Mitchell, recounts the release from prison of suffragette Elsie Howey; she was attired in full armour as Joan of Arc and, mounting a white charger, led a march of women from Marble Arch to the Aldwych Theatre.⁸ Christabel designates Joan the patron saint of the militant spinsters: she was the central icon of the movement.

Although the women's movement as a whole shared an iconography to justify their engagement with the political process, the W. S. P. U. approached sexual politics very differently from Millicent Fawcett's N. U. W. S. S. The N. U. W. S. S. was constitutionalist and conciliatory in its approach and in the intended outcome of its political agitation. Fawcett sought a close working relationship with men to secure political reform since she believed that women's suffrage was not an exclusively female concern. She considered the interests of the sexes as related and dependent -- compatible in the long-term, rather than oppositional: 'I never believe in the possibility of a sex war. Nature has seen to that: as long as mothers have sons and fathers daughters there can never be a sex war'.⁹ This moderation differs from the approach of the W. S. P. U. who tended to be more aggressive towards men and heterosexual union, although even they continued to support motherhood, and were optimistic about the survival of the family, albeit in a modified form.

Fawcett's tolerant response to sexuality was, along with the sexual experimentation of the *fin-de-siècle* 'New Woman', in part the beginning of the sort of feminism which has carried women through much of the twentieth century. This tolerant feminism was promoted in the early twentieth century by journals such as the *Freewoman*. This branch of feminism was to become increasingly liberal, supporting the sexual liberation of women and the practice of different types of sexual and emotional relationship with men. This type of feminism involved no direct commitment, at the level of public discourse, to reconstruct notions of male sexuality and no threat to withdraw from heterosexual relations until men had changed. Its public discourse never included the militant celibacy of the more extreme groups. Instead, according to the predominant line of reasoning of twentieth-century feminism, the single woman should be free to enjoy heterosexual

⁷ S. D. Shallard, 'Warrior Women', *Votes for Women* (3 March 1911), 357.

⁸ Mitchell, p. 140.

⁹ quoted in Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries. Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

sex and even to have children on her own; formal marriage need not be a precondition of reproduction. This version of feminism probably found increasing favour in the twentieth century because it could readily be assimilated to the ideas of 'companionate' marriage and sexual union promoted and popularised by the new 'science' of sexology.

The opposing responses of the two camps, the N. U. W. S. S. and the W. S. P. U., to sexuality represent, as Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois point out, two contrasting traditions of feminist approaches to sexuality:

The strongest, virtually unchallenged in the mainstream women's rights movement of the nineteenth century, addressed primarily the dangers and few of the possibilities of sex. Another perspective, much less developed but with some eloquent spokeswomen by the early twentieth century, encouraged women to leap, adventurous and carefree, into sexual liaisons, but failed to offer a critique of the male construction of the sexual experience available to most women.¹⁰

Many members of the W. S. P. U. believed that male-female sexual relationships were corrupt; to understand this was to awaken politically. Emmeline Pankhurst attributes her militancy to the inequities she encountered as a poor law guardian and registrar of births and deaths. She recounts a case in which medical practitioners colluded with a husband to keep his wife ignorant of the cause of her child's death -- inherited syphilis contracted from the father -- "Was not that enough to make me a militant suffragette?" Mrs Pankhurst roared at her audience in the Albert Hall in 1912.¹¹

Other women too were converted to militancy by their personal experience of the suffering and oppression of girls and women. R. May Billinghurst, testifying at her trial for militant disruptive action at the Old Bailey on the 7 January 1913, said that her work in a Sunday School and through the Band of Hope had led her into homes in the slums of London:

I became acquainted with such sorrow and suffering borne by the women that I cannot bear to sit comfortably at home and think of it -- some husbands were drunkards, some openly unfaithful, some deserted their wives and children and many beat them and it was gradually unfolded to me that the unequal laws which made women appear inferior to men were the cause of these evils. I found that the man-made laws of marriage parentage and divorce placed women in every way in a condition of slavery

¹⁰ Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois, 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Thought', *Feminist Review* 13 (1983), p. 42.

¹¹ Reported in *The Suffragette* (11 April 1913), p. 422.

[...] At this time I also became acquainted with the rescue work in the streets of London [...] it was not an uncommon occurrence for little girls of 12 & 13 to be brought to the home [...] because they were about to become mothers.¹²

The suffrage campaign was not narrowly political, although in the pre-war years the vote was regarded as the principal legislative and constitutional barrier. Without the vote women would remain dependent and coerced, their rights contingent upon what seemed to be capricious and uncharitable male-dominated legislature on divorce, equal pay, prostitution, child custody, female employment -- indeed, any subject which was directly related to women's welfare. But while the suffragettes demanded participation in the political process, they more fundamentally sought an entire reworking of the lives of women. Susan Kingsley Kent points out that the militant suffragettes sought 'to redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture of Britain'.¹³ Feminist attitudes to heterosexual union were informed by a faith in celibacy, unequal marriage being the least tolerable state. The militants recognised the economic imperative to heterosexuality and claimed that sexual intercourse normally occurs between economic unequals. Contemporary feminist Sheila Jeffreys described the heterosexual couple as a 'power relationship'.¹⁴

The Vote ran a column called 'How Men Protect Women' which listed countless examples of male violence against women and the inadequate sentences given to men: William Foggart, who attacked his wife with a knife and gun, was fined £10; Mrs Fergusson was burned to death when her drunken husband threw a lighted lamp at her brother; Dorothy Stevens was brutally killed with a knife by Conrad Selby -- the verdict was 'manslaughter'.

Sheila Jeffreys notes that the period from 1906 to 1914 saw vigorous feminist initiatives to regulate male sexual practices and to shield women from such practices.¹⁵ Lucy Re-Bartlett viewed the W. S. P. U. as the forerunner of a new culture. She anticipated a 'new social conscience' among women and claimed to hear in 'the hearts of many women [...] a cry somewhat like this [...] *I will know no man and bear no child* until this apathy is broken'.¹⁶ Feminists sought transformation in public and private morality, especially in the area of sexual

¹² Fawcett Library, R. May Billingham, Catalogue of Papers of and Relating to R. May Billingham, 05 Box 5, n. d.

¹³ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 3.

¹⁴ Sheila Jeffreys, 'Sex reform and anti-feminism in the 1920s', *The sexual dynamics of history* edited by The London Feminist History Group, (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 177-202, (p. 202).

¹⁵ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies* (London: Pandora, 1987), p. 89.

¹⁶ Lucy Re-Bartlett, *Sex and Sanctity* (London: Longmans, 1912), p. 25.

relations between men and women. The issue of male sexual behaviour was at the very centre of the political agenda.

The W. S. P. U. drive to reconstruct male sexual behaviour can also be connected to the earlier campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts and the late nineteenth-century social purity movement. Many campaigners against the Contagious Diseases Acts, which were repealed in 1886, drew on the thinking which inspired the social purity movement of the eighteen-eighties. In *The Spinster and Her Enemies* Sheila Jeffreys traces the development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century social purity movement in Britain. The social purity movement burgeoned in the eighteen-eighties, and is most readily understood as involving the conjunction of religious revivalism with the agitation against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Many of the feminists from Josephine Butler's Ladies' National Association migrated to the social purity movement after the repeal of the Acts. The social purity movement consisted of groups such as the National Vigilance Association, the Moral Reform Union and the Social Purity Alliance (which had been established as early as 1873). Social purity feminism sought egalitarian marriage laws, male sexual continence (often through male chastity leagues), the upgrading of women's property rights and the provision of better educational opportunities. It was, perhaps, also influential in forming the notions of marital mutuality and women's right to consensual sex which were slowly absorbed into middle class culture from the turn-of-the-century.

The most militantly feminist group of the social purity movement, the Moral Reform Union, was active from 1881 to 1897; at the Union's first meeting one woman urged that they 'demand purity and righteousness in men'. Men were to conform to those standards of chastity which Victorian society had enjoined on middle-class women. The Moral Reform Union, however, insisted that it supported 'pure family life' and the family as 'the unit of the nation'; it explicitly opposed free love.¹⁷

Lucinda Chandler spoke on the topic of marital reform at the 1888 International Council of Women held in Washington:

Women as well as men must eliminate from marriage the features of prostitution, for when prostitution ceases inside of marriage it will disappear outside [...] How shall a woman be educated to know she has the right to control her own person? By listening to the voice of her own soul,

¹⁷ Fourth Annual Report of the Moral Reform Union, (London, 1886), p. 3, quoted in Deborah Gorham, 'The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon". Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England', *Victorian Studies* 21 (1977-1978), p. 357, note 9.

and setting aside every inbred idea that has come down from male theology and statute.¹⁸

Chandler's view of marital prostitution was exceptional in the social purity movement, and does not therefore mean that the movement went along with W. S. P. U. theories on the patriarchal structures of marriage. Yet Chandler's emphasis upon female self-reliance and a woman's right to control her own body, does indicate some link between social purity feminism and militant feminism.

Several points arise from social purity rhetoric: the developing idea that women have a right to control their own sexual destinies; the recognition of the importance of women's legislative and political power as the only real means to protect their rights; and the demand that men must control their sexual appetites -- which ran counter to the notion that these appetites were uncontrollable.

Both the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts and the social purity movement helped to construct W. S. P. U. discourse on sexuality and prostitution. All three movements have in common a belief that since men are the perpetrators of prostitution, the most effective means of preventing the sexual abuse of women is to establish male chastity rather than to castigate prostitutes.

Links between the W. S. P. U. and the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts are apparent in the appearance of Christabel Pankhurst's tract on venereal disease, *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (1913). This began as a series of articles in the journal of the W. S. P. U., the *Suffragette*, on the effects of venereal disease on culture. Pankhurst blames the indiscriminate exercise of male sexual desire for the increase in venereal disease. *The Great Scourge* reveals militant feminist hostility to men. Pankhurst famously says: 'There can be no mating between the spiritually developed women of this new day and men who in thought and conduct with regard to sex matters are their inferiors.'¹⁹ Sheila Jeffreys notes that *The Great Scourge* represents 'a significant new strand in the reasons women were giving for remaining unmarried'²⁰ whilst David Mitchell suggests that Pankhurst's moral campaign 'appealed to ferocious spinsters'.²¹ Even at the time, 'free love' advocate, Dora Marsden, responded to *The Great Scourge* with the suggestion that there was 'more danger to "health" from the miseries of renunciation and the dull hearts of virginity than from the ills of syphilis and gonorrhea'.²²

¹⁸ Report, International Council for Women, Washington, 1888, p. 289, quoted in *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, p. 23.

¹⁹ *The Great Scourge*, p. 98.

²⁰ *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, p. 89.

²¹ Mitchell, p. 226.

²² quoted in Mitchell, p. 228, no source given.

Prostitution is presented by Pankhurst as a feature of 'woman slavery', which men seek to maintain by denying power to women -- hence their opposition to female franchise. The only route out of sexual oppression, Pankhurst claims, is for women to obtain the vote and use it to enforce male chastity -- hence the double slogan, 'Votes for Women and Chastity for Men'.

At the same time the prostitute's visibility was thought scandalous -- the term 'public woman' was interchangeable with prostitute. When the heroine in H. G. Wells' novel *Ann Veronica* (1909) attempts to stroll freely and aimlessly around London she has to endure the humiliation of being stared at by men and incurs the risk of being followed.²³ Olive Schreiner relates how she was suspected of being a prostitute by a policeman when walking in London one evening in the company of a male friend. Schreiner wore no gloves or hat and this was taken as additional evidence that she was soliciting.²⁴ Increasingly, however, many 'respectable' women were entering the public domain through work such as urban philanthropy, clerical work, as Poor Law guardians and so on. Feminists sought to make the public arena secure for women without threat of approach, attack, or any inference of immorality.

Christabel Pankhurst's claim in *The Great Scourge* that 75% to 80% of the male population had contracted venereal disease before marriage was incorrect. But her fears were shared by many others. Gail Savage points out that: 'Christabel Pankhurst's attack on male immorality, however strident it might have been, did not represent an especially idiosyncratic view of the danger of venereal disease'.²⁵ Pankhurst's feelings articulate anxieties shared by many feminists:

Never again must young women enter into marriage blindfolded. From now onwards they must be warned of the fact that marriage is intensely dangerous, until such a time as men's moral standards are completely changed and they become as chaste and clean-living as women.²⁶

Venereal disease is imagined by Pankhurst as a specifically male disease. And so women have to be 'blindfolded', lulled, or bound by marital promises in order to risk its dangers. Many militant feminists shared a similar sense of having been misled

²³ H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909).

²⁴ Lucy Bland, 'Purifying the Public World: Feminist Vigilantes in Late Victorian England', *Women's History Review*, 1, 3 (1992), 397-412, (p. 408), Olive Schreiner recounts the incident in a letter to the Editor of the *Daily News*, (28 December 1885), reprinted in *Olive Schreiner's Letters, 1871-1899* edited by R. Rive, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 70-1.

²⁵ Gail Savage, "'The Wilful Communication of a Loathsome Disease': Marital Conflict and Venereal Disease in Victorian England", *Victorian Studies* 34 (1990-1), 35-54, (p. 37).

²⁶ quoted in "'The Wilful Communication of a Loathsome Disease'", p. 36.

about the character of heterosexual union. Cicely Hamilton, dipping into prohibited medical books, recoils in horror as she discovers the existence of syphilis:

By the idle opening of a book [...] I remember the thought which flashed into my mind -- we are told we have got to be married, but we are never told that! It was my first revolt against the compulsory nature of the trade of marriage.²⁷

Some feminist arguments for women's 'moral mission' cited men's lack of sexual continence as the cause of cultural and racial degeneration. Such were the claims of feminist theosophist Frances Swiney, a prominent figure at the Higher Thought Centre in London. The *Suffragette* often contained advertisements promoting her writing. Swiney was shocked to discover from contemporary sources how many female maladies could be attributed to sexual intercourse. Throughout her work Swiney advises abstinence from sex during pregnancy and lactation and suggests that sexual union between married couples should occur about every four years. Swiney also believed in the innate superiority of women. She writes in *Sublime Feminism*: 'the female is the balance-wheel of life's machinery [...] in all species the female alone has the creative power to form out of her own substance.'²⁸

In her polemical book *Marriage as a Trade* (1909) Cicely Hamilton suggests that marriage becomes compulsory for women who have no other object in life:

As long as child-bearing was an involuntary consequence of a compulsory trade -- as, to a great extent, it still is -- there must have been innumerable women who, year after year, bore children whom they did not desire to bear; who suffered the discomforts of pregnancy and the pangs of childbirth not that they might rejoice when a man was born into the world, but that a fresh and unwelcome burden might be added to their lives.

'How many children', asks Hamilton, 'are born each year merely because their mothers were afraid of being called old maids?'²⁹ Militant suffragette Theresa Billington-Grieg also questions the extent to which women willingly become mothers:

Present motherhood is very often a danger instead of a benefit to the State -
- many people would serve the country better if they refused to be parents.

²⁷ Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (New York: Moffat and Yard, 1909), p. 73.

²⁸ Frances Swiney, *Sublime Feminism* (Cheltenham: League of Isis, n. d.)

²⁹ Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (1909), (repr. London: The Women's Press, 1981), pp. 22, 116, 29.

Has [the State] [...] the right to demand that a woman shall become an unwilling mother? Can unwilling motherhood supply the best citizens?³⁰

Anti-feminists were deeply concerned with the falling birth-rate; perhaps too many women shared Billington-Grieg's convictions and were refusing parenthood? At an annual meeting of the British Medical Association one of the discussions centred on this topic. In a few of the opening papers charges were directed against the suffragettes. Dr Freemantle objected that:

... their ideal would seem to be to beat men at their own game. The crown of this arch which they are building for themselves is political power, and woman suffrage in any kind of form is therefore profoundly inimical to the birth-rate.³¹

Rebecca West, in the *Freewoman* in August 1912, offers a significant definition of spinsterhood as involving deliberate segregation from the opposite sex. West further defines spinsterhood as 'the limitation of experience to one's own sex'.³² However, many militant feminists felt that since women, unlike men, had few, if any, sexual desires, celibacy was an ideal route to self-determination. Indeed, Cicely Hamilton chooses to account for the 'uncompromising and [...] brutal attitude which man has consistently adopted towards the spinster' as because 'the perpetual virgin was a witness, however reluctantly, to the unpalatable fact that sexual intercourse was not for every woman an absolute necessity'.³³

A correspondent of the *Freewoman* magazine, E. Noel Morgan wrote, in August 1913, an impassioned description of the political cogency of singleness. Morgan was responding to a paper given by Mrs Gallichan at the *Freewoman* Discussion Circle on the 'Problems of Celibacy'. Morgan's objection to what she perceives as an attempt to problematise celibacy is that: 'We find that wherever women are admitted to sex intercourse to such a degree that the celibate class is practically non-existent, there the position of women socially, economically, and intellectually is of a low order'.³⁴ Sex under its lawful guise of heterosexuality was no more than the subjection of woman to man. Morgan advocates raising the numbers of the celibate as the only real means of ensuring equality. The numbers should be three hundred celibate women to one man, for after all:

³⁰ Fawcett Library, Theresa Billington-Grieg, 'The Trade in Sex', Box 404, pp. 6-7, n. d.

³¹ quoted in Dr Helen Harrison's Report on the 78th annual meeting of the B. M. A., *The Vote* (3 September 1910).

³² Rebecca West, *Freewoman* (1 August 1912).

³³ *Marriage as a Trade*, p. 36.

³⁴ E. Noel Morgan, *Freewoman* (8 August 1913), p. 234.

The class of unhusbanded women has been given the task of raising the fair sex out of its subjection. For such a duty the strength and energy of passion is required. Can this task be performed if woman to any extent indulges in sex intercourse -- otherwise subjection to man. It may be urged that for this [task a] certain number of women [should] be forced to be the saviours of their sex by applying themselves to strict abstinence.³⁵

Celibacy as it was interpreted by the tactically combative W. S. P. U. would be bound to result in the partial or total fragmentation of the male construction of heterosexual union. It was therefore desirable to establish a celibate class of women, politically empowered and protective of other women. Such aims appear almost to have been realised within the ranks of the W. S. P. U. Andrew Rosen notes that by 1913-14 63% of the W. S. P. U. membership were single women -- a rise of 18% since 1906-7³⁶. In 1913 all W. S. P. U. organisers were single women. The shift to martyrdom, arson and a refusal to compromise appears to have been appropriate to, if not indicative of, the altered membership.³⁷

In 1913 Walter Heape was worried by this predominance of spinsters in the militant movement. Not only did he consider the single woman to be a likely candidate for mental illness because of the non-functioning of her reproductive organs, but he also assumed that she would naturally feel hostility towards reproductive women:

Although there are many married women enrolled amongst the suffragist party, women who would embrace the cause of any who are unhappy or needing help, those who take an active part in the movement are undoubtedly spinsters; a dissatisfied and, we may assume, an unsatisfied class of women [...] Extended power given to women threatens to result in legislation for the advantage of that relatively small class of spinsters [...] and [...] their interests are directly antagonistic to the interests of the woman who is concerned in the production of children [...] Extended power given to women will result in the waste products of our Female population gaining power to order the habits and regulate the work of those women who are of real value to us as a nation.³⁸

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 234.

³⁶ Statistics are taken from Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up, Women... the Militant Campaign of the W. S. P. U. 1903-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 210.

³⁷ Rosen, p. 210.

³⁸ Walter Heape, *Sex Antagonism* (London: Constable, 1913), pp. 206-8. It was widely believed that if a woman were not to use her physiology for the purposes of reproduction then this may well render her infertile, or have some other detrimental effect upon her psychological well-being. Walter Heape writes: 'A normal woman is physiologically constituted to bear children and to rear them, and her neglect to perform the functions of motherhood results in derangement of the normal functional condition of all those systems of organs which are controlled or in any way affected by the generative system [...] thus any derangement of this one system tend to induce pathological conditions throughout the body, and all spinsters run this risk', in *Sex*

In Britain, 1906 to 1914 was the great period of militant feminist activity. Suffragettes went public, interrupting public meetings and the speeches of politicians and officials. They acclimatised themselves, often with difficulty, to dramatic confrontations which often led to violence. For many single women confrontational methods seemed necessary to change perceptions of singleness and dependency. Theresa Billington-Grieg, who eventually left the W. S. P. U. in 1906 to join the splinter group, the Women's Freedom League, found that her only choice was between unladylike militancy or subordination:

My dream of achieving an education, of knowing and understanding the things of the mind [...] was to be utterly broken. Only that lower step of an unlettered amateur could be mine if I agreed, having only a litter of crumbs of knowledge on which to feed. Crude in judgement. Baffled in argument [...] The capacities I knew I had -- the capacities they [her family] knew I had to be wasted. It was utterly impossible for me to submit [...] And I knew from the life around me and my reading what sort of life loomed ahead for the family drudge, the spinster sacrificed to family needs and living at last as a despised dependent.³⁹

In keeping with the suffragette policy of 'Deeds, not words' letter box arson was on the increase as was damage to property; Mary Richardson slashed the Rokeby *Venus*; Ethel Smyth taught Emmeline Pankhurst to throw stones on Hook Heath.⁴⁰ Militancy endangered not only the reputations of individual women, but also, as Brian Harrison notes, 'success in what was [...] seen as woman's most important trade, marriage [...] suffragettes were [...] breaching taboos of sex'.⁴¹ The suffragettes were prepared to risk all; their health, marital opportunities, their freedom and even their lives. W. Lyon Blease sets out the principals which lead to political success in a tract for the Women's Freedom League: 'Two things are required for the success of all political causes. The first is publicity; the second, sacrifice. The tactics of the militant suffragists have provided both'.⁴²

Antagonism, p. 210. Surgically operated on or hospitalized women are documented by Elaine Showalter in her essay 'Victorian Women and Insanity' *Victorian Studies* 23 (1979-80), 149-81.

³⁹ Fawcett Library, Theresa Billington-Grieg, private papers, Box 397, n. d.

⁴⁰ The figure of Ethel Smyth also crops up in Virginia Woolf's life; the two women were to form a boisterous and amusing friendship, though Woolf was, at first, rather frightened of the strength of Ethel's attachment to her. She writes to Quentin Bell that the seventy-one year old Ethel has fallen in love with her which she compares to being pursued and caught by a giant crab, *Congenial Spirits. The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*, p. 267. For further Woolfian accounts of Ethel Smyth see *Congenial Spirits. The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* edited by Joanne Banks, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 27-8.

⁴² W. Lyon Blease, 'Against Prejudice', (London: Women's Freedom League, n. d.), p. 18.

Discussions of the power of martyrdom resonate through the suffragette narratives and the propaganda literature of both the W. S. P. U. and the Women's Freedom League. Emily Wilding Davidson gives this account of her protest against forcible feeding in Holloway:

In my mind was the thought that some desperate protest must be made to put a stop to the hideous torture which was [...] our lot. Therefore [...] I climbed on to the railing and threw myself out on to the wire-netting, a distance of between 20 and 30 feet. The idea in my mind was -- one big tragedy might save many others; but the netting prevented only severe injury [...] I began to look out again. I realized my best means of carrying out my purpose was the iron staircase [...] I walked upstairs and threw myself [...] If I had been successful, I should undoubtedly been killed [...] But I caught once more on [...] the netting [...] I heard someone saying, 'No surrender!', and threw myself forward on my head with all my might. I knew nothing more.⁴³

For Christabel Pankhurst, as for many other spinster feminists, the motivating force of suffragism was the loss of 'the personal in the great impersonal', which resulted in a breath-taking mixture of zestfulness and sacrifice.⁴⁴ During one stay in Holloway Prison Ethel Smyth leaned from her window and used her toothbrush to conduct suffragettes singing the *March of Women*. On another occasion, Lady Constance Lytton was detained in Holloway Prison Infirmary as the prison authorities insisted her weak heart could not stand ordinary prison work, and she protested for the right to receive the same treatment as other suffragettes. Using a hairpin or needle, she pricked 'Votes for Women' on her body over her weak heart.⁴⁵

The full social cost of militant activities is grimly represented in anti-suffragist Mrs Humphrey Ward's novel *Delia Blanchflower* (1917).⁴⁶ The narrative introduces the figure of militant leader Gertrude Marvell, who seeks to recruit Delia to the militant cause. Delia has just inherited a large property (Maumsey in the New Forest) from her father when Gertrude arrives to act as her companion and tutor. Gertrude has already been imprisoned for stone-throwing but her fanaticism is concealed beneath a detached, languid and ironic manner. Her physical appearance, however, hints at her dangerously militant tendencies:

⁴³ Fawcett Library, Emily Wilding Davidson, private papers, Box 554, n. d.

⁴⁴ Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), quoted in Josephine Kamm, *Rapiers and Battleaxes* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 152-3.

⁴⁵ Margaret and Mary Thompson, *They Couldn't Stop Us* (London: W. E. Harrison, 1957).

⁴⁶ Mrs Humphrey Ward, *Delia Blanchflower* (London: Ward and Lock, 1917). All subsequent references to *Delia Blanchflower* will be taken from the Ward and Lock edition.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, slenderly made, with a sallow, regular face, and good though short-sighted eyes [...] The high collar of the white blouse, fitting tightly to the slender neck, the coat and skirt of blue serge without ornament of any kind, but well cut, emphasised the thinness, almost emaciation, of the form [...] The body with its clothing seemed to have been simplified as much as possible, so as to become the mere instrument of the will which governed it. (DB, 44)

She resembles Olive Chancellor in her role as the mentor of a younger woman and also in her loss of that pupil's devotion to a conservative male suitor. She has taught Delia history but, as Ward tells us, it is 'all from one point of view: that of the woman stirred to a kind of madness by what she held to be the wrongs of her sex' (DB, 66). Delia is under Gertrude's tutelage for eighteen months:

... the pupil [...] had come to adore her [...] Gertrude threw her arms round the girl, accepting from her what were practically the vows of a neophyte in a secret and revolutionary service. (DB, 67)

Gertrude is a relentlessly dedicated feminist. She feels nothing but disdain towards men, which is partly accounted for by her unhappy family background; her father is narrow-minded, her brother profligate, and, predictably enough, her suitor dumped her and ran off with her younger sister. Gertrude is also a leading official in the organisation 'The Daughters of Revolt', and the suffragettes' paper is punningly named *Tocsin*. While she is Delia's companion she attracts an eccentric fringe of local women who have read *Tocsin* and want to join the suffragette movement. All are single and described scathingly: there is the vigorously built assistant mistress at a local grammar school; a farmer's daughter, 'a strapping girl, with a huge vanity and a parrot's brain' (DB, 142), who has been jilted by her suitor; and Miss Toogood, a 'short, limping' and consumptive dressmaker. In one recruit Gertrude's rhetoric kindles 'the long-repressed will and passion of the girl's stormy nature [...]' The sheer violence of it appealed to her like water to the thirsty' (DB, 159).

In the opposite camp is the central male figure, Mark Winnington, whom Ward describes reading an article in the *Quarterly* entitled 'Contemporary Feminism' with 'mingled amazement and revolt':

So women everywhere -- many women at any rate -- were turning indiscriminately against the old bonds [...] demanding 'self-realisation', freedom for the individual and the personal will; rebelling against motherhood, and life-long marriage; clamouring for easy divorce, and denouncing their own fathers, brother and husbands, as either tyrants or fools. (DB, 4)

He is a provincial Englishman, a traditionalist with a public school background. Throughout the narrative Ward insists on the hero's impartiality and 'disinterested outlook' (*DB*, 8). From their first encounter, his stern masculine good sense brings out all that is natural and womanly in Delia; she flushes, trembles, adjusts her hair and wants to cry when he shows her sympathy. He meanwhile puzzles over why on earth women should want the vote anyway, given that they have power enough as the natural guardians of morality. As in *The Bostonians* the non-verbal charm of the young priestess of feminism is emphasised; the woman is again separated from the word:

His moral sense revolted against her violence -- her defence of violence. A girl of twenty-one addressing this ugly, indifferent crowd, and talking calmly of stone-throwing and arson, as though they were occupations as natural to her youth as dancing or love-making! [...] And yet he had never been more stirred, more conscious of the mad, mixed poetry of life, than he was, as he stood watching the slender figure on the wagon -- the gestures of the upraised arm, and the play of the lights [...] now on the deep white collar that lightened her serge jacket, and now on the gesticulating hand, or the face that even in these disfiguring cross-lights could be nothing else than lovely. (*DB*, 171)

Gertrude's grand plan is to burn down Monk Lawrence, the country house of Cabinet Minister, Sir Wilfrid Lang. Monk Lawrence dates from the Elizabethan period, is filled with priceless treasures, and clearly figures peace and continuity. When Delia gazes at the house, she is conscious of 'a rich confused impression of old seemliness and mellowed beauty, -- steeped in [...] English history, English poetry' (*DB*, p. 204). The suffragettes do manage to execute their plan to torch the house, but Gertrude and a small child are accidentally caught in the flames. Gertrude's last remorseful wail as she perishes is 'The child! The child!'

However gruesome the torments which await the fictional suffragette, in reality many single and self-emancipating women found that militancy offered them a valuable sense of community. The life experience of many single women had hitherto proved to be fragmentary and isolated. Their unmarried status had been largely untheorised and culture had presented them with no positive sense of how to interpret their singleness or any independent strategy or secular community of spinsters to alleviate loneliness. Therefore many single suffragettes felt that participation in a movement which theorised singleness as heroic and political and which further enabled them to engage with broad impersonal forces, soothed their isolation with the sweet balm of community. The comparative largeness of the suffragette movement and the scope for martyrdom which militancy offered,

suggested the inherent justice of their feminist aims. Collective militancy possessed both religiosity and wholeness, as is explained by Miss McMillan, who gives in *The Vote* some reasons for militancy and the pursuit of emancipation:

A great light has flashed on the thinking womanhood of Britain [...] It is not their womanhood that makes women [...] range themselves with the militants. It is their impersonal sympathies that are awakened. They are not merely feminine. They begin to be fully human.⁴⁷

Single woman Lydia Becker articulates her feminist inspiration in similar terms when she describes the approval she felt emanating from a meeting of working-class women in Manchester. She writes to a friend:

If my eyes had been shut I should have fancied it was men who were cheering and clapping [...] I can't tell you how my heart went out to those women: and to see them look at me -- oh, it was really sacred -- awful: it was as if I received a baptism.⁴⁸

Many suffragettes justified their unorthodoxy and the challenge it presented to the domestic or marital confinement of women, as a new mode of femininity which might enable women to realise a fuller humanity; Emily Wilding Davidson wrote in 'The Price of Liberty' that: 'the true suffragette is an epitome of the determination of women to possess their own souls.'⁴⁹ Before the First World War many militants based their political activities upon a belief in the superiority of direct personal commitment over traditional authority. Christabel Pankhurst makes a direct connection between her singleness and her ability to act effectively as a militant on the political stage, when she recounts a conversation in an article for the *Weekly Dispatch*:

'We should have thought you had deserted us if you had married,' said a woman to me the other day [...] and that is certainly what [suffragettes] would have thought and said [...] If I had married the government of the day would certainly have hoped, and hoping believed, that I was likely, sooner or later, to abandon the militant policy and that militancy would accordingly collapse. They would have persuaded themselves that a husband's influence would in the end prevail and weaken my militant

⁴⁷ Miss McMillan, *The Vote* (9 December 1909).

⁴⁸ quoted in Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: the Story of a Struggle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 80.

⁴⁹ Pankhurst Library, Emily Wilding Davison, 'The Price of Liberty', Box 554, n. d.

purpose. And what a terrible difficulty, if not impossibility, it would have been for me to convince them of the contrary!⁵⁰

A large proportion of the suffragettes hoped that the eventual result of their efforts would be a far truer complementarity of the sexes than that expressed by the earlier Victorian concept of the separate spheres. A more authentic union between man and woman was possible and necessary for the well-being and future of the race. This can be taken as one of the paradoxes of militant celibacy: its proselytising seemed provocative and aggressive but in fact its advocates claimed that they sought to find a political platform from which to project into public life all the benignity of a loving and selfless maternalism. Even when Mrs Despard, leader of the Women's Freedom League, fancifully envisages a near-biblical exodus of women from 'cities reeking with corruption' to land purchased by themselves, in order to create a utopian community of benign mothers and enlightened children, she is quick to add that the new communities would eventually be dependent upon the arrival of liberated men.⁵¹ For, as Charlotte Despard had explained in an earlier article, in woman's soul there lived 'the ideal of the family'.⁵²

Clearly then, from mid-century to the outbreak of the First World War, middle-class women's perception of their function in society had changed significantly. Increasing numbers of women remained single because they chose to (although many still lacked the opportunity to marry or felt that singleness had been forced by population change). Divorce became a limited option and hence a new source of singleness. The domesticity which had for so long confined women was being remodelled politically. Ibsen's heroine Nora attempts to make practical initiatives to reclaim her life in *The Doll's House*; Vivie Warren joyfully throws her suitor's note into the office bin and turns back to the work she chooses in Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*. These acts of self-definition mark a significant shift in perspectives on marriage and female fulfilment. Although many suffragettes did still use traditional definitions of women's function, there was, within suffragette discourse, a full awareness of female diversity. Cicely Hamilton speaks of this suppressed diversity:

For generation after generation the lives of women of even the slightest intelligence and individuality must have been one long and constant struggle between the forces of nature endeavouring to induce in them that

⁵⁰ Christabel Pankhurst, 'Confessions of Christabel: Why I Never Married' *Weekly Dispatch* (3 April 1921) 1 and 7, (p. 7).

⁵¹ Charlotte Despard, 'Can Women Combine?', *The Vote* (9 September 1911), p. 246.

⁵² Charlotte Despard, 'Why we want the vote: the woman worker', *The Vote* (29 April 1911), 5, (p. 5).

variety which is another word for progress and their own enforced strivings to approximate to a single monotonous type [...] However squarely uncompromising the characteristics of any given woman, the only vacant space for her occupation was round, and into the round hole she had to go. Were her soul the soul of a pirate, it had to be encased in a body which pursued the peaceful avocation of a cook. Vicious or virtuous, matron or outcast, she was made and not born.⁵³

As we have seen, throughout the nineteenth-century and through the early decades of the twentieth century, feminist dissension was extensive: feminists scrutinised education and vocation, the law, politics and culture. Many feminists took an irreligious swipe at the institution of marriage. Cicely Hamilton's *Marriage as a Trade* made an influential case for celibacy, voicing a critique of middle-class marriage which came from the very centre of militant feminism. The title of Hamilton's book invites its reader to make a parallel between marriage and prostitution. Hamilton reasons that marriage represented a narrowing of women's hopes and ambitions. As a militant spinster Hamilton tries to locate the identity of the middle-class single woman in productive labour and economic independence, shifting the focus away from her reproductive (or rather non-reproductive) social role. Earlier in 1908, Cicely Hamilton called the pairing off of men and women through matrimony into heterosexual reproductive units 'the Noah's Ark Principle'. Hamilton further contends that the word 'woman' should not be synonymous with 'mother', as the mother's role should not be exclusive or promoted as a definition of women's lives.⁵⁴

The practice of celibacy gave feminist spinsters a new sense of pride in their social status -- which enabled Cicely Hamilton to declare at Queen's Hall in 1919:

Do you suppose that forty or fifty years ago a woman would have dared to stand up on a platform and say, without the slightest shame, that she was over thirty and unmarried? She could not do it. That is past.⁵⁵

Writing in *The Vote* Ethel Hill foresees a time when:

... that old-fashioned type of woman -- dearly loved by the old-fashioned man -- the woman who to please him belittled her own sex and the needs of her own sex, that type of woman will be as extinct as -- well, the hansom cab!⁵⁶

⁵³ *Marriage as a Trade*, p. 44.

⁵⁴ Cicely Hamilton, *Women's Franchise*, (2 January 1908), p. 311.

⁵⁵ Cicely Hamilton, *The Vote* 3 (15 April 1911), p. 295.

⁵⁶ Ethel Hill, 'Miss Beatrice Harraden', *The Vote* 1, 3 (11 November, 1909), p. 28.

Every woman who remained single and entered the work place was undermining the tyranny of domesticity. Access to better education and employment was reflected in women's greater social visibility. But with this visibility and the disappearance of hansom cabs and complaisant women, there developed a deepening hostility towards single women and their project to restructure the family, social and sexual relations. Sir Almoth Wright discusses the subject of militant hysteria in an address to the Editor of *The Times* in 1912 and his comments indicate the increased influence of medical and psychological discourses upon anti-suffrage analysis of the militant suffragette, and, thinly disguised beneath that figure, the spinster. Feminism and the celibacy which it often exacted are viewed by Wright as indications of sexual disorder. The suffrage movement drew its recruits from 'the half million of our excess female population' which, according to Wright, consists in part of:

... a class of women who have all their life-long been strangers to joy, women in whom instincts long suppressed have in the end broken into flame [...] These are the sexually embittered women in whom everything has turned into gall and bitterness of heart and hatred of men.⁵⁷

Wright presents five categories of militant suffragette including the intellectually and sexually embittered and the sexually atrophied for whom he recommends emigration and reproduction to meet the needs of the Empire.⁵⁸ Wright also expresses concern that a large number of single women are involved in the running of schools and colleges and thus, according to Wright, able to influence girls. Wright wishes that the suffragette were 'crushed under the soldiers' shields like the traitor woman at the Tarpeian rock'. A suffragette nurse responded by prescribing for Sir Almoth:

... a six months' holiday, a sea voyage preferably. No letters to be written or received. No books to be read -- except *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, a careful study of which will teach him that things are not what they seem.⁵⁹

Sir Almoth's ludicrous desire is easily laughed at, yet the threat posed by militant celibacy was potentially serious; reproduction was at stake.

Arthur Chas. Gronno, warning of the dangers of women M. P.s, maintains that: 'It is the state of manhood, the ability to render bodily service, to hazard life

⁵⁷ Sir Almoth Wright, 'On Militant Hysteria', *The Times* 28 March 1912, 7-8, (p. 7).

⁵⁸ 'On Militant Hysteria', p. 8.

⁵⁹ Beatrice Kent, *The Vote* (6 April 1912), p. 292.

and limb in the defence of the State which is the fundamental reason for the [male] vote.⁶⁰ However, Mr Gronno, being too attentive to the danger of women in Westminster, failed to see the greater danger of war with Germany. And when hostilities began with Germany in August, 1914, Millicent Fawcett did not hesitate to voice N. U. W. S. S. support for the national cause claiming that: 'we have another duty now [...] let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship, whether our claim to it be recognized or not.'⁶¹

To some extent, patriotic compliance helped to secure women the vote. Members of the N. U. W. S. S. joined Voluntary Aid Detachments, the Red Cross and even women's branches of the armed services. The pattern of work for men and women of all classes was not, at first, disrupted by the outbreak of war, but as increasing numbers of men were drawn into the Armed Forces, women were called upon to enter new spheres of employment. As men were recruited for active service, women became electrical fitters, signalmen, grave diggers, bus conductors. Female clerks and, of course, nurses were in demand. Munitions factories opened their gates to floods of women, and this process was accelerated by the introduction of conscription in April 1916. In her discussion of the demarcation of gender during the first and second World Wars, Margaret Higonnet makes the point that:

When the homefront is mobilized, women may be allowed to move 'forward' in terms of employment or social policy, yet the battlefield -- preeminently a male domain -- takes economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women's objective situation does change, relationships of dominance and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations.⁶²

In 1918, when women's full contribution to the war effort (chiefly their work in the munitions industry, transport service and nursing) was widely acknowledged, Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act. All adult males received the vote, and all women over thirty who were householders, the wives of householders, university graduates or occupiers of property worth five pounds per year. Not until 1928, when the voting age was reduced to twenty-one, did women gain the franchise on the same terms as men.

⁶⁰ Arthur Chas. Gronno, *The Woman M. P. A Peril to Women and the Country* (Manchester: Manchester Branch of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, n. d.), p. 14.

⁶¹ quoted in Josephine Kamm, *Rapiers and Battleaxes* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 181.

⁶² Margaret Randolph Higonnet, 'Introduction', *Behind the Lines. Gender and the Two World Wars*, edited by M. R. Higonnet et al., (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 6.

Feminist militancy effectively vanished after 1914, and the non-militant N. U. W. S. S. was free to extend its non-violent and democratic practices on to the national feminist platform. The W. S. P. U. ceased to exist in any coherent form partly because the Pankhursts forbade further militancy and the dictatorial character of their leadership ensured obedience. Ultimately, as Brian Harrison points out: 'A body which responded to disagreement with schism or expulsion could provide experience neither of [...] continuous collaboration between the sexes, nor of [...] continuous compromise between divergent organizations'.⁶³

The vote was a means to further reform and not an end in itself, the parliamentary franchise opened the way to change, but it was to be non-militant change. No proper objectives had been devised by the W. S. P. U. leadership for future feminists, it had been an organisation dependent upon its leadership and was non-reformist by definition. Its policy of non-collaboration lost all direction, its strategy being vague, minimal and reliant upon oppositional tactics. Sacrifice proved to have few lasting compensatory rewards. W. S. P. U. militant practice crumbled: Emmeline Pankhurst went on to work with her old enemy Lloyd George, when he became Minister of Munitions, in his scheme to recruit women for munitions factories.

The motto of the W. S. P. U. paper became *Brittania* which translated as 'For King. For Country. For Freedom.' It regularly advertised 'Patriotic Meetings' to be held every Sunday in Hyde Park. In the January 17, 1916, edition of the paper a demonstration was advertised for the 21st of that month on 'Kaiserism or Liberty' to be chaired by Miss Annie Kenney. During the W. S. P. U. campaign in the Clyde Valley General Flora Drummond spoke to an audience of 4000 men at Fairfield Shipbuilding Yard on the need to employ women as munition workers. 'You see' she told them, 'we women suffragists have buried the hatchet. We have set aside our grievances -- we have set aside everything but the fact that Britain is at war, and that Britain must win.' No statement could have been more honest.

With the collapse of central feminist institutions such as the W. S. P. U., single sex institutions and relations were increasingly denigrated and a new urgency was attached to the development of women's relations with men. In promoting celibacy and spinsterhood many spinster feminists had been in part rebelling against what they viewed as the increasing sexualisation of women in the work of male sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. The positive aspect of disenfranchisement was that the feminists could set a torch to patriarchal ideology -- spinsters like Cicely Hamilton were in no doubt that through the sex act men could secure women's subordination and that the male-dominated 'science' of sexology was

⁶³ *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 76.

deeply linked to patriarchal control. The popularisation of the discourses of the new 'science' of sexology in the early decades of the twentieth century meant that the concept of voluntary motherhood was increasingly promoted, as was the need for a form of 'companionate marriage' which would make marital union attractive and satisfying. The popularisation of contraception, while obviously liberating many women from the hazards of repeated or unwanted pregnancy, and enabling both married and unmarried heterosexual women to engage in sexual activity, clearly spelled the demise of militant celibacy for some heterosexual women. Contraception supported the earlier impact of the 'New Woman' on concepts of female singleness. The impact of the 'New Woman' shifted the focus on celibacy as a mode of empowerment for single women, to a new concept of female sexual self-expression through alternative unions, including free love unions, between men and women. The figure of the 'New Woman' was an early stage in the process which was to separate female singleness from celibacy, although it is important to bear in mind that the 'New Woman' also resisted orthodox marriage.

In the first decades of the twentieth century there were two main strands of opposition to the spinster: one response to the spinster emphasised her sexual perversity, which tended to cast doubt upon the efforts of celibate militant women who opposed male sexual practices; the other promoted free love to solve the problem of 'surplus' women and to eradicate prostitution -- this implied, of course, that middle-class women had been so sexually repressed that men had to go to prostitutes to gratify their sexual needs.

The idea of companionacy between men and women, usually still involving a marital frame, was assumed to be liberating for the middle-class woman. An ideal of domestic partnership between men and women blossomed. The influence of marriage on the lives of women thus remained an issue not of category but of degree; its symbolic and material authority still stretched to affect the lives of those furthest from marriage -- single women who never married or cohabited with men. Wifely experience was again keyed into womanhood to dishonour the unmarried socially and so the central discourses of marriage continued to be pivotal to the gendering of women. The new 'science' of sexology no longer constructed men and women in terms of difference, or at least it did so with lessened emphasis. But the new 'equality' merely adjusted existing power relations. Martha Vicinus observes that the sexologists turned sexual emancipation for 'middle-class consumption' into 'an argument for "companionate marriage"'.⁶⁴

The debate over woman's role shifted from the question of her public function back to a discussion of her role in marriage. The middle-class woman was

⁶⁴ Vicinus, p. 291.

never allowed to forget that she was reproductive and yet paradoxically her womanhood remained hidden, unrevealed, as suspect as ever. But whether through her sexuality, her periodicity, or her genitalia, she remained the other: unequal and unknown.

During the Victorian era isolated reconnaissances into the unknown feminine had been possible, for instance, in the predominantly male domains of phrenology or physical anthropology, or in social Darwinism. This work was, in some ways, a preliminary to the new sexology's sustained investigation of women and their place. The competing claims of unity and diversity were reconciled in the synthesis of companionate marriage with a drive to educate women in their sexuality. Havelock Ellis claims in 'The need for sex instruction', that sex education 'has far more bearing on happiness in marriage than any degree of merely general culture.'⁶⁵ Sexology defined the 'normal' woman as heterosexual and a willing participant in marriage and the family.

Ellis and Carpenter worked with the notion that women's sexuality was repressed and required liberation. Ellis supported 'free unions', divorce law reform and the use of birth control to separate sex from reproduction. He influenced such feminists as Stella Browne, Dora Russell and Marie Stopes, all of whom became advocates of a woman's right to pleasure in heterosexual sex. While sexology conceded women's ability to enjoy sex, it also designated heterosexuality as the appropriate mode of expression of female sexuality and created a particular definition of non-conformist female sexuality as 'lesbian'. The terms of description used for the lesbian parallel or even, it could be suggested, adopt the vocabulary used by anti-feminist commentators to classify the middle-class spinster. In her 1923 analysis of 'feminine inversion' or lesbianism, sexologist Stella Browne describes a lesbian, whom she refers to as 'Case A', in terms reminiscent of conservative accounts of the feminist spinster:

[She] has an instinctive horror of men [...] and also quite a definite antagonism to them socially [and] as a rule, criticises even the most harmless or upright and well-intentioned men, unsparingly. [She has] an immense intolerance of normal passion, even in its most legally sanctioned and certificated forms [...] And all the while, her life revolves round a deep and ardent sex-passion [...] entirely justified in her own opinion as pure family affection and duty!⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Havelock Ellis, 'The need for sex instruction' in *Questions of Our Day* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1936), p. 262.

⁶⁶ Stella Browne, 'Studies in Feminine Inversion', *Journal of Sexology and Psychoanalysis* (1923), 51-8, (p. 52).

The terms of this description suggest that all the features of Case A's critique of heterosexual union and antipathy towards marriage, could place her as a militantly celibate feminist; or, as a lesbian. And just in case we miss this implication Browne expresses her conviction that 'much of the towering spiritual arrogance which is found [...] in many high places in the Suffrage movement [...] is really unconscious inversion.' According to Browne, the heterosexual expression of a woman's sexuality is her 'most precious personal right.'⁶⁷ The sex reformers formed new rationales for women's heterosexual role.

In the years before the First World War the *Freewoman* magazine opposed female celibacy. Its journalism constructed female celibacy as limiting and remote from any genuine notion of women's freedom -- celibacy denied women the 'right' to sexual relations with men. An anonymous article on 'The Spinster' speaks of:

... the High Priestess of Society. Not of the mother of souls, but of her barren sister, the withered tree, the acidulous vessel under whose pale shadow we chill and whiten, of the Spinster I write. Because of her power and dominion. She, unobtrusive, meek, soft-footed, silent, shame-faced, bloodless and boneless, thinned to spirit, enters the secret recesses of the mind, sits at the secret springs of action, and moulds and fashions our emasculate society. She is our social nemesis.⁶⁸

The cultural significance of the spinster has shifted; she may not be the drip she once was, but she now emerges as the emissary of barely concealed perversity. Her oddness is no longer economic or material, it is sexual. The passage envisages the spinster in terms similar to those used throughout late nineteenth century feminist discourse to describe venereal disease and male sexuality; all quietly destroy the foundations of social life. Equally, all play significant roles in social apocalypse.

A faster route to liberty, the *Freewoman* opined, resided in marital reform, perhaps even polygamy, and the promotion of 'free' love. The *Freewoman* changed its subtitle in May, 1912, from *A Feminist Review* to *A Weekly Humanist Review*, thus signalling a change editorial policy. Its new purpose was to 'show that the two causes, Man's and Woman's are one'. Women need no longer feel alienated by sexual relations, but could enjoy new status as a powerful participants. Heterosexual sex breathed warm life into womanhood.

The 'puritanism' of celibate feminist spinsters could then be perceived as akin to the 'prudishness' of middle-class Victorian sexual attitudes. Both had to be

⁶⁷ 'Studies in Feminine Inversion', pp. 57, 58.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, 'The Spinster', by One, *Freewoman* (23 November 1911), 10-11, (p. 10).

assailed and now the main remaining propagator of 'prudish' beliefs was the spinster feminist. The execration of the spinster was thus of primary interest to sex reform.

The popularity of Marie Stopes's treatise *Married Love*, published in 1918 shows how the views of female sexuality promoted by many sexologists were becoming culturally acceptable. Despite Marie Stopes's apparent aversion to the writing of Havelock Ellis, she adopted and extended many of the views promulgated by sexology.⁶⁹ *Married Love* sold six editions in 1918 alone; it shaped many women's expectations about sex. Linda Grant describes it as 'for decades the sex manual of English middle-class women'.⁷⁰ In her analysis of the correspondence which Stopes received following its publication Ellen Holtzman finds that the text was 'in many cases the only explicit discussion of sexuality which the correspondents had been exposed to [...] *Married Love* seems to have played an important role in shaping their expectations about sex.'⁷¹ Here is Virginia Woolf's account of its effect:

I've been talking to the younger generation all the afternoon. They are like crude hard green apples: no halo, mildew or blight. Seduced at fifteen, life has no holes and corners for them. I admire, but deplore. Such an old maid, they make me feel. 'And how do you manage not -- not -- not-- to have children?' I ask. 'Oh, we read Mary Stopes of course.' Figure to yourself my dear Molly -- before taking their virginity, the young men of our time produce marked copies of Stopes! Astonishing!⁷²

In *Married Love* Stopes formulated the law of the periodic nature of sexual desire in women; an explanation of the workings of female sexual desire and an idea which, according to Phyllis Grosskurth, had never occurred to Havelock Ellis 'for all his espousal of the erotic rights of women.'⁷³ Stopes also attributed diseases in women varying from neuralgia and nerves to fibroid growth, to the practice of celibacy.⁷⁴ In 1921 Marie Stopes opened the 'Mothers' Clinic, described by Peter Fryer as intended to promote 'voluntary and joyous motherhood'.⁷⁵ Marie Stopes received a letter from

⁶⁹ Marie Stopes described reading Ellis's text *Sexual Inversion* as 'like breathing a bag of soot; it made me feel choked and dirty for three months', from 'Obituary Notice', *The Literary Guide* (September 1939), p. 171, quoted in Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1980), p. 187.

⁷⁰ Linda Grant, *Sexing the Millennium* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 44.

⁷¹ Ellen Holtzman, 'The Pursuit of Married Love: Women's Attitudes Toward Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939', *Journal of Social History* 16 (1982-3), 39-52, (p. 40).

⁷² Virginia Woolf to Molly MacCarthy (19 January 1923), *Congenial Spirits*, p. 156.

⁷³ Grosskurth, p. 372.

⁷⁴ Barbara Brookes, 'Women and Reproduction 1860-1939' in *Labour and Love* edited by Jane Lewis, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 149-171, (p. 158), from Marie Stopes, *Married Love* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1918), p. 107.

⁷⁵ Peter Fryer, *The Birth Controllers* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 228.

a single woman in August 1919 which asks if "there [are] any legitimate means by which an unmarried woman can satisfy her sexual instinct?", to which Stopes replied that emigration to Western Canada in order to find a husband may be possible but that if:

... marriage is really impossible, I do not know how the sex instinct can be legitimately fulfilled, except by deflecting it into sound work [...] At the time of conscious need of sex, really hot baths are good in dissipating the electric energy which accumulates.⁷⁶

Ellen Holtzman provides some useful clues about why nineteen-twenties women found *Married Love's* emphasis upon female sexual pleasure so acceptable:

The new decade opened with a rapid rise in unemployment [...] women's magazines [...] undertook a campaign to encourage women to return to their domestic roles, thereby leaving as many jobs open to men as possible [...] Stopes' ideas about female sexual pleasure added another dimension to women's life in the home. By arguing that women were sexual beings who had a right to satisfaction, Stopes was, in effect, providing women with a sexual role within marriage [...] gave women a goal to strive for within the confines of [...] domestic life.⁷⁷

This kind of domestic goal must have been particularly appealing to middle-class women given the sharp decline in birth-rate among the middle-classes. If women have neither a maternal role in the home nor an economic one out of it then the sexual role within marriage becomes an attractive one. Sexology was likely to become a principal provider of forms of female sexual expression.

Creating further pressure against singleness anti-feminists noted with alarm what they perceived as a trend towards celibacy in women. They attributed spinsterhood to degeneracy or an aversion to motherhood. Healthy development in women was signified by attachment to their prescribed sphere. Walter Gallichanan, an advocate of polygamy, condemns what he terms 'involuntary spinsterhood' and claims that prudery rather than male sexuality is a source of lasciviousness.⁷⁸ Charlotte Haldane writes in *Motherhood and Its Enemies* (1927) of the threat which single women pose to society. She groups spinsters with vegetarians and anti-vivisectionists, who dabble in freakish forms of science, religion and philanthropy and who seek to establish cat and dog homes or any other kind of joy-defying

⁷⁶ *Dear Dr. Stopes*, edited by Ruth Hall (London: Penguin, 1978), pp. 163-4.

⁷⁷ 'The Pursuit of Married Love', p. 42.

⁷⁸ Walter Gallichan, *The Poison of Prudery, A Historical Survey* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1929), p. 192.

missionary society. The spinster, Haldane claims, seeks to light the fires of sex-antagonism (no doubt built from the firewood accumulated from breaking up cradles in the eighteen-nineties).⁷⁹ Haldane peevishly notes the privileges enjoyed by spinsters and finds that cultural approval of female singleness can only be detrimental to the mothers of Britain:

... the spinster has won her present recognition largely at the expense of the potential or actual mother [...] her growing economic and political status constitutes a definite menace to the future of motherhood.⁸⁰

In the twenties Haldane sent out a questionnaire to some thirty institutions connected with a range of professions, in a bid to determine the proportions of single to married women working in those fields. She found that most of the women surveyed had entered their professions after nineteen-twenty. The Law Society had a total of fifty-two women, forty-seven of whom were single; two hundred and fifty-five industrial welfare workers were single and only nine married. Society, according to Haldane, was teeming with working spinsters, celibacy having swept its way out of the nunnery. These women are 'abnormal' or 'subnormal', insists Haldane, their unvaried diets mean that they lack the vitamins specific to reproduction and the non-fulfilment of their biological abilities may well make them sterile and cause 'the emergence [...] of the secondary sexual characteristics of the opposite sex'. By allowing such women access to work and political rights 'society is encouraging them to put forward their programmes as those of all womanhood':

... by the fact that they will not mate and bear children, they will be differentiated from the normal female population [...] economic treatment cannot be denied them; by their votes they will obtain it through political channels if others are blocked [but] money spent on celibates, public money [...] cannot be used for subsidizing motherhood.⁸¹

Norman Haire, a leading sexologist who founded the Walworth Marriage Advice Centre in 1921, writes in the foreword to Anthony Ludovici's analysis of the future of women, that men are naturally polygamous and that 'it would be better for every woman to have half a husband [...] than to give half the women a whole husband and the others no share in a husband at all'. For, according to Haire, 'sound and desirable women cannot be happy unmated' and if any women should find

⁷⁹ Charlotte Haldane, *Motherhood and Its Enemies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927).

⁸⁰ Haldane, p. 108.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp. 134, 154, 137.

herself content with singleness this can only be because she is 'atypical'.⁸²

Ludovici's text envisages a nightmare world of the future populated by desireless single women, who pride themselves on their superiority to sex, joined by 'thousands of disillusioned married women who [...] have become slanderers of love and man'. Ludovici appeals to women not to forsake their bodily happiness nor to divest man of his reproductive rights. Otherwise, women can do no more than follow 'neutral pursuits and interests only fit for neuters'.⁸³ Furthermore, in this spinster-dominated future society, the age of consent will be raised to the menopause, reproduction will only occur through surgery, as a kind of vaccination and men will become the poorest-paid employees in a woman-managed industrial base. Ludovici hopes instead for a 'Masculine Renaissance' through which women will recover 'the lost joy of looking up to her mate' and learn again to 'despise herself if she wears glasses, if she has false or bad teeth, if she cannot function without scientific aids, and if she cannot suckle her child'.⁸⁴ Common to all these accounts is an attack on the political prominence of spinsterhood within the feminist movement. The spinster is identified as the primary threat to harmonious heterosexual relations. The subtext of these analyses reconstitutes the political focus on celibacy within the women's movement as abnormal prudery.

The Sex Reform Congress of 1929 was held in London and was organised by the British branch of the World League for Sex Reform. Supporters or members of the league are listed and include Vera Brittain, Walter Gallichan, Sylvia Pankhurst, Dorothy Richardson, Marie Stopes, Rebecca West and Leonard Woolf. Sheila Jeffreys notes of the reports given at the Congress that 'all indicate that women's "resistance" or "frigidity" was a cross-class phenomenon at this time'.⁸⁵ R. B. Kerr, presenting a paper on the sexual 'rights' of single women, estimates that as many as forty percent of women over the age of thirty had never married. He lists the achievements of spinsters in a variety of fields, but makes no mention of their feminist activities. Nothing can compensate women for a lack of sexual experience, and the only obstacle to sexual liaisons with men is what Kerr calls 'prudery'. The militant celibacy of the militant suffragette movement is being reworked as a sort of self-negating prudery. Single women are oppressed by celibacy:

We all feel and she herself feels, that something of immense importance has been missed out of her life. Nothing can compensate, in the life of the average woman, for the lack of full sexual experience [...] auto-erotic

⁸² Norman Haire, 'Foreword', Anthony Ludovici, *Lysistata or Woman's Future and Future Woman* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927), pp. 7-8, 6.

⁸³ Ludovici, pp. 45-6, 49.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 112.

⁸⁵ *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, p. 179.

practices [...] are not a spiritually adequate substitute for the natural relation of man and woman.⁸⁶

On the other hand, Naomi Mitchison's paper on the practice of contraception insists on the sexual needs of women but also places a high value on celibacy in women's lives: celibacy enables women to devote their full energies to whatever work they choose.⁸⁷

Spinster feminists such as Winifred Holtby found that their perceptions of self-affirming and contented female singleness were increasingly rare and isolated. Winifred Holtby, reviewing Louisa Alcott's fiction for *Time and Tide* recommends Alcott as an example of normal spinsterhood:

Louisa Alcott was [...] a maiden aunt, a spinster supporting a large, dependent family [...] Yet [...] There was no hint of frustration or fear [...] Her appetites for love, devotion, adventure, observation and success were amply satisfied.⁸⁸

This style of female singleness Holtby recommends 'to all those who are deluded or depressed by mournful fantasies of our pseudo-psychologists, who persist in associating spinsters with frustration and maiden aunts with neuroses'.⁸⁹ In an earlier article in *Time and Tide* on George V's Jubilee celebrations Winifred Holtby comments on the changes in popular ideas about female celibacy which she detects:

When I was a child an unmarried woman who had compromised her reputation for strict chastity was an outcast; she was called Fallen, Unfortunate or Wicked, according to the degree of charity in those who mentioned her. Today, there is a far worse crime than promiscuity: it is chastity. On all sides the unmarried woman today is surrounded by doubts cast not only upon her attractiveness or her common sense, but upon her decency, her normality, even her sanity. The popular Women's Magazines, short-story writers, lecturers and what not are conducting a campaign which might almost be called 'The Persecution of Virgins'.⁹⁰

Holtby humorously observes that she almost regrets refusing the marriage offer of a foreign gentleman who proposed to her while the gramophone played 'No Rose in all

⁸⁶ R. B. Kerr, 'The Sexual Rights of Spinsters', *The Sex Reform Congress* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1930), 91-4, (p. 92).

⁸⁷ Naomi Mitchison, 'The Use of Contraceptives by Intelligent Persons', *The Sex Reform Congress*, 182-8, (p. 188).

⁸⁸ Winifred Holtby, 'Untitled Review of Louisa Alcott's Fiction', *Time and Tide* (13 July, 1935), 1056-8, (p. 1056).

⁸⁹ 'Untitled Review of Louisa Alcott's Fiction', p. 1058.

⁹⁰ Winifred Holtby, 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide* (4 May 1935), 647-8, (p. 647).

the World' and who, having been spurned, next corresponded with her from Wormwood Scrubs asking that she acquire some woollen undergarments for him while he served time for forgery. 'Seriously,' Holtby continues, 'it takes considerable vanity, self-respect and periodical inoculations of flattery for the unmarried woman of what was once considered unblemished reputation to stand up to the world today'.⁹¹ As sexuality was more closely tied to the reproduction of the population so the social condemnation of celibacy increased.

First published in 1917 and reprinted eight times in the next two decades, *Regiment of Women*⁹², written by single woman Winifred Ashton using the pseudonym Clemence Dane, can be taken as indicative of a widespread hostility towards spinster feminists. In her nineteen-fifties study of representations of the lesbian in literature Jeanette Foster finds *Regiment of Women* 'the first British novel [...] devoted wholly to variance' and Foster herself concludes that 'it is the sex starvation of spinsterhood which produces variance, a barren substitute for married love'.⁹³ Twenties reviewer George Greenwood locates Dane among Rebecca West, May Sinclair and Rose Macaulay in the front line of those fiction writers who best 'express our social upheaval' and who are the 'chroniclers of England today'.⁹⁴ The narrative engages with many of the issues which provoked the twentieth century backlash against the militant celibate spinster and thus allows the reader to make illuminating connections between the culture in which a work is created and the finished product. Placed alongside narratives such as *Delia Blanchflower* this type of anti-spinster novel can be seen as an increasingly common response to the middle-class single woman's greater mobility and provides indirect testimony to the fear which female independence excited. Critical responses to *Regiment of Women* acclaimed the boldness of Clemence Dane's representation of the 'abnormality' of the friendships which spring up between women in single sex institutions. S. P. Mais applauds Dane's attention to 'irregular friendships':

All the characters are drawn with an almost diabolic insight into the human mind. The most important person is a mistress, Clare Hartill, whose one aim in life is to surround herself with useful protégées and make them

⁹¹ 'Notes on the Way', p. 648.

⁹² Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women* (1917) (repr. London: Heinemann, 1966). All future reference to *Regiment of Women* will be taken from the Heinemann edition.

⁹³ Jeanette Foster, *Sex Variant Women in Literature: A Historical and Quantitative Survey* (London: Frederick Muller, 1958), pp. 258, 260.

⁹⁴ George Greenwood, "'This England'" in Contemporary Fiction', *World's Work* 41 (March 1923), 383-8, (p. 384).

submit themselves wholly to her influence, alternately fawning upon them and neglecting them.⁹⁵

Set in a single-sex school with a perverse spinster teacher as central figure *Regiment of Women* responds specifically to the dominant post-war grouping of middle-class spinster teachers. Ruth Adam notes the significance of the spinster teacher in the promotion of feminism:

... probably the most important contribution which the young high-school teacher made to the women's movement was to show the girls a new model woman: herself; a woman with a work-identity instead of only a family one -- for instance as daughter, wife, mother, aunt -- or a class one [...] The schoolmistress of the period gave girls a new concept of themselves, as scholars, potential leaders, or even as athletes, instead of the old limited concept of being a young lady, a well-behaved and affectionate daughter and a future wife or frustrated old maid.⁹⁶

The most prominent of all working spinsters was the teacher. Teachers formed the largest category of professional women, numbering 180,000 in 1911.⁹⁷ Teaching was one of the few professions, other than nursing, in which single women were actually welcomed, as opposed to being merely tolerated, but the marriage bar in teaching meant that women had to resign their posts as teachers at the point of marriage. Ruth Adam observes:

... the spinster's right to an occupation and a livelihood was not to be allowed to extend to women in general, during this anxious time when men's work was becoming steadily scarcer. The Civil Service barred married women; it was impossible to combine being a nurse with being a wife; and women teachers were required to resign by the wedding-day, though in theory each local authority made up its own mind on this issue.⁹⁸

But above all, teaching was regarded as of primary importance because of the progenitorial role of the spinster teacher; Adam notes that spinster teachers 'sowed the seeds of progress in the next generation', could create in the girls they taught a new concept of themselves.⁹⁹ Through teaching, the spinster was no longer consigned to the solitary confinement of non-reproduction. Indeed, teaching could be regarded as a substitute for actual motherhood, according to Michael Apple,

⁹⁵ S. P. Mais, 'Clemence Dane', *Books and Their Writers* (London: Grant Richards, 1920), pp. 67, 69-70.

⁹⁶ Ruth Adam, *A Woman's Place 1910-1975* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), pp. 24-5.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 102.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

'teaching was defined as an extension of the productive and reproductive labour women engaged in at home'.¹⁰⁰ And yet there were also fears that the spinster's outsiderhood would rub off on her pupils.

In *Regiment of Women* Dane explores female singleness, the function of the family, the changing construction of gender and attitudes to sexuality.

The antagonist of the novel, Clare Hartill, whose surname is laboriously significant, works as a senior teacher in the single-sex school of Utterbridge. She wields nearly absolute power over the girls who attend her classes, and works alongside other unencouraging examples of spinsterhood. Clare's assistant at Utterbridge is a fellow teacher, Miss Henrietta Vigers who is:

... spare, precise, with pale, twitching eyes and a high voice. Her manner was self-sufficient, her speech deliberate and unnecessarily correct: her effect was the colourless obstinacy of an elderly mule. (*RW*, 1)

Predictably enough, Clare Hartill is an orphan and was raised by another powerful spinster teacher, although Dane never fully explores this connection. Clare is recklessly cruel and emotionally frigid, such emotions as she does possess are motivated by her desire for control over other women:

Love of some sort was vital to her. Of this her surface personality was dimly, ashamedly aware [...] but the whole of her larger self knew its need, and saw to it that that need was satisfied [...] there must be effort -- constant, straining effort at cultivation of all her alluring qualities, at concealment of all in her that could repulse. (*RW*, 30)

Clare is 'unmaternal to the core' (*RW*, 29) which contrasts with her 'way of taking any one young and attractive under her protection' (*RW*, 8), and points towards some more obscure meaning for her habit of collecting disciples. However, at the outset of the narrative, she is sufficiently dynamic and self-confirming to be above suspicion. She uses 'her personal charms to accomplish her aims' (*RW*, 6) and the power this gives her over other women and girls is progressively rationalised as the outcome of perversion. Concerned only with using women while extracting homage from them, Clare relishes the excesses offered by 'feverish friendships and sudden ruptures' (*RW*, 22). Although a proficient and gifted teacher, the source of her abilities lies in her abnormal nature: 'She did whatever she set out to do so much better, so much more graphically than it had ever been done before, that invariably she attracted disciples' (*RW*, 6). Clare holds other women captive by her dubious

¹⁰⁰ Michael Apple, 'Teaching and "Women's Work": A Comparative Historical and Ideological Analysis' *Teachers College Record* 86. (1984-85), 455-73, (pp. 459-60).

charms and, exemplifying the dangers of female perversity, she threatens the heterosexual affinities of her captives. Clare wants her acolytes to replicate her own views. When Henrietta Vigers crosses her too often she is mercilessly dispatched by Clare, and the narrator describes her retreat into the world beyond Utterbridge:

Henrietta Vigers was forty-seven when she left. She had spent youth and prime at the school, and had nothing more to sell. She had neither certificates nor recommendations behind her. She was hampered by her aggressive gentility. Out of a £50 salary she had scraped together £500. Invested daringly it yielded her £25 a year. She had no friends outside the school [...] Heaven knows what became of her. (*RW*, 209)

Dane takes considerable pains to show the reader why her antagonist is so harmful to other women -- for instance Henrietta Vigers's likely suffering in the world beyond Utterbridge is Clare's fault rather than the fault of a society which makes no provision for unmarried women. Dane also sets the figure of Clare against more truly 'feminine' women, mainly represented by Alwynne Durand, the object of Clare's affections, and her spinster aunt, Elsbeth.

Clare emerges as a truly evil figure when she causes one of her smitten pupils, Louise Denny, to commit suicide. Clare forces Louise to overwork at school in order to please her, and Louise mistakes Clare for a protector who will give her the affection she has lost with the death of her mother. Happiness is an entirely new experience for Louise: she feels it an 'active pleasure' (*RW*, 42):

Louise was encouraged, her shyness swept aside, her ideas developed, her knowledge tested; she was fed too [...] on richer and richer food [...] the freedom of the library and long talks with Clare. (*RW*, 32)

When Louise comes close to having a nervous breakdown, Clare playfully tells her that she does not believe in God thereby crushing, Dane implies, any hope which Louise could have clung to during her impending depression:

Clare knew her power. At a soothing word from her, Louise would have shelved her speculations, or at least have continued them impersonally. Clare could have guaranteed God to her. But Clare had shrugged her shoulders, and Louise had grown white. (*RW*, 95-6.)

The repetition of Clare's unacceptability is the structural purpose of the narrative.

Dane's concern about single-sex education was shared by many. Writing of sex-segregation in education in *The Freewoman* in 1911, Helen Hamilton suggests that the lack of any masculine element in female residential colleges and the girl

student's reasonable desire to emulate her spinster teachers means that such institutions result in 'the artificial manufacture of inevitable spinsters'.¹⁰¹ In an article on the subject of spinsters and art Rebecca West claims that 'there are hundreds and thousands of spinsters all over the country, produced for the most part by the educational system'.¹⁰² In her essay 'A Problem in Education' Dane makes a similar point about spinster teachers and provides an extended account of her objections to spinster teachers in single-sex schools: 'Trained among variations of themselves, they acquire an attitude of indifference, almost of contempt for the other sex: they are, in a word, estranged':

The teachers of the future are sent to school and trained among members of their own sex [...] till they are eighteen. They are given a further training, still mainly segregational, at their training college or university: they are then plumped down in schools to teach -- members of their own sex again! They go on doing it for thirty years unless they marry [...] Now what do, what can these people know of life as a whole? How can they be fitted to prepare other people for adult life when, for practical purposes, they have never experienced it? Their existence [...] is arduous, spartan, but it is also extremely sheltered. They do not know life [...] members of the other sex, are little more than shadows to them [...] We know that these sex-segregated girls of the last generation are the celibate mistresses of to-day.¹⁰³

The implication of such commentary is that active intervention in the education system is required to direct a girl's developing sexuality, for, left in the present system the girl-pupil of today will become the old maid of tomorrow, kept out of the patterning of society, she would find herself placeless and her status undefinable.

It was partly in this spirit that society anxiously scrutinised the educated woman -- would she reproduce as willingly as the average woman? Apparently so, for in a survey of women students conducted for the National Birth Rate Commission in 1914, Dr Agnes Saville and Dr Major Greenwood found that the families of educated women were indeed no smaller than the average -- education could fit women for motherhood.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, many anti-feminist commentators continued to view the surrogacy of the spinster teacher as inimical to womanhood; Charlotte Haldane identifies the spinster as an old enemy of natural motherhood. The prosperity of the

¹⁰¹ Helen Hamilton, 'Spinsters in the Making', *The Freewoman* (14 December 1911), 66-8, (p. 67).

¹⁰² Rebecca West, 'Spinsters and Art', *The Freewoman* (11 July 1912), 147-9, (p. 149).

¹⁰³ Clemence Dane, 'A Problem in Education', *The Women's Side* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1926), 52-76, pp. 67, 72-3.

¹⁰⁴ Jane Lewis, *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984), p. 99.

spinster could lessen incentives to maternity, and Haldane insists that the growing economic and political status of the spinster 'constitutes a definite menace to the future of motherhood'.¹⁰⁵ It is not surprising that some feminist commentators sought to reassure their public that spinster teachers possessed a full sense of maternity. Winifred Hindshaw finds in 1912:

... teachers are largely young and normal individuals, whose maternal tendencies find an outlet among their pupils as a sort of interlude before marriage. Their case does not diminish the fear that 'modern' ideas may make women less motherly. There remain, looming in the background of the professional ranks, those ominous celibate figures in whom individuation [...] seems to have prevailed over reproduction, not temporarily, but for good and all [...] And yet the formula fails to cover the facts. Reproduction in the ordinary sense is absent; the main energies certainly go into intellectual work of some kind; but in barren and blighted soil blooms none the less devotion to children.¹⁰⁶

But *Regiment of Women* with its girl's school setting and endemic singleness is generally antagonistic to single-sex schools and the undisputed command of unmarried female teachers who seek to reproduce themselves in the next generation. The very character of female sexuality, according to Dane, makes single-sex education all the more dangerous, as indeed is any solely female environment:

... with most women the sex feeling is rather indirect and passive [...] their active emotions are more maternal and spiritual than passionate [...] Women can have an intense longing for attention and affection and comradeship without necessarily or consciously wishing to marry. But what opportunity has a woman to mix freely with men and women alike, so as to understand her own outlook on these matters, to test her feelings, to differentiate between her need of friendship and her need of love? Her sole emotional outlet is her fellow-mistresses and pupils.

She concludes that 'men are good for women and women are good for men'.¹⁰⁷

Regiment of Women is full of warnings about single-sex enclaves. Dane is certain that co-educational schools are most beneficial to society:

We can trust the average child to know when it is well off, that if a child grows up mixing freely with the other sex, in some mysterious way that

¹⁰⁵ Haldane, p. 108.

¹⁰⁶ Winifred Hindshaw, 'The Maternal Instinct', *The Freewoman* (23 May 1912), 13-14, (p. 14).

¹⁰⁷ 'A Problem in Education', pp. 73, 76.

sense of being in the right place, that knowledge that it is itself educating and being educated by its opposite number will suffice it.¹⁰⁸

In Underhill Clare's pupils mimic her passions and desires, as they are persuaded to do so by the sweetness of her approval. Clare, however, is not equipped to fill the role of mother in the emotional life of her pupils, she is not true to its selflessness and her surrogacy is incomplete and manipulative:

Clare's love of power had its morbid moments, when a struggling victim, head averted, pleased her. There was never, among the newcomers, a child, self-absorbed, nonchalant or rebellious, who passed a term unmolested by Miss Hartill. Egoism aroused her curiosity, her suspicion of hidden lands, virgin, ripe for exploration [...] She had been a rebel in her own time, and had ever a thrill of sympathy for the mutinies she relentlessly crushed. (*RW*, 30-1)

Clare stalks through the education system, vampirishly draining her own sex's vitality and wooing young virgins into her own deviance. So far is she from truly offering an alternative feminine sexuality that her conquests resemble those of men.

Through the narrative Dane makes the woman-loving spinster seem monstrous and in possession of a dangerously authoritative position in society. Dane writes in 'A Problem in Education':

... the present system of education does not render it impossible for a morbid and sensitive woman to amuse herself and gratify her love of excitement by playing on this tendency to exaggerated hero-worship in the children and mistresses under her care. Such women do exist [...] [they are] vampire women.¹⁰⁹

In *Regiment of Women* Clare Hartill appears to be a representation of such 'vampire women'; her abundant but frozen and misdirected sexuality making her grotesque. She is a conglomerate of insatiable erotic demands. Richard Dyer notes the presence of a tradition of lesbian vampires in literature and finds descriptions of Clare Hartill in *Regiment of Women* couched in imagery drawn from vampirism:

Even where the language of the writing does not so explicitly evoke vampirism, the nature of the relationships in the [novel] is always one in which a stronger woman dominates [...] a weaker [...] woman. [This is part] of a shift in the social definition of intense relationships between women [...] The notion of 'lesbianism', seen as a sickness, was used to

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

discredit both romantic friendships between women and the growth of women's political and educational independence. Thus there is a fit between the general associations of the vampire tale and the way in which friendships between women were being pathologised in the period.¹¹⁰

Clare Hartill lives on her victim's youth and vitality which sustains her own tarnished, discontented being. She rapidly wears her victims out and must continually search for fresh prey.

Having established Clare's morbidity through an account of her teaching, Dane depicts Clare's relationship with young fellow schoolteacher Alwynne as unnatural. Clare is determined to possess Alwynne and continually out-manoeuvres adversaries until Alwynne's male lover becomes a serious challenger. Until that point, Alwynne is Clare's 'property':

[Clare] had grown very fond of Alwynne; but the sentiment was proprietary; she could derive no pleasure from her that was not personal, and, in its most literal sense, selfish. She was unmaternal to the core. She could not see her human property admired by others (*RW*, 28-9)

Clare's love is too egotistical and proprietorial to take second place, even temporarily, to any man or woman and so her relationship with Alwynne becomes increasingly fraught; the unorthodox nature of passionate same-sex relations seems to result only in unhappiness. Like Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians*, Alwynne is open to immediate occupancy. The figures of self-reproducing spinster and impressionable girl are locked together in the embrace of feminism, and the agency of the hero is required to pluck the younger woman from an 'unnatural' union, in order to more correctly place the submissive femininity which the girl displays in a suitable heterosexual pairing. Alwynne is utterly vulnerable to Clare's flirtations and provides her with the devoted affection which she would display in a heterosexual partnership. The emotional subordination of such girl heroines to their spinster feminist mentors can be located in anti-feminist fears about the expansionist aims of feminist discourse; fears that it will drag passive femininity into a vortex of rebellion. Alwynne innocently reiterates Clare's criticisms of men and whenever she talks to anyone 'all conversational roads led to the suffrage question'. And yet she remains integrally pure and feminine: 'She was as innocent of knowledge of her own charm as unwedded Eve; [...] her impulse to Clare was [...] of the freshest, sweetest hero-worship [...] and Clare opened her hungry heart to her' (*RW*, 29).

¹¹⁰ Richard Dyer, 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism', *Sweet Dreams. Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), pp. 47-72, (pp. 52-3).

Alwynne, preyed upon by Clare's desire, becomes thin and wan as her vitality is drained from her. Her faithfulness to Clare and the attempt to place her femininity in a false cultural matrix, one in which she is committed to a female friend, is represented as an aberration of her real nature. Alwynne, however, remains blameless, as her false union with Clare springs from a feminine desire to please others and take pleasure in pleasing.

As an agent of lesbianism, Clare is exploitative, manipulating other women's naivety and interfering with the natural passage of their womanhood. Clare's demands distort Alwynne's womanhood, which, given the opportunity to express itself, proves to be best fulfilled by a solicitous man.

The passion between Clare and Alwynne is never depicted as physically sexual, but there does seem to be a profoundly erotic attraction between them. Clare is initially attracted by Alwynne's 'obvious shyness and desire to please' (*RW*, 7) while Alwynne flushes beautifully beneath Clare's stare and insolent smile. They court each other for some time, have tiffs and reconciliations, go on holidays together and plan a life together. When Roger Lumsden, the hero, eventually kisses Alwynne, she compares the wholesome feel of his lips favourably to Clare's stern kisses.

Ultimately, Alwynne's commitment to female friendship proves to be no more than a sporadic rebellion, which can be attributed to her youthfulness, and she soon becomes exhausted by the squabbling of the female community at Underhill. She is sent by her aunt Elsbeth to the countryside and to Roger Lumsden's home, Dene. In effect, Elsbeth sends Alwynne on a healing journey to heterosexuality and the happy complementarity of marriage. S. P. Mais finds the attraction between Alwynne and Roger to be unquestionably superior to Alwynne's relationship with Clare: 'We know that the call of Nature will be more insistent than the barren unnatural cry of the lacerated selfish ell-woman'.¹¹¹ The character of Alwynne is appropriately framed by heterosexual love and it is through the figure of Roger Lumsden that she is rescued from the stuffy confines of the single-sex school. Alwynne confesses to Roger that she is tired of Utterbridge:

'It's just the atmosphere, and the awful crowding. Such a lot of women at close quarters, all enthusiasm and fussing and importance. They're all hard-working, and all unselfish and keen [...] they're dears when you get them alone, but somehow, all together, they stifle you. And they all have high voices, that squeak when they're keenest.' (*RW*, 295)

¹¹¹ 'Clemence Dane', p. 72.

Conveniently enough, next to Dene nestles Dene Compton, a co-educational school, and Alwynne responds delightedly to the plain and sensible atmosphere of Dene Compton, where none of the teachers receives the unhealthy adulation of a pupil:

... the great school fascinated her. It was scarce a third larger than her own [...] but the perfection of its proportions made it impressive. The arrangements for the children's physical well-being reflected the methods employed for their spiritual development. There was an insistence on sunlight and fresh air and space [...] body and mind alike were given room in which to turn, to stretch themselves, to grow. (*RW*, 220)

Dane explicitly binds together the healthiness of the mixed sex school with the healthiness of heterosexual union. Dane's point in *Regiment of Women* seems to be that worries about spinster teachers, although justifiable, will, in most cases, be defeated by a biological preference for the male which no amount of teaching will eradicate. The reader is directed towards recognising the validity of heterosexual union, which functions within the wider self-renewal of nature. Roger is a market-gardener with an inordinate interest in sprouting bulbs. Dane piles on natural imagery -- Alwynne communes with tulips as Roger masterfully steals a first kiss. Alwynne herself is blonde haired, wears a green gown, is rarely seen without a bunch of flowers, and is nicknamed 'Daffodil' or 'Daffy' by her pupils at Utterbridge. Roger understands Alwynne better than anyone else; his masculinity is the appropriate correlative of her femininity. His masculine directness is opposed to Clare's serpentine female subtleties:

He detected a hysterical tendency in the emulations and enthusiasms [...] The gardener in him revolted at the thought of such congestion of minds and bodies [...] The friend [...] [Alwynne] so consciously mentioned, repelled him [...] He was horrified at the idea of such a woman, such a type of woman in undisputed authority, moulding the mothers of the next generation [...] but he supposed she was but one of many. (*RW*, 248-9)

Roger is able to defeat Clare's malign influence. Alwynne marries her benign suitor and escapes the tyranny of feminist institutions. Alwynne's joy, like that of Verena Tarrant, is only marred by the fact that she can find no entry into her expected life without renouncing Clare. Clare knows she stands no chance against marriage: 'She recognized dully that even sharing her was out of her power. What had she to do with a husband, and housewifery, and the bearing of children? Alwynne married was Alwynne dead' (*RW*, 344).

Lillian Faderman speculates about the possibility of Clemence Dane's lesbianism when she mentions in *Surpassing the Love of Men* that P. Julien and J.

Phillips link Dane with Violet Trefusis, the lover of Vita Sackville West. Violet Trefusis was apparently close friends with Dane in the early nineteen-twenties and used her to make Vita jealous. Faderman suggests that the figure of Clare in *Regiment of Women* can be seen as an interesting and painful commentary on the amount of self-loathing induced in some lesbian women.¹¹²

However, whatever her sexuality, Dane was certainly a single woman and, despite the conservatism of her views on marriage and the essential conformism of her fiction, was a non-participant in marital union, even if only as one who missed marriage. Perhaps the coercive drive of her narrative represents a route out of unresolved feelings. Her narrative stance does seem to be slanted by too insistent an aversion to the unorthodox.

Although Dane's narrative is deliberately selective in its choice of material, ambiguities do surface. Even though Clare Hartill is largely to blame for Louise Denny's suicide, the narrative darkly portrays the Denny family. Louise's father is brutal and repels his daughter; their arguments are openly hostile, although they do not understand each other: 'There was a world of uncomprehending contempt in the eyes of father and child alike, though the father's were amused, where the child's were bitter' (*RW*, 137). The marriage of Louise's parents was unhappy:

He had imagined himself in love with his first wife, had married her, piqued by her elusive ways [...] and she, shy and unawakened, had taken his six feet of bone and muscle for outward and visible sign of the matured physical strength her nature needed. (*RW*, 42)

It takes no longer than their honeymoon for each to realise with conviction that they are unsuited; he feels 'burdened [...] with a phantast', while she feels 'tied to a philistine':

For a year they shared bed and board, severed and inseparable as earth and moon; then the wife, having passed on to a daughter the heritage of a nature rare and impracticable as a sensitive plant, died and was forgotten. (*RW*, 42)

This scene seems to undermine Dane's argument in 'A Problem in Education' that 'family life is [a form of] co-education'.¹¹³ The family's supremacy may remain intact in Dane's vision of culture yet her seemingly unwilling indictment of the Denny family renders her text unstable.

¹¹² Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), p. 471.

¹¹³ 'A Problem in Education', p. 72.

In relation to the social climate of 1917, Clare is successful as an independent, breadwinning woman, and has the audacity, towards the end of the narrative, to argue with Elsbeth Loveday, Alwynne's maiden aunt and Clare's old adversary, that marriage is not necessary to Alwynne. Clare insists that Alwynne can take delight in a fulfilling singleness as she may spend her life with another woman and enjoy a career:

'She doesn't want a husband. She doesn't want a home. She doesn't want children. She wants me -- and all I stand for. She wants to use her talents [...] She wants success -- she shall have it -- through me. She wants friendship -- can't I give it? Affection? Haven't I given it? What more can she want? A home? I'm well off. A brat to play with? Let her adopt one, and I'll house it. I'll give her anything she wants. What more can your man offer [...] I tell you, we suffice each other. Thank God, there are some women who can do without marriage -- marriage -- marriage!' (*RW*, 338)

Clare's point is that female independence can fulfil women in each and every aspect of their lives as adequately as heterosexual union; women need no longer be dependent on the charity or otherwise of patriarchal culture. Economic independence has brought to Clare the power of refusal. Women, she insists, may occupy other lives, female friendship need not be just an alibi for years spent waiting for marriage, and the ferocity of Dane's construction of the figure of Clare is perhaps an indication of the very real threat which Clare's values pose to Dane.

Elsbeth's response to Clare's argument prioritises heterosexual union, and is the bedrock of the morality of the novel:

... 'feminine friendship is all very well [...] but when it is a question of Marriage [...] How can you weigh the most intimate, the most ideal friendship against the chance of getting married [...] when her youth is over, what is the average single woman? A derelict. [...] We both know that an unmated woman -- she's a failure [...] Don't you realize your [...] responsibility? [...] When you allow [Alwynne] [...] to attach herself passionately to you, you are feeding, and [...] deflecting from its natural channel, the strongest impulse of her life [...] Shall she never break away? Shall she [...] spend her whole youth in sustaining [...] old maids [...] We must give her what we've missed ourselves.' (*RW*, 334-6)

Female friendship then can never win the contest with old heterosexual values and Clare's selfish inability to honour heterosexuality is a sign of her disturbed state. Marriage is presented as woman's highest freedom. As Elsbeth claims:

'Do you think I don't know your effect on the children at school? Oh, you are a good teacher! You force them successfully; but all the while you eat up their souls [...] I tell you, it's vampirism. And now you are to take Alwynne. And when she is squeezed dry and flung aside, who will the next victim be? And the next, and the next? You grow greedier as you grow older, I suppose. One day you'll be old. What will you do when your glamour's gone? I tell you, Clare Hartill, you'll die of hunger in the end.'
(*RW*, 337)

The figure of Elsbeth represents the mode of spinsterhood which the narrative can support; she is submissive, firmly heterosexual and a staunch supporter of marriage. Elsbeth's is a 'suppressed and self-effacing personality' (*RW*, 24) and she has invested all her love in Alwynne. Elsbeth is taken for granted by Alwynne at the start of the narrative, although she was the 'pole-star' of Alwynne's world (*RW*, 25) until the advent of the fascinating Clare. However Elsbeth is grateful for the limited affection which Alwynne bestows upon her as she knows she is not clever enough to be interesting to others: 'She had been too much occupied, all her life, in smoothing the way for other people, to have had leisure for her own cultivation, physical or mental' (*RW*, 24).

In as much as the narrative can tolerate spinsterhood, Elsbeth is presented positively, though Dane implicitly asserts that she feels even her benevolent spinsterhood as a type of failure given that she has never managed to enjoy true fulfilment through marriage and maternity; 'the delight of actual motherhood was denied Elsbeth' (*RW*, 58). Elsbeth had been in love with Roger Lumsden's father, and was even self-effacing enough to preside as a bridesmaid at his marriage, although she did successfully avoid him for years afterwards. Having nursed her father for over ten years, as her mother was an invalid, she was over thirty when her mother died and thus too old to marry, even if she had possessed the self-esteem necessary to promote her own interests. The bleakness and peculiarity of single life can never give full scope for women's natures, Dane suggests, and Elsbeth's life is narrowed not only by her complicity with the cultural placement of singleness, but by single life itself. Elsbeth's spinsterhood is, therefore, complicit with a sense of her own failure, and she has passed on her collusion with passive heterosexuality to her niece. Dane's point seems to be that although singleness carries with it natural disabilities, if it is penitent and gentle, it may be a responsible spinsterhood, rearing other women to benefit the patriarchy. And so the one tradition of marriage is handed down from woman to woman, as suffragette feminist Cicely Hamiton describes it, 'marriage as inevitable as lessons and far more inevitable than death'.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *Marriage as a Trade*, p. 31.

What *Regiment of Women* articulates in terms of belief is that womanly happiness can only be reached through heterosexual union. Such an outcome is the inevitable culmination of Dane's commitment to the legitimacy of marriage.

The new pre-war ideology was, perhaps, in many ways a falsifying ideology of womanhood, as headless as the domestic angel, and again as complicit in consecrating women's sexual relativity. The myth of the political docility of women had been exploded in the pre-war years but as the feminist critique of sex became frozen in the paralysing correlation of feminism with equality in partnership, this cul-de-sac left no room for other relationships, and marriage remained the normal expectation for women, and continued to confer a higher status than spinsterhood -- as Martha Vicinus writes: 'Unmarried women [...] had lost the richly nurturing women's subculture of the past without gaining access to an aggressively married and heterosexual world'.¹¹⁵

As middle-class spinsterhood lost much of its political force and identity, singleness had no feminist aspect of voluntarism to it and certainly has no political force in terms of sexual politics. Dora Russell's concept of spinsterhood is characterised by frustration, although she does admit some notion of the spinster's political status in her analysis. In the mid-twenties Russell describes the nineteenth-century revolt of the single woman as frenzied and ascetic: 'it seemed to express the anger of the spinster thwarted and despised in the current scheme of values'. Chaste and cold by necessity the spinster fought in an atmosphere of:

Swoons and ringlets, won for us schools and colleges, free limbs, health and the open air; unlocked for us the classics, science, medicine, the history of our world; drew us from our paltry, ladylike accomplishments; wrote upon our schoolbooks: 'Knowledge is no more than a fountain scaled', and flung wide the gate into the world. They, these pioneers, childless, unwed, created and bore thousands of women, made them anew, body and soul [...] Just like the new learning of the Renaissance to men's minds in Europe was the opening of high school and university to the feminine mind of today.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Vicinus, p. 299.

¹¹⁶ Dora Russell, *Hypatia or Woman and Knowledge* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1925), pp. 16, 17.

CHAPTER SIX

'Miss M.' comes out: Self-identity and Maternity in the Fiction of Radclyffe Hall and May Sinclair

In the latter part of the nineteenth-century, as women gained access to higher education and the professions, they frequently did so through the support of all-female groups and institutions, forming close relationships with each other which were intense and committed. The struggle for autonomy often involved making an effort to remain single and separate from the family sphere, and many single women found emotional sustenance through long-term female friendships.

Frances Power Cobbe promoted such relationships between single women:

Nor does the 'old maid' contemplate a solitary age as the bachelor must usually do. It will go hard but she will find a *woman* ready to share it [...] She thinks to *die*, if without having given or shared some of the highest joys of human nature, yet at least without having caused one fellow-being to regret she was born to tempt to sin and shame. We ask it in all solemn sadness -- Do the *men* who resolve on an unmarried life, fixedly purpose to die with as spotless a conscience?¹

What Carol Smith-Rosenberg designates as 'romantic friendship' provided an alternative emotional non-familial framework for women; 'romantic friendship', according to Smith-Rosenberg, is the nineteenth-century form of a 'long-lived, loving relationship between women'.² Smith-Rosenberg analyses such friendship not in terms of any possible sexual contact between romantically involved women, but places such relationships in appropriate cultural and social settings which avoid the need to define 'romantic friendship' according to homosexual or heterosexual forms of behaviour:

The twentieth-century tendency to view human love and sexuality within a dichotomized universe of deviance and normality, genitality and platonic love, is alien to the emotions and attitudes of the nineteenth

¹ Frances Power Cobbe, 'Celibacy vs. Marriage', *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863), pp. 52-3.

² Carol Smith Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America', *Signs*, 1, 1, 1-28, (p. 1).

century and fundamentally distorts the nature of these women's emotional interaction.³

Romantic friendship, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains, 'represented one very real behavioral and emotional option socially available to nineteenth century women'.⁴ Without sexual contact between the participants such relationships offered a semi-legitimate alternative to heterosexual marriage. For instance, actress Charlotte Cushman enjoyed with Matilda Hays what Elizabeth Barrett Browning called a 'female marriage'.⁵ Abundant evidence exists in nineteenth century letters and diaries that women routinely formed long-lived emotional links with other women.

The relationship between Charlotte Brontë and Ellen Nussey began in adolescence, developing into passionate affection in their twenties, maturing into deeply supportive love, charted in their correspondence from 1831 to 1855. Charlotte writes affectionately to Ellen in 1836:

Ellen I wish I could live with you always. I begin to cling to you more fondly than ever I did. If we had but a cottage and a competency of our own, I do think we might live and love on till Death without being dependent on any third person for happiness.⁶

Esther Newton points out that such relationships: 'Could not be conceived as sexual within the terms of nineteenth century discourse. Insofar as first generation feminists were called sexual deviants, it was because they used their minds at the expense of their reproductive organs'.⁷

Victorian society was largely characterised by strict gender-role differentiation throughout culture, resulting in the development of single-sex and homosocial groupings. Such groupings and the proximity of women to women was felt by some commentators to encourage sexual intimacy. Havelock Ellis writes in *Sexual Inversion* (1908):

It has been stated by many observers that homosexuality is increasing amongst women. It seems probable that this is true. There are many

³ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8. Smith-Rosenberg also claims that eighteenth-century women had access the option of romantic friendship.

⁵ Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1976), p. 654, note no. 130.

⁶ quoted in Elaine Miller, 'Through all changes and through all chances: The relationship of Ellen Nussey and Charlotte Brontë', in *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840-1985*, edited by the Lesbian History Group, (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 29-54, (p.36).

⁷ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', in *The Lesbian Issue*, edited by Lilian Faderman et al, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 7-26, (p. 12).

influences today which encourage such manifestations [...] Marriage is decaying, and, while men are allowed freedom, the sexual field of women is restricted to trivial flirtation with the opposite sex and intimacy with their own sex [...] I do not say that these unquestionable influences of modern movements can directly cause sexual inversion [...] but they develop the germs of it, and they probably cause a spurious imitation. This spurious imitation is due to the fact that congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in women of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily, influence others.⁸

Although Ellis regarded inversion largely as congenital, it is apparent in the above passage that nineteenth-century feminists were perceived as blurring the distinctions between the sexes. Much sexological literature, of which Ellis is representative, directly responded to the changing position of women.

In the eighteenth and throughout most of the nineteenth century, relations between women were not clearly demarcated as sexual or non-sexual, lesbian or heterosexual. So the sexological 'discovery' of the female invert in the late nineteenth century is crucial. Lesbianism was named and given the beginnings of an identity through the categorisations of the sexologists. Homosexual identity as a whole was a product of this social categorisation, the eventual effect of which was not necessarily liberating. As Jeffrey Weeks formulates it, 'to name was to imprison'.⁹ In Foucauldian terms to organise a new area of knowledge is also to create a new set of power relations and power resides with those who define: those who examine others' sexuality.

Havelock Ellis records in *Sexual Inversion* the case of 'Miss M', aged twenty-nine. 'Miss M', he says, 'can see nothing wrong in her feelings; and, until a year ago, when she came across the translation of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892), she had no idea "that such feelings like mine were 'under the ban of society' as he puts it, or were considered unnatural and depraved"'.¹⁰ Lesbianism could previously have merged relatively easily into general patterns of female-female relationships which largely presented themselves as ties bred by the common experience of womanhood.

Undoubtedly, sexology did enable some single feminist women to name their sexuality as lesbian. When a spinster suffragette who had been practising militant celibacy wrote to Edward Carpenter in 1915, she expressed gratitude for the sense of self-definition which his treatise, *The Intermediate Sex*, had provided:

⁸ Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1908), p. 148.

⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 92-93.

¹⁰ Ellis, p. 137.

I have recently read with much interest your book entitled *The Intermediate Sex* & it has lately dawned on me that I myself belong to that class & I write to ask if there is any way of getting in touch with others of the same temperament.¹¹

However, not all responses to the formulation of an identity designated lesbian were as happy. Gillian Whitlock recounts a conversation about *The Well Of Loneliness* between Leonard Woolf and his mother: about which she commented:

'It is a dreadful pity I think that such a book should have been published. I do not mean for ordinary reasons. What I mean is that there are many unmarried women living alone. And now it is very hard on them that such a book has been written'.¹²

Unlike male homosexuality, lesbianism was never the object of legal persecution. Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* frankly discussed male homosexuality and Edward Carpenter wrote to Ellis gleefully anticipating the publication of *Sexual Inversion* in England: 'it will make a sensation when that comes out in England there will be a silence in heaven for half an hour'.¹³ The first major change in English law concerning homosexuality came when Parliament moved to eliminate the sale of children for prostitution. Legislation was rushed through Parliament in the wake of the exposé of child prostitution by W. T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead's 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', appeared as a five-day series from 6 July 1885 and before the series concluded, Parliament had passed a series of laws which raised the age of consent to sixteen and gave police the right to search suspected premises and to suppress brothels.

The M. P. Henry Labouchère, emphasised the need to protect male children as well as female. He introduced an additional clause as an amendment which prohibited public or private acts 'of gross indecency' between males. An additional effect of the amendment was that sexual acts between females went unrecognised: the very existence of lesbianism was unacknowledged.¹⁴ Blanche Cook suggests that beneath the spinster exists the silenced lesbian and goes on to ask: 'How many

¹¹ quoted in Ruth Claus, 'Confronting Homosexuality: A Letter from Frances Wilder', *Signs*, 2, 1 (1977), 928-33, (p. 930).

¹² Gillian Whitlock, 'Everything is Out of Place': Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Literary Tradition', *Feminist Studies*, 13, 3 (1987), 554-582, (p. 559).

¹³ quoted in Vincent Brome, *Havelock Ellis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 95.

¹⁴ Ironically, the most publicised victim of the new act was not the child procurer at whom it was theoretically directed, but the writer Oscar Wilde.

women-loving women subsisted in that lonely interface called "spinsterhood", limited to the role of Victorian aunt, doomed to family service?¹⁵

It was not until 1921 that a concerted attempt was made to include lesbianism in a Criminal Amendment Bill, in a clause making 'acts of gross indecency between female persons' liable to the same penalties as those for males. However, the clause was deleted by the House Of Lords. The leader of the opposition to the anti-lesbianism amendment was the Earl of Malmesbury, who argued that the defeat of the Bill was essential as women differed from men:

Women are by nature much more gregarious. For instance, if twenty women were going to live in a house with twenty bedrooms, I do not believe all twenty bedrooms would be occupied, either by reasons of fear or nervousness and the desire of mutual protection. On the other hand, I know that when men take shooting boxes the first enquiry is that each shall have a room to himself, if possible.¹⁶

Few questioned the propriety of intense relationships between women and patterns of behaviour between lesbians could resemble patterns of relationships between heterosexual women, differing radically from the sexual patterns which characterised the relationships of both heterosexual and homosexual males. Nor did lesbianism have the same cultural visibility as male homosexuality -- for instance in 1901 Krafft-Ebing noted there were only fifty known case histories of lesbianism.

Sexual appetite was considered marginal to female motivation. In keeping with this belief George Gissing, writing in December 1898 to Gabrielle Fleury, stressed the wrongness of thinking 'women cannot live alone. Why, most women, before their marriage are passionless'. Whereas men are tortured by what Gissing euphemistically calls 'loneliness'.¹⁷ Gissing shares his sentiments with sexologist Krafft-Ebing who claims in *Psychopathia Sexualis*: 'Woman is wooed for her favour. She remains passive. This lies in her sexual organisation and is not founded merely on the dictates of good breeding'.¹⁸

¹⁵ Blanche Cook, "Women Alone Stir My Imagination": Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition', *Signs*, 4, 4 (1979), 718-739, (p. 720).

¹⁶ Hansard, *House of Lords Debates* 46, (15 August, 1921), cols. 566-577. The Bill was also opposed by Lord Desart, who founded his arguments against the Bill on the premise that most women would be ignorant of lesbianism and would thus be horrified by the implications of the clause.

¹⁷ *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, edited by Pierre Coustillas (New York: The New York Public Library, 1964), p. 164.

¹⁸ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, translated by C. G. Chaddock (Philadelphia and London: F. A. Davis, 1892), p. 13.

In 1903 Havelock Ellis, however, recognised that the notion of women's sexual 'anaesthesia', as he called it, was a nineteenth-century creation.¹⁹ Ellis took his information about passionlessness from the generation immediately preceding his own but he was eventually to link a lack of sexual passion in women to their social repression.

In the nineteenth-twenties and thirties feminist liberation was increasingly linked to the sexual rights of women. Spinsterhood shifted from being considered a political choice to a sexual choice and spinsters were increasingly deemed either lesbian or sexually unfulfilled, with both interpretations involving some notion of deviancy. The new classification of the late nineteenth-century feminist practice of militant celibacy as a screen for lesbianism meant that the feminist appeal of celibacy and singleness began to be represented as symptomatic of lesbianism. If most feminist spinsters could be judged to be lesbian, then this created a possible division not only between lesbians and heterosexual women, but also between feminism and heterosexual women. Aspirations to male privilege could be viewed as symptoms of lesbianism, and although lesbian attachment could further intensify animosity between the sexes, if lesbianism proved to be congenital, then antagonism could be viewed as the result of biological and sexual competition, rather than the result of cultural construction.

The nineteenth-century idea of female passionlessness had been used by some women as a means of asserting control in the sexual arena even if that meant denying sexual motivation. The single woman could use her alleged prudery or asexuality to play down her sexual characterisation which was so often the cause of her exclusion from significant vocational and social areas of life. And lack of sexual motivation had been already been used to signal women's moral superiority, thus enabling women to participate in and even lead many nineteenth-century reform initiatives, such as those against the Contagious Diseases Acts. If women accepted the idea of their sexual 'anaesthesia', this provided increased solidarity between them and enabled them to view female-female relationships as distinguished by a nobler character than male-female relationships. The American Sarah Grimké wrote that 'sexual passion in man is ten times stronger than in women' and that women were thus innately superior to men.²⁰ Feminist opposition to 'sexual anaesthesia' only occurred when the medical establishment shifted approaches to the concept from the moral to the physical.

¹⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1913), volume 3, pp. 193-194.

²⁰ quoted in R. G. Walters, 'The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism', *American Quarterly*, 25 (1973), 177-201, (p. 196).

In 1868 American feminist Susan Anthony described her feelings towards Anna Dickinson as 'mother yearnings' and later as 'motherly love' and 'elderly sister's love'; the familial guise of her feelings apparently freed them from implications of sensuality. Anthony found in the women's movement the daughters she was unable to have as a single woman. And this fitted prevailing characterisations of female sexuality in terms of 'maternal instinct'. At the same time Anthony urged Dickinson 'not to *marry a man*' but instead to speak at an Equal Rights Anniversary meeting.²¹

In the past it had been only in cases where female-female relationships were publically revealed as preferred to male-female relationships, in defiance of female life expectations, that social responses to romantic friendships became hostile. Hence, the fury of the families of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby when they eloped together in 1778 to a cottage in North Wales. Havelock Ellis reported the case of a young Massachusetts woman who committed suicide in 1901 when her family opposed her loving friendship with an older married woman.²² The emotional and physical centrality of women in each others' lives in both these cases had defeated their expected heterosexual roles.

Occasional references to lesbian relationships tend to survive only incidentally as when Bertrand Russell encountered his wife Alys's cousin, Helen Carey Thomas, who was President of Bryn Mawr College, in 1896. Russell recounts how Carey Thomas felt contempt for men and he hints at her homosexuality:

She lived with a friend, Miss Gwinn, who was in most respects the opposite of her, Miss Gwinn had very little will power, was soft and lazy, but had a genuine though narrow feeling for literature [...] At the time we stayed with them, their friendship had become a little ragged. Miss Gwinn used to go home to her family for three days in every fortnight and at the exact moment of her departure each fortnight another lady [...] Miss Garrett would arrive to depart again at the exact moment of Miss Gwinn's return. Miss Gwinn, had meantime fallen in love with a brilliant young man [...] This aroused Carey to a fury and every night as we were going to bed, we used to hear her angry voice scolding Miss Gwinn in the next room for hours together.²³

²¹ Katz, p. 449.

²² *ibid.*, p. 65.

²³ Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967), volume 1, pp. 205-207.

In the late nineteenth-century women on both sides of the Atlantic sought the franchise and participated in reformist schemes. Opponents of reform frequently attacked reformers for violating gender codes; anti-feminist physicians argued that sharp sex distinctions were biologically founded and if violated, could damage female reproductive capacities.²⁴

One of the most obvious ways in which sex roles were defined was through dress. Throughout most of the nineteenth century minimal differences in the anatomy of men and women were exaggerated. In her autobiography Frances Power Cobbe recalls a large iron staple from which dangled a hand-swing on the bedroom ceiling of her childhood home in Ireland. When she asked what it was for she was told that her great aunts used to hang by their arms from it while their maids laced their stays.²⁵

However, if dress was symbolic, it was also restrictive. Eliza Lynn Linton found the crinoline ridiculous, and suggested that it made women look like huge bells, with their feet as twin clappers.²⁶ Margaret Oliphant complained in *Dress* (1878) that female fashion appeared designed to restrict movement altogether:

... it is painfully bound in across the body like the swaddling clothes which are so pernicious to infants [...] and the bondage of this dress at times reaches, or is said to reach, the extravagance of preventing movement altogether, so that a lady in full dress can hardly walk, can with difficulty get up stairs, and cannot by any possibility sit down.²⁷

The Rational Dress Society argued that women should abjure the tightly-laced corset, discard the narrow shoe and slip out of the dress that weighed fifteen pounds. As women gained access to greater social opportunities and wider employment options, so ideas of suitable attire altered; seriousness of purpose was best displayed through sensible, comfortable dress.

The late nineteenth century was an time of argument about female sexuality, physiology, health, dress and exercise and from these debates, sexological medical opinion emerged as an authoritative discourse. The sexological pioneers' preoccupation with the scientific study of sexuality, led to the

²⁴ For further information see D. F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 387.

²⁵ Frances Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1894), p. 16.

²⁶ Eliza Lynn Linton, *Ourselves. A Series of Essays on Women* (London: G. Routledge, 1870), p. 13.

²⁷ Margaret Oliphant, *Dress* (London: Macmillan, 1878) in Margaret Oliphant et al, *Art in the House and House Decoration, Dress and Music in the House* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1978), p. 70.

new discourse of 'sexology'. The study and popularisation of sexology challenges the notion that the nineteenth century was a uniquely sexually repressive period. Victorian 'prudery' seems to be manifest in its severe penalisation of prostitutes and birth-controllers and in a Victorian fondness for euphemism and ornate delicacy. For example, Theresa Billington-Grieg recalled her mother feverishly sandpapering down the curve of Cupid's bottom on her favourite set of china.²⁸ However, the refusal to allow sexuality to curve forth from the china, or to discuss sexuality openly, places it at the heart of discourse in the nineteenth century. There is much here to support Foucault's contention that the elaborate strategies which surround any discussion of sexuality in the nineteenth century mark sex as the 'secret' of nineteenth century social discourse.²⁹ But somewhat ironically, the new sexology was eventually, if inadvertently, to support the pathologising of aberrant sexual practices.

Much social discourse revolves around the issue of sex from the eighteenth century onwards. Sexuality pervades social consciousness from the debates over Malthusianism onwards and is central to theories of population and birth control.³⁰ One need only recall the Besant and Bradlaugh trial,³¹ divorce reform typified by the Caroline Norton campaign,³² the furore surrounding the Contagious Diseases Acts,³³ public dismay over child prostitution, 'fallen' women, or the existence of homosexual brothels such as that in the Cleveland Street scandal³⁴ and the eugenics movement's concern with race improvement and judicious breeding.

The Victorians, then, perpetually debated appropriate sexual values in a period of rapid social, economic and political change. Sexuality may not always have been directly discussed, but it informed a series of debates. In *History of Sexuality* Foucault asserts that sexuality was central to the workings of power in

²⁸ Theresa Billington-Grieg, *The non-violent militant. Selected Writings of Theresa Billington-Grieg* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

²⁹ Michel Foucault, 'An Introduction', *The History of Sexuality*, translated by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), volume 1, p. 69.

³⁰ Thomas Malthus, a Church of England clergyman, anonymously published his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. Peter Fryer points out that the connections made between Malthus and the birth control movement can be misleading in *The Birth Controllers* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 70.

³¹ Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh risked arrest and trial in order to have the case for birth control placed on official and public records.

³² Caroline Norton's struggle to limit the legal control of husbands over wives resulted in the Infant Custody Act of 1839.

³³ The Campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts led by Josephine Butler was active from 1869. Campaigners agitated against the state regulation of prostitution, which involved the compulsory examination of prostitutes in garrison ports and towns, thus placing responsibility with the prostitute rather than her male client. The Acts were finally repealed in 1886.

³⁴ The Cleveland Street scandal involved the exposure of a homosexual brothel, which was in existence from 1889 to 1890 and the scandal was reported to have implicated a member of the Royal family.

the nineteenth century, as the focus of a twofold investigation of the poor: a preoccupation with population control; and the furtherance of a new science of control over physical life. Both appear linked to sexology: sex 'was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species'.³⁵

The growth in sexological discussion of the methods and procedures for classifying sexuality delineated sexual unorthodoxy. Karl Ulrichs, one of the earliest writers on sexuality, using the pseudonym Namu Namantius, published a dozen volumes on sexuality between 1865 and 1875. Ulrichs did not reveal his identity until 1868. He argued that a sexual desire for other men, which he experienced himself, was not 'abnormal' but inborn.

Ulrichs used contemporary studies in embryology as a basis for his theories.³⁶ The sexual organs were not differentiated in the early stages of the human embryo, Ulrichs suggested, at which point a three-fold division into male, female and 'urning-urningen' was possible. The latter group would have the physical features of one sex and the sexual instincts of the other. This resulted in the 'inversion' of sexual desires. Ulrichs explanation of the 'third sex' was to be widely popular in both nineteenth and twentieth century sexological literature.

The medical model of homosexuality was formed mainly in the later nineteenth century. The first physician to attempt to place an analysis of homosexuality on a clearly scientific basis was Carl Westphal. In 1869 he published the case history of a female homosexual, the description of which was to typify later analyses of female homosexuals. It emphasised her preference for characteristically 'male' pursuits.

The most influential of the early researchers was Richard von Krafft-Ebing with his treatise *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). His work gathered together several nineteenth century theories of sexual perversion. Sexual perversion was caused by faults in the nervous system combined with hereditary defects; 'degenerescence' affected the nervous system. Foucault notes that the analysis of heredity placed sex 'in a position of "biological responsibility" with regard to the species' and that theories of degeneracy explained how an inheritance of various maladies resulted in the sexual pervert; 'Look into the genealogy of an exhibitionist or a homosexual: you will find a hemiplegic ancestor, a phthisic parent, or an uncle afflicted with senile dementia'.³⁷

³⁵ Foucault, p. 146.

³⁶ For further information see Hubert C. Kennedy, 'The "Third Sex" Theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs', in *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality*, edited by Robert Petersen and J. Licata Salvatore (New York: The Haworth Press, 1981), 103-11.

³⁷ Foucault, p. 118.

In *Psychopathia Sexualis* Krafft-Ebing offered a pioneering catalogue of perversities: urologia, fetishism, zoophilia, frottage, coprolagnia, and nymphomania. Krafft-Ebing allowed himself a wide field for perversity, characterising as perverse every expression of sexual instinct which 'does not correspond with the purpose of nature, i.e. propagation'.³⁸ His analysis of the heterosexual sexual drive, which was influential, is an important feature of his thesis. The heterosexual sex drive was:

... the most important factor in social existence the strongest incentive to the exertion of strength and acquisition of property, to the foundation of a home and the awakening of altruistic feeling, first for a person of the opposite sex, then for the offspring and in wider sense for all humanity.³⁹

The sexual is seen as a key to the social and 'normal' heterosexual activity socialises in the most appropriate form: the procreative instinct leads to the moral life.⁴⁰

Because of the confessional nature of many of the sexual histories in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Jeffrey Weeks regards its appearance as a defining moment in the history of sexological literature: 'it was the eruption into print of the speaking pervert, the individual marked or marred by his (or her) sexual impulses'.⁴¹ However, this 'eruption' is of one gender; among the numerous confessions volunteered to Krafft-Ebing, not one was made by a woman, with the result that all narratives concerning male homosexuality are first person and all the female narratives are third person.

But it was Havelock Ellis, more than any other sexologist, who popularised sexology. The result of his research was the seven-volume work, written over a period of thirty years, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, originally issued in 1896 and then revised in 1938. Ellis's volume on homosexuality, *Sexual Inversion*, was originally conceived as a collaboration between Ellis and the homosexual John Addington Symonds, who had earlier written two anonymous defences of homosexuality.⁴² *Sexual Inversion* specified the characteristics of sexuality,

³⁸ Krafft-Ebing, p. 56.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ In his preface to the first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* Krafft-Ebing stressed that in order to ensure that 'unqualified persons' did not gain access to his studies, he had found it necessary to Latinise both the title of his book and 'particularly revolting portions' of the book.

⁴¹ Weeks, p. 67.

⁴² J. A. Symonds had written *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, a defence of homosexuality, which he had dared not publish until 1896. Both Jonathan Katz in *Gay American History* and Barbara Fassler in 'Theories of Homosexuality as sources of Bloomsbury's Androgyny', *Signs*, 5,2 (1979), 237-251, have pointed out that classical allusions found in the titles of books during this period may have intimated a textual preoccupation with homosexuality.

charting sexual 'normality' and its 'morbid' aberrations, and speculating on the effects of sexuality on life patterns.

Between 1898 and 1908 as the 'science' of sexology established its discourse, over a thousand publications on homosexuality appeared.⁴³ The concentration in sexological literature on the 'perverse' seemed scientifically to confirm standards of sexual 'normality'. But above all, the work of the sexologists was characterised by the cataloguing of the limits of perversity and an array of minute and encyclopaedic descriptions and classifications. The sexologists were constantly forming a discourse of sexuality and generating terms for sexual proclivities -- for instance Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* was originally called *An Unknown People*.

The case studies of Krafft-Ebing were a model for what was to follow. His classification of female homosexuals stressed their masculine interests or features. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* the female subject whom Krafft-Ebing listed as case 95 cross-dressed, worked as a railwayman and visited brothels with men. She provided an interesting insight into acquired inversion. When dressing as a man she gained such knowledge of them that: 'I took an unconquerable dislike to them [...] I felt myself more and more powerfully drawn toward intelligent women and girls who were in sympathy with me'.⁴⁴ Krafft-Ebing observed that Case 106 had masculine arms and legs and ladies' shoes did not fit her, while case 120 had a deep voice and coarse features, but did not show signs of growing a beard.⁴⁵ In his studies of female inverts Havelock Ellis even went so far as to examine the larynx of many inverted women, as he considered the invert's voice must surely be *contralto*.

Krafft-Ebing's case studies provided what was to be a preliminary link between lesbianism and feminism. When Krafft-Ebing classified the female homosexual, he stated that she would display 'an inclination [not] for the arts [...] [but] for the sciences', would abhor perfumes and cosmetics and would enjoy sport.⁴⁶ Given the context of presumed female passionlessness, inversion did not involve attraction to one's own sex as much as the display of the social characteristics of the opposite sex. In his description of the object of the invert's sexual desire, Havelock Ellis's *résumé* of her qualities shows many correlations with Victorian descriptions of the spinster:

⁴³ Weeks, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Krafft-Ebing, p. 195.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 234, 284.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 280.

'They are not usually attractive to the average man [...] Their sexual impulses are seldom much marked [...] [they are] not well adapted for child-bearing [...] They are the pick of the women whom the average man would pass by. No doubt this is often the reason why they are open to homosexual advances [...] [and] seem to possess a genuine, though not precisely sexual, preference for women over men, and it is this coldness [...] which often renders men rather indifferent to them.'⁴⁷

The medical separation of spinsters, lesbian women and feminists from 'normal' female sexuality was utilised eventually as a method of isolating rebellious women, linking sexual deviance with social deviance.

Conservative commentators such as Arabella Kenealy, writing on the subject of feminism and sex extinction in the nineteen-twenties, felt so uncomfortable about the increased visibility of fashionable inversion that she objected to feminism on the grounds that it sought to normalise the mannishness of some women:

There have always been, as history shows, women in whom, from faulty heredity or culture, or from stress of circumstance, the male traits have been abnormally developed; virile-brained, stout-hearted, muscular chieftainesses, chatelaines, abbesses, matrons; or, (in less agreeable guise) amazons, shrews and viragos. But always such were recognised as being abnormal, and for the most part as being repellent. It was not sought to manufacture them. It is only of late years that mannishness has become a serious Cult.⁴⁸

Edward Carpenter wrote a pamphlet on homosexuality, *Homogenic Love*, in 1894 and *The Intermediate Sex* in 1908. Carpenter argued that homosexuals could provide enlightened leadership in democratic society, since the homosexual combined both male and female qualities. As he watched the suffragettes emerging from the chrysalis of restrictive womanhood, Carpenter felt it to be possible that a 'new sex is on the make'; 'like the feminine neuters of Ants and Bees -- not adapted for child-bearing, but with a marvellous and perfect instinct of social service, indispensable for the maintenance of the common life'.⁴⁹ In his pamphlet *Homogenic Love*⁵⁰ which was published through the Manchester Labour Press, Carpenter suggests a connection between lesbianism and feminism:

⁴⁷ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1908), p. 133.

⁴⁸ Arabella Kenealy, *Feminism and Sex-Extinction* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1920), p. 253.

⁴⁹ Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age. A Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915), p. 67.

⁵⁰ 'Homogenic' was the term Carpenter coined for the homosexual.

It is noticeable [...] that the movement among women, for their own liberation and emancipation [...] has been accompanied by a marked development of the homogenic passion among the female sex. It may be said that a certain strain in the relations between the opposite sexes which has come about owing to a growing consciousness among women that they may have been oppressed and unfairly treated by men, and a growing unwillingness to ally themselves unequally in marriage -- that this strain has caused womankind to draw more closely together and to cement alliances of their own [...] such comrade alliances -- and of a quite passionate kind -- are becoming increasingly common and especially perhaps among the more cultured classes of women, who are working out the great cause of their sex's liberation.⁵¹

Sexologists theorised issues which were increasingly viewed as concrete social problems. Fears of the effects of feminism on the relations between the sexes were directed into sexology. Concern with the changing relations between genders, resulted in an array of speculations about inversion, cross-gender behaviour and reproductive instinct. The author of *Inversion Sexuelle* (1893), Julian Chevalier, attributed homosexuality to a congenital base but went on to suggest that homosexuality was on the increase because women were becoming independent and pursuing careers.⁵²

Sexological literature is marked by its expectation that homosexuality or the germs of inversion will be detectable in independent feminist women, of whom a significant proportion were single. For spinsters formed a substantial number of those Victorian and Edwardian women who had a public profile. Lillian Faderman notes that of 'the 977 women appearing in the 1902 edition of Who's Who, almost half did not marry and of the women who received Ph. D's in American Universities from 1877 to 1924, three-fourths did not marry'.⁵³ The conditions of middle-class marriage made a career or sustained political activism relatively incompatible, consequently women involved in these areas refrained from marriage and tended to co-habit with other women. A poem appearing in *Punch* in 1884 humorously addressed itself to the unsexing process of education on women. It was directed at those who had succeeded at Newham and Girton:

O pedants of these later days, who go on
undiscerning,
To overload a woman's brain and cram our
girls with learning,

⁵¹ Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love* (Manchester: Manchester Labour Press, 1894).

⁵² For further information see Greenberg, p. 387.

⁵³ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), p. 186.

You'll make a woman half a man, the
souls of parents vexing,
To find that all the gentle sex this
process is unsexing.⁵⁴

The Single Woman and Lesbian Identity in *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Unlit Lamp*

The impact of sexological discourse on the construction of lesbian identity can most readily be traced through Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928).

Central to *The Well of Loneliness* and to the discourse on inversion which it seems to promote is Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The treatise is stored discreetly in the library of the Sir Philip Gordon, the father of the heroine, Stephen. Sir Philip makes small pencil notes in the margins of the treatise. *Psychopathia Sexualis* provides Sir Philip with explanations of Stephen and he judges Stephen's sexuality accordingly.

Indeed, Radclyffe Hall intended *The Well of Loneliness* to popularise inversion, as Hall's partner, Una Troubridge, confirms: 'She had long wanted to write a book on sexual inversion, a novel that would be accessible to the general public who did not have access to technical treatises.'⁵⁵ The two years which Radclyffe Hall spent writing *The Well* were enlivened by Hall's sense of the selfless necessity of her task. She wrote to Havelock Ellis in 1928:

I am only sustained in my determination to set forth for the general public the tragedy of such lives, by the knowledge of the courage with which men of science, chief among them yourself, have of recent years tried to elucidate the facts of inversion for the benefit of serious students.⁵⁶

Using sexological discourse on female inversion, Hall provides a fictional account of its pathology. In her article 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian' Esther Newton places *The Well* as Hall's attempt to break with the nineteenth-century asexual model of romantic friendship. Newton suggests that Hall recognised the necessity of discrediting this ideology of passionlessness, and endorsing a physically desiring female sexuality.⁵⁷ It can be argued, however, that Hall's use of the

⁵⁴ Anonymous, 'The Woman of the Future', *Punch*, 10, 5 (1884).

⁵⁵ Una Troubridge, *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall* (London: Hammond 1961), p. 81.

⁵⁶ quoted in Arthur Calder Marshall, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), p. 263.

⁵⁷ Newton, pp. 557-575.

concept of the 'invert', the male soul trapped in the female body, means that Stephen's physical desires do not emerge as actively female, but rather as mimetic of male desires: Stephen's is a male sexuality trapped in a female body. When Vera Brittain reviewed *The Well* for *Time and Tide* magazine in 1928, she expressed reservations about Hall's representations of female sexuality. Although Brittain supported Hall's challenge to the cultural exclusion of the lesbian, she disliked Hall's 'over-emphasis of sex characteristics that rendered her "normal" women clinging and feminine to exasperation'.⁵⁸

Virginia Woolf described *The Well* to Quentin Bell as 'that well of all that's stagnant and lukewarm' and many whose names appeared in the list of signatories protesting the censoring of *The Well* found the text maudlin and misogynistic with too many glum stereotypes and pessimistic emphases.⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf reports to Vita Sackville-West on 30 August 1928:

Morgan goes to see Radclyffe in her tower in Kensington[...] and Radclyffe scolds him like a fishwife, and says that she won't have any letter written about her book unless it mentions the fact that it is a work of artistic merit -- even genius [...] so our ardour cools, and instead of offering to reprint the masterpiece, we are already beginning to wish it unwritten.⁶⁰

Rebecca West pointed out the irony that *The Well* cost fifteen shillings whereas the scandalmongering papers, which urged its censorship, could be bought for a penny, thus popularising inversion more than Hall could ever hope to:

... now that the government has supplied female homosexuality with a handsome, noble and intrepid martyr the word lesbian will in no time suggest to the young girl something other than the friend of Catullus who had bad luck with a sparrow.⁶¹

The popularisation of *The Well* was in part a result of the media and legal scrutiny it was subjected to.

Current feminist critical response to *The Well* is diverse. Lillian Faderman argues in *Surpassing the Love of Men* that Hall accepted the sexological construction of congenital inversion and that Hall's further assertion that such

⁵⁸ Vera Brittain 'Facing Facts' (August 1928), reprinted in *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity* (London: Femina Books, 1968).

⁵⁹ *Congenial Spirits. The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Joanne Banks (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989), p. 236.

⁶⁰ quoted in Cook, p. 732.

⁶¹ Rebecca West 'Concerning the Censorship' (1931) in *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Doran, 1967), p. 11.

sexual identity was God-given, was a strategic move best placed within the context of demands for the 'cure' of inversion. According to this interpretation of *The Well*, the text seeks moral respectability for inversion and is sustained by a religious framework: Stephen Gordon petitions God throughout the narrative. Faderman suggests too that the fact that Stephen never chose her inversion strengthens Hall's argument that to criminalise homosexuality is unjust.⁶²

Sonja Ruehl uses ideas developed in Foucault's analysis of sexuality to argue that *The Well* constructs a 'reverse discourse' about lesbianism; one that contests existing categories.⁶³ She points out that prior to the publication of *The Well* lesbianism was located within a prevalent rhetoric of sin whereas definitions of lesbianism as congenital might release it from this rhetoric. Ruehl is surely right when she claims that within *The Well* Hall articulates lesbianism as a lesbian, and places the invert as the subject of the narrative. In this way Hall projects lesbian identity from within the boundaries of her own identity as a lesbian. This supports Foucault's description in *The History of Sexuality* of the formation of a 'reverse discourse': 'homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.'⁶⁴

It is useful to contrast public response to *The Well* with responses to Compton Mackenzie's satire on lesbian society, *Extraordinary Women* (1928), which appeared just after *The Well* and was withdrawn by Cape following advice from the Home Office. *Extraordinary Women* provoked no controversy nor was it ever threatened with prosecution. It seems relevant that the novel made no claims to educate public opinion, nor did it articulate lesbianism from within, nor did it attempt to alter, or reclaim for the lesbian, existing definitions of lesbianism. But Compton Mackenzie still felt nervous about the future of his novel. He admits in his autobiography, *My Life and Times*, that both he and his publishers Mackenzie and Secker were worried that *Extraordinary Women* would be prosecuted in the wake of the suppression of *The Well*.⁶⁵

According to Jane Rule, *The Well* has retained its place as an authoritative text on lesbianism because the text supports misconceptions: that the social and sexual identity which the lesbian seeks to assert is a masculine one and that a

⁶² Faderman, p. 317.

⁶³ Sonja Ruehl, 'Inverts and Experts: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Identity' in *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, edited by R. Brunt and C. Rowan (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), p. 16.

⁶⁴ Foucault, p. 101.

⁶⁵ Compton Mackenzie, *My Life and Times: 1928-1930* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), VI.

woman would be happiest if she could enjoy the normality of a heterosexual union unless she is congenitally abnormal. Rule observes:

[*The Well of Loneliness*] supports the view that men are naturally superior, that, given a choice, any woman would prefer a real man unless she herself is a congenital freak. Though inept and feminine men are criticised, though some are seen to abuse the power they have, their right to that power is never questioned. Stephen does not deny the social structure she was born into. Male domination is intolerable to her only when she can't assert it for herself. Women are inferior. Loving relationships must be between superior and inferior persons.⁶⁶

After all, the lesbian heroine, Stephen, identifies most closely with the long line of patriarchs who precede her; their portraits furnish not only the corridors of the family house, Morton, but also Stephen's imagination. In her anguished desire to be an accepted son of the patriarchs she upholds the legitimacy of the masculine needs and longings of the invert. Through a shared sense of patriarchal value she gifts her 'feminine' lover, Mary, to her rival, Martin, in recognition that the best man has won. Stephen Gordon is a social pariah only because she is not allotted her proper function as a male in a male oriented society.

Vern Bullough has uncovered a study conducted in the nineteen-twenties and thirties involving about twenty-five lesbian women in Salt Lake City, which provides insight into early lesbian responses to *The Well*. The lesbians interviewed objected to *The Well*, feeling that Hall's construction of inversion was prescriptive and unwelcome. Bullough explains:

One woman, seemingly typical, felt that the novel caused people who before had never heard of lesbianism to classify as lesbian every woman who wore a suit (with a skirt) and was seen more than once in the company of another woman.⁶⁷

Stephen Gordon seems then to confirm sexological descriptions of the female invert. She is muscular, narrow-hipped and in the ease with which she performs 'masculine' tasks, she resembles her father. She proves her masculinity by successfully wooing the feminine and wifely Mary. Stephen combats lingering 'womanliness' in her person, viewing female characteristics as in opposition to her lesbianism. Stephen's longing for the social confirmation of her manhood is a motif which runs through the text: as a child she wants to play at male games in

⁶⁶ Jane Rule, *Lesbian Images* (London: P. Davies, 1976), p. 60.

⁶⁷ Vern Bullough, 'Lesbianism in the 1920s and 1930s: A Newfound Study' *Signs* 2, 4 (1977), 895-904, (p. 897).

the company of boys and her father trains her in gentlemanly accomplishments. "Do you think I could be a man", she asks Sir Philip, "supposing I thought very hard -- or prayed, Father?"⁶⁸ Masculinity always represents Stephen's natural standard and provides her with role models.

Furthermore, Radclyffe Hall appears to advocate marriage as a model for lesbian relationships. Stephen's relationship with Mary mimics heterosexual marriage and Hall borrows courtship patterns from heterosexual romance to depict Stephen's relationships with women in whom she is sexually interested. Stephen's idealisation of marriage becomes progressively more explicit: her greatest disappointment during her early ill-fated relationship with Angela Crosby comes when Angela points out Stephen's inability to marry her. Stephen feels unfairly excluded from heterosexual marital patterns and Hall uses Stephen's reverence and longing for marital union in support of the invert's right to exist. Stephen venerates her parents' marriage as "the one perfect thing" (*WL*, 82) about her; family dynamics and chromosomes collude in the maintenance of heterosexual marriage as the ideal union. Stephen's response, as a lesbian, to marriage is remarkable only in that she chooses to locate herself, in such a model of heterosexual union, in the male position. Heterosexuality is the source of Stephen's ethical practice. She feels an:

... inherent respect for the normal which nothing had ever been able to destroy, not even the long years of persecution -- an added burden it was, handed down by the silent but watchful founders of Morton. She must pay for the instinct which, in earliest childhood, had made her feel something akin to worship for the perfect thing which she divined in the love that existed between her parents. (*WL*, 438)

The legitimacy of her parents' heterosexual union contributes to the doomed nature of Stephen's illegitimate homosexual unions. It can be seen that Hall's construction of lesbian identity radically differs from rebellious version of lesbianism as an alternative to heterosexuality. Radclyffe Hall seems not to deny the centrality of heterosexuality and the cultural placement of heterosexual marriage as the only fulfilment for women. Hall displays no awareness that rebellious lesbian practice can share a similar cultural placement with militant celibacy in its threat to a social life based on heterosexual terms.

Stephen Gordon's actions at the close of *The Well* are conservative; she actively encourages her long-term partner Mary to form a heterosexual alliance which will more suitably fulfil Mary's 'womanly' nature. After all, Stephen's

⁶⁸ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 22. All subsequent references to *The Well* will be taken from the Virago edition.

creator, Radclyffe Hall, was no feminist: she deplored the post-war trend that encouraged women to work and in an interview with Evelyn Irons for the *Daily Mail* in 1928, she declared that "to be a good wife and mother is the finest work a woman can do".⁶⁹ In *The Well* marriage offers Mary security and is deemed to be far more functionally appropriate, though less intense, than her union with Stephen. As Stephen renounces her lover she has a compensatory vision of how exile will inspire her, she will give voice to those who are silent and gain sympathetic recognition for the invert: 'Her barren womb becomes fruitful -- it ached with its fearful and sterile burden. It ached with the fierce yet helpless children who would clamour in vain for their right to salvation' (*WL*, 446). *The Well* is a paradigm of a narrative pattern which Catherine Stimpson identifies in the lesbian novel: 'the dying fall, a narrative of damnation, of the lesbian's suffering as a lonely outcast attracted to a psychological lower caste.'⁷⁰

In the 1981 introduction to the Virago edition of Radclyffe Hall's *The Unlit Lamp* (1924) Zoe Fairbairns notes Hall's belief that *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) was her first attempt to incorporate a homosexual theme in her fiction. Fairbairns finds Hall's conception of her work peculiar, given the intimations of lesbianism which Fairbairns feels dominate Hall's earlier novel, *The Unlit Lamp*. Inez Martinez firmly places *The Unlit Lamp* as Hall's first novel 'about lesbian love'⁷¹ and Catherine Stimpson finds in *The Unlit Lamp* an example of 'lesbian realism': 'the daughter and governess have a long, unconsummated, ultimately ruptured lesbian relationship.'⁷² Many feminist critics have found *The Unlit Lamp* a more sympathetic vehicle for lesbianism than *The Well*, as the former text depicts women-loving women without recourse to the unwieldy discourse of inversion. *The Unlit Lamp* is far less informed, if at all, by sexological descriptions of 'inversion' and by Hall's reading of Krafft-Ebing or Havelock Ellis. The novel's less declarative form and slight use of sexological discourse means that it does not limit the means of describing relationships between women. Despite this, critical responses to the text remain unresolved: is the spinster heroine of the novel, Joan Ogden, involved in a coded form of lesbian relationship or a romantic friendship with her governess, Elizabeth Rodney, and is the central relationship of the novel that between Joan and Elizabeth, or between Joan and her mother?

⁶⁹ *Daily Mail* (26 July 1928), quoted in Michael Baker *Our Three Selves* (London: GMP, 1985), p. 248.

⁷⁰ Catherine Stimpson, 'Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English' in *Writing and Sexual Difference* edited by Elizabeth Abel (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 244.

⁷¹ Inez Martinez, 'The Lesbian Hero Bound: Radclyffe Hall's Portrait of Sapphic Daughters and Their Mothers' *Journal of Homosexuality* 8, 3/4 (1983), p. 127.

⁷² Stimpson, pp. 253, 248.

Havelock Ellis in his article 'Sexual Inversion in Women' which appeared in the *Alienist and Neurologist* in 1895 admits some idea of romantic friendship into his model of lesbian behaviour. Ellis formally upholds the notion, derived from Krafft-Ebing of an ascending scale of inversion. The scale begins with women involved in romantic friendships in which inversion does not appear in a congenital form and ends with the active and congenital invert. Ellis's inclusion of romantic friendship in the scale of inversion could tend to stigmatise any form of close female relationship or contact as homosexual.

It is perhaps useful to regard Radclyffe Hall's journey from *The Unlit Lamp* to *The Well of Loneliness* as a reflection of the sort of transition that occurred from romantic friendship to its classification as inversion, and from the figure of the woman-loving spinster to the lesbian. Discrepancies of opinion about the focus of *The Unlit Lamp* have arisen alongside critical attention to inversion in *The Well of Loneliness* and this attention has tended to encourage readings of Joan in *The Unlit Lamp* as latently lesbian.

The relationship between Joan and Elizabeth, or indeed between Joan and her mother, can indeed be classified as lesbian, albeit a lesbianism based on emotional rather than physical fulfilment. But if read without the retrospective illumination of *The Well*, *The Unlit Lamp* seems to take on an entirely different emphasis and can be classed quite happily with other texts dealing with spinsters and romantic friendships. The easy drift of lesbian narratives into romantic friendship narratives and vice versa, is supported by the conclusions of Lillian Faderman in a discussion of lesbian magazine fiction in the early twentieth century. Faderman describes the prevalence throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century of popular stories which contained same-sex love. Woman-woman relationships were treated without self-consciousness or any feeling that they might be immoral, perverse or lesbian: 'homoaffectional expression between women was far less restricted in the past [...] permissible behaviour included caressing, holding, exchanges of endearments and expressions of intense emotional commitment to each other.'⁷³

Fiction which places single women centrally as heroines tends to incorporate woman-loving women in the form of 'romantic friendship' which can include intimations of homosexuality. However, such intimations are never boldly stated nor does it usually seem to have been felt that distinctions between different types of female union and friendship are necessary. Lesbian narratives were not necessarily invisible but resided comfortably within narratives of romantic

⁷³ Lillian Faderman, 'Lesbian Magazine Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11, 4 (1978), p. 801.

friendship. Following the establishment of sexological discourse, such women-loving spinsters could be classified as 'lesbian' and so defined as separate from heterosexual union. In one sense, the lesbian may appear less fully single: her sexual choices preclude any notion of her unity with heterosexual spinsters. For example, it was suggested amongst the Bloomsbury group that the title 'Miss' be refused to Radclyffe Hall because of her sexual proclivities. This seems to indicate either an awareness of the masculine prerogatives that her sexual status as a lesbian enabled her to exercise, or an awareness that the signification of single status represented a plea for heterosexual union.⁷⁴ Vita Sackville-West, discussing marriage with Harold Nicolson on the radio in 1929, confirms the problems of the aging Miss:

'... marriage is more important to a woman than to a man. After all, you know at once, as soon as you hear a woman's name, if she is married or not; you know if she is Miss or Mrs. If she is Miss, you immediately have a faint feeling of pity or anticipation, according to her age [...] marriage, in fact, is assumed to be woman's natural profession -- her whole-time job. With a man, it's subsidiary; it doesn't affect his outward life.'⁷⁵

Joan Ogden, the spinster heroine of *The Unlit Lamp*, is exceptional; her intellect is alert and vigorous and her spirit aches for emotional adventure. But there is no viable outlet for self-realisation in Seabourne, the seaside town where she lives. Narrative tension begins when Elizabeth Rodney is employed as governess to Joan and her sister Milly. Elizabeth is a 'New Woman', she is ex-Cambridge and is the adopted child of a spinster, Miss Wharton, who has been active in rescue work. At the point of her entry into the narrative, Elizabeth is twenty-six years old, and sister to a middle-aged bachelor who has never been motivated by any ambition greater than to live in the family house and continue his uncle's business.

Elizabeth is attracted by the Joan's scholarly potential but recognises the difficulties that would arise from the separation of Joan from her mother which an academic future would entail. Elizabeth's attachment to Joan develops into profound love which keeps Elizabeth in Seabourne for a further ten years, hoping that Joan will have the courage to leave her mother.

The first moment of closeness between Elizabeth and Joan occurs when they watch a boat moving out to sea and share a wish to be sailing away from

⁷⁴ *Congenial Spirits*, p. 236.

⁷⁵ Transcript of Vita Sackville-West's comments appeared in an article entitled 'Marriage' *Listener* (26 June 1929), 899-900, (p. 899).

Seabourne. Elizabeth's and Joan's dreams of escape are symbolically represented by a figurehead which sits in a neighbour's garden, facing the Atlantic:

... it looked wistful and rather lovely; there was something pathetic about the thing, it had a grotesque kind of dignity in spite of its faded and weather-stained paint. The ample female bosoms bulged beneath the stiff drapery, the painted eyes seemed to be straining to see some distant object; where the figure ended below the waist was a roughly carved scroll showing traces of gilt, on which could be deciphered the word 'Glory'.⁷⁶

Always gazing at the journey to be undertaken, unable actually to depart, the figurehead is a metaphor for the women's future.

All of Joan's efforts are directed towards the study of medicine; when she is twenty-one she intends to live with Elizabeth in London where Elizabeth will help to support her studies. Joan's parents emphatically oppose her ambitions: her mother hopes that Joan will be the resident spinster of the family while her father believes that a girl's only duty is to marry. Joan and Elizabeth need not be lovers in order to be rebellious; merely as women who like women they break the cultural pattern. One need only recall the pleasure and surprise that Virginia Woolf expressed in *A Room of One's Own* as she read that Chloe liked Olivia for the first time in literature. Woolf observed that women in fiction had repeatedly been 'not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex'.⁷⁷ In *The Unlit Lamp* Joan likes Elizabeth so much that she imagines a shared idyllic future together:

The flat would have a study with shelves for their books; they would go out of it every morning to jostle with crowds, to work and grow tired [...] They would cook their own supper, or sometimes go out to one of the little Italian restaurants [...] They would go to cheap seats at the theatre or to the gallery at Covent Garden [...] They would unlock their front door with their own latch-key and hang up their coats in their own front hall. (UL, 143)

Early in the novel Elizabeth is linked with images of growth, beauty and strength: she has eyes like water 'all greeny and shadowy and deep looking' and reminds Joan of 'a larch tree just greening over' (UL, 34). However, although seeking for Joan a happiness that is compatible with Joan's needs, Elizabeth becomes dependent upon Joan. Elizabeth explains her dependency to Joan:

⁷⁶ Radclyffe Hall, *The Unlit Lamp* (1924) (repr. London: Virago, 1989), p. 45. All subsequent references to *The Unlit Lamp* will be taken from the Virago edition.

⁷⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929), pp. 123-4.

'... it is jealous [...] of you, Joan, of any interests that seem to take your attention off me, of any affection that might rob me of even a hair's-breadth of you. It wants to keep you all to itself, to have all your love and gratitude, all that makes you you; and it wouldn't be contented with less'. (UL, 190)

Radclyffe Hall appears to suggest that the urge to live within another's life is an essential female characteristic: certainly the women in *The Unlit Lamp*, with the possible exception of Joan's sister Milly, share this urge. Joan expresses her sense that Elizabeth is planted within her, becoming dependent on her nurture:

... a sudden new feeling of responsibility towards Elizabeth, different in quality from anything that had gone before. She became suddenly aware that she could make or mar not only herself but Elizabeth, that Elizabeth had taken root in her and would blossom or fade according to the sustenance she could provide. (UL, 130)

Elizabeth makes sporadic efforts to break her dependency. On the first occasion when Joan breaks her promise to Elizabeth to leave Seabourne, Elizabeth manages to remain away from Seabourne for a year, but after this is reconciled with Joan. At Elizabeth's return the two women experience a temporary renaissance of their love:

Joan had never known anything quite like this before; she wondered whether the dead felt as she did when they met those they loved on the other side of the grave. A deep sense of peace enveloped her; Elizabeth felt it too, and they sat very often with clasped hands without speaking, for now their silence drew them closer than words would have done. (UL, 185)

Elizabeth undoubtedly offers a fresh alternative womanhood for Joan to identify with and the romantic tension of their embattled relationship increases throughout the narrative. Joan feels aroused by Elizabeth's burnt hands after Elizabeth has tried to beat out the flames upon a woman on fire: 'Joan realized that whatever there was to do must be done by her; that Elizabeth the dominating, the practical, was now as helpless as a baby. The thought thrilled her' (UL, 199). This episode also serves as a paradigm for the sad futility of selflessness: the woman Elizabeth tried to save dies of her injuries, Elizabeth's hands are permanently scarred and Joan's delight in tending Elizabeth is dampened by guilt.

Duty and compassion repeatedly undermine Joan's ambitions and she becomes acquiescent in her own destruction. Her character fulfils the title of the

novel, which Una Troubridge suggested on the eve of publication. It is derived from Browning's poem *The Statue and the Bust*: 'And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost, / is -- the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin'. Joan's personal weaknesses always annul her potential, and she lacks the will to act autonomously. The narrative represents this conformity as perilous; Joan can only be a forerunner of independent womanhood, but can never be free herself.

Sexuality itself is not a central concern in *The Unlit Lamp*, nor does Joan have specifically sexual needs. Joan shares with Stephen Gordon the outward trappings of an invert: the cropped hair and neat tailored clothes, complemented by a cravat or tie. But in Joan's case, these signs are never supported by direct statement or action. However, Joan's longing for smartness and starched collars may be more properly understood not as a sign of her undisclosed lesbian identity, but as an indication of her desire to provide herself with a clear identity as a single woman, to triumph over the cultural constrictions of her femininity through the use of costume. Joan's masculinised body is symbolic of her rejection of traditional gender divisions:

... her black, cropped hair, her beautiful mouth, and her queer, gruff voice. Her flanks were lean and strong like a boy's; they suggested splendid unfettered movement [...] She appeared beautiful because symbolic of some future state -- a forerunner [...] [of] a vast army of women like herself, fine, splendid and fiercely virginal; strong, too, capable of gripping life and holding, it against odds -- the women of the future. (*UL*, 209)

Physically, Joan is like Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1860) and her figure also resembles the virgin frame of Olive Chancellor in *The Bostonians* (1886). One can also set Hall's description alongside that of Rhoda Nunn in *The Odd Women* (1893), although Rhoda is never described as boyish. Everard gazes in delight at Rhoda's beauty:

The prominent forehead [...] the straight eyebrows, strongly marked, with deep vertical furrows generally drawn between them [...] The big, strong chin; the shapely neck -- why, after all, it was a kind of beauty [...] she had a well-built frame. He observed her strong wrists, with exquisite vein-tracings on the pure white.⁷⁸

Rhoda's powerful wrists and Joan's lean flanks partly align them in what is perhaps a tradition of narrative description of single heroines whose shared virile physique typifies the strong-mindedness of the spinster, although it must be recognised that

⁷⁸ George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (1893) (repr. London: Virago, 1987), pp. 101-102.

Hall's description of Joan is tempered by Hall's identity as a lesbian and Joan possesses a far more classically androgynous beauty.

Hall barely acknowledges that Joan's attachment to Elizabeth may have a sexual dimension. Joan is given a vague awareness that she prefers women to men sexually as well as emotionally, but she never has to confront the ontological responsibilities of this knowledge. Yet an unmistakable current of affection runs between the friends and passions other than intellectual seem to fuel their discussions about science and the world beyond the stifling domesticity of Seabourne. Hints of lesbianism are perhaps present in the text and feminist narrative theory does provide strategies for reading the possibly lesbian content *The Unlit Lamp*. Rachel Blau Du Plessis argues in *Writing Beyond the Ending*: 'the erotic and emotional intensity of women's friendship cuts the Gordian knots of both heterosexuality and narrative convention'.⁷⁹ Joan and Elizabeth are defined by their relationship to each other, not to men; Radclyffe Hall has inscribed female desire in the plot of *The Unlit Lamp*, an act that in itself demands a questioning of heterosexuality. Relationships between women are a predominant feature in fiction which centres upon a single woman character or characters. And from the late nineteenth-century onwards these relationships increasingly displace the heterosexual love plot from the centre of such texts. Women's lives are no longer recollected through, organised by and narrated via heterosexual experience.

The Unlit Lamp may also be felt to investigate the possible relationship between intense mother/daughter bonding and potential lesbianism. Mrs Ogden has never found sexual fulfilment with her crude husband and throughout Joan's childhood treats her daughter as compensation for the inadequacies of Colonel Ogden; Joan is expected to behave, in a sense, as a substitute lover. Mrs Ogden exploits Joan erotically, insisting upon physical demonstrations of affection. She actively fantasises about Joan: 'Joan's strong, young arms would comfort and soothe, and her firm lips grope until they found her mother's; and Mrs Ogden would feel mean and ashamed but guiltily happy, as if a lover held her' (*UL*, 13). Described initially as a 'perpetual romance', the mother-daughter relationship comes to excite physical repulsion in Joan:

Side by side, in a small double bed, lay the mother and daughter in dreadful proximity. Their bodies, tired and nervous after the day, were yet unable to avoid each other [...] Mrs Ogden, who got a sense of comfort from another body beside her at night, would creep up close to her daughter. (*UL*, 234)

⁷⁹ Rachel Blau Du Plessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 149.

Some feminist analyses of lesbian sexuality discuss the role of the eroticised mother/daughter relationship; in her article 'Early and Later Determinates of Lesbian Choice' Ruth-Jean Eisenbud suggests that at about the age of three primary lesbian choice may occur in girls as a result of the precocious sexual desire of the child for her mother.⁸⁰ Esther Newton also claims that 'a central component of lesbian sexuality [is] mother/daughter eroticism'. Newton admits, however, that feminist psychology has yet to provide a comprehensive explanation of the 'riddle of sexual orientation'.⁸¹

In *The Unlit Lamp* Hall presents unironically a grim reworking of the central tenet of Victorian domestic ideology; that a woman does not need anything to live for beyond her children. Immured in the house, Mrs Ogden's responsibility is to maintain the sanctity of the home. The home is her province and she is the repository of 'feminine' values within the patriarchy. Ironically, Mrs Ogden is both victim and perpetrator of patriarchy, and it is her helplessness within that ideology which so binds Joan to her: 'Joan loved the little mother, the miserable, put upon, bullied mother, the mother of headaches and secret tears; she would not love the self-assertive, unjust mother, she never had' (*UL*, 55). Joan finds in the thinness of her mother's hands a reason for loving her and she seems surrounded by romance. Even when Joan comes to see her mother divested of romance, pity still lingers.

Many feminist discussions of women's participation in the socialisation of their daughters use a psychoanalytic methodology. Nancy Chodorow in 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality' uses object relations theory, and develops her analysis of gender relations through focusing on early childhood experiences. Chodorow's interests reside in a study of the reproduction of mothering, rather than more generally in the formation of gender identity. Chodorow claims that an examination of the practice of motherhood may provide important clues about the difference between genders and women's subordinate status. Chodorow notes that child-rearing practices are centred primarily around the mother and argues that inappropriate motherhood and mothering may be an important feature in accounting for the secondary status of women. Confusion of ego boundaries is more likely between mother and daughter; a mother is liable 'to experience her daughter [...] as herself' and will tend to identify to a greater extent with her female offspring.⁸² At its most benign, mother-daughter identification is described by

⁸⁰ Ruth-Jean Eisenbud, 'Early and Later Determinates of Lesbian Choice' *Psychoanalytic Review* 69, 1 (1982), 85-109.

⁸¹ Newton, p. 21.

⁸² Nancy Chodorow 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality' in *Women, Culture and Society* edited by Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 47.

Julia Kristeva in her essay 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini' as: 'the reunion of a woman-mother with the body of her mother [...] by giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself'.⁸³ Nancy Chodorow claims in *The Reproduction of Mothering* that in the case of the male child, a primary identification with the mother gives way to a developing masculine gender identity, he comes to define masculinity as non-feminine and not involved with women.⁸⁴ But the female gender identity of the girl child does not require a rejection of the primary identification with her mother. One cannot, of course, use Chodorow's later feminist analysis of motherhood as in any way an explanation of Hall's representation of motherhood, but, at the same time, Hall's text does prefigure some of the issues which Chodorow takes up, and, perhaps, also does what Chodorow fails to do, partly addresses the larger cultural issues which lead to the devaluation of women.

Radclyffe Hall depicts motherhood in *The Unlit Lamp* as far more than the biological process of reproduction. Mrs Ogden can control her daughter through various manipulations of her mothering role. Joan's whole relationship to her mother is ambivalent. In *The Unlit Lamp* Mrs Ogden is described from Elizabeth's viewpoint as:

... like a lost fledgling, with her hopeless look and her big eyes; she was also rather like a starving dog [...] Starving, what for? [...] Had Mrs Ogden always been so hungry? She was positively ravenous, you could feel it about her, her hunger came at you and made you feel embarrassed. Poor woman, poor woman, poor Joan. (*UL*, 22)

Elizabeth's view of Mrs Ogden is endorsed later in the narrative by Joan's suitor, Richard. The bond between mother and daughter is presented as tragic: 'There was something almost tragic about these two [...] bound together as they were by a subtle and unrecognized tie, struggling to find each for herself and for the other some compensation, some fulfilment' (*UL*, 75).

In *The Unlit Lamp*, the mother-daughter relationship comes to stand as a paradigm for the single woman's whole ambivalent relationship to reproduction, maternity and autonomy. Within the narrative framework, the heroine's struggle for identity is dramatised in the context of the mother-daughter relationship. The single woman's response to maternity has direct bearing upon vocation and

⁸³ Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini' in *Desire and Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 239.

⁸⁴ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (London: University of California Press, 1978).

fulfilment and, as in Joan Ogden's case, the attempt to escape the coercive pressures of reproductive and heterosexual ideology could prove impossible.

Mrs Ogden offers Joan no strong models of female independence. Her own identity has been lost in the identity of her husband. The message for women who seek full independence would appear to be that they must reject the 'feminine' values embodied in mothers such as Mrs Ogden. And yet both Mrs Ogden and Stephen Gordon's mother, Anna, in *The Well of Loneliness* manage to maintain their power over their daughters; both refuse to affirm the adulthood of their daughters and both assume that selflessness is their due.

In these fictions, then, mothers are felt to have much to answer for. And insofar as mothers inhibit the passage of daughters to autonomy, the rejection of motherhood as a value in itself may seem to follow. But it remains unclear what alternative mode of existence is possible or desirable. In these fictions mothers appear as partly revered and partly derided figures. They retain the power to coerce their daughters and also perpetuate the expectation that women, much more than men, will find a primary identity in the family. In some nineteenth-century fiction motherhood is signified by absence. Mothers are absent or dead, perhaps wistfully recollected. Both Lucy Snowe of *Villette* and Olive Chancellor of *The Bostonians* are orphaned and draw at least a portion of their independent status from their lack of family and, it could be suggested, more specifically from their motherlessness. In the very absence of the mother some nineteenth century novelists found space to investigate the daughter's development. In early twentieth-century women's fiction the mother comes back. Fully visible, exciting, disturbing and negative images of motherhood proliferate and the single woman's relationship to such figures of maternity is fully dramatised. Such fictions operate as female disclaimers of myths of familial harmony. In novels such as *The Unlit Lamp* or in May Sinclair's novels *Mary Olivier* (1919) and *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1920) the family structure is edited down to the mother-daughter relationship. In *Mary Olivier* all the male family members are killed off during the course of the narrative until the story centres on the mother-daughter relationship; Joan Ogden fades into a lonely attendant at her mother's side; Harriett Frean practices in the pious depths of her spinsterish heart the insincere self-sacrifice that her mother taught her.

Patricia Meyer Spacks summarises this shift in focus from nineteenth to twentieth-century fiction: 'in nineteenth-century novels women express hostility toward their mothers by eliminating them from the narrative; twentieth-century fiction dramatizes the conflict.'⁸⁵ The issue of singleness is in these novels

⁸⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 191.

examined through the mother/daughter relationship. There is a larger awareness that motherhood may be a social institution and a role, subject to cultural imperatives rather than an essential part of women's 'nature'.

Radclyffe Hall undermines belief in selfless motherhood in *The Unlit Lamp* and explodes the notion that female self-sacrifice is in any case a simple good. Joan Ogden's unsuccessful suitor, Richard Benson, exclaims:

'You might have been a brilliant woman, a woman that counted for a great deal, and yet what are you now? [...] whose fault is that? Not yours, who had too much heart to save yourself. I tell you, Joan, the sin of it lies at the door of that old woman [Mrs Ogden] up there in Lynton; that mild, always ailing, cruelly gentle creature who's taken everything and given nothing and batted on you year by year. She's like an octopus who's drained you dry. You struggled to get free, you nearly succeeded, but as quickly as you cut through one tentacle, another shot out and fixed on you'. (UL, 300)

Joan's mother's hold over her mind and life is tenacious; the home is a prison rather than a sanctuary for the single woman. Throughout the narrative, Radclyffe Hall undermines the romanticisation of motherhood but does not allow her heroine to escape the maternal trap. Joan fails to break free because her nature is protective, and there is some suggestion that Joan's protectiveness is the incipient mode of her mother's possessiveness.

Mrs Ogden is pitiable in that she has spent years nursing her bed-ridden husband but dangerous in her search for emotional compensation.:

... [she] had become a veritable reservoir of soothing phrases, solicitous actions, tabloids, hot soups and general restoratives [...] There were times [...] when she longed, yes longed to break down utterly, to become bed-ridden, to be waited upon hand and foot, to have arresting symptoms of her own, any number of them. (UL, 12)

Colonel Ogden has dictated the atmosphere of the family home. He is truculent and imperious and his image dominates the house: 'The Colonel's face looked sternly into the camera, his pen was poised for the final word, authority personified (UL, 9). Mrs Ogden finds the presence of Colonel Ogden's masculinity incongruous in their shared bedroom, his red puffy face glares against the pillow, his stertorous breathing fills the air and repellent thoughts about him spring from her unconscious like a jack-in-the-box (UL, 25-26).

Mrs Ogden does not want Joan to marry, lest she will be subjected to the repellent familiarity of sex which has proved so repulsive to her. 'Joan would just go on loving her', she decides, 'it would be the perfect relationship, Mother and

Child' (UL, 26). Yet despite her protective feelings for Joan, Mrs Ogden is willing to collude with Colonel Ogden when it suits her. When the Colonel invests unwisely his daughters' inherited income, the income which Joan is relying on to finance her independence, Mrs Ogden meekly consents to be co-signatory to his dealings, using her apparent docility and passivity to rob Joan of an independent future. Mrs Ogden also measures her own value according to her relationship with the patriarchal traditions of her family. She thinks of herself as a Routledge and conservatively honours the traditions of her male forebears. On what she designates 'Anniversary Day' she lays laurel wreaths on a portrait of the notable Admiral Sir William Routledge to commemorate his part in a battle. It is explained that this ritual helps temporarily to obliterate the humiliations of her marriage: 'hidden away under the bushel of affectations, social ambitions and snobbishness [...] there might well have burnt a small and feeble candle -- the flame of a lost virginity (UL, 208).

Everything that impedes Joan's progress to independence is welcomed by Mrs Ogden. The Colonel's death is followed by the discovery that he has mismanaged Joan's and her sister Milly's inheritance; the egocentric Milly enrolls at the Royal College of Music leaving Joan to act as companion to their mother; and she returns home with tuberculosis expecting to be nursed by Joan. These events provide opportunities for Mrs Ogden to tighten her hold on Joan. She is petulant and reproachful and manipulates Joan by threatening collapse or illness at each instance of rebellion. She seeks continually to halt the differentiating process between mother and child.

Richard Benson's proposal of marriage to Joan might in earlier fictions have represented a threat to the autonomy of the single woman. In *The Unlit Lamp* the proposal is placed in opposition to the restrictive mother-daughter relationship. Joan defines herself to Richard as "not a woman who could ever have married" (UL, 302), but the choice is not simply between marriage and singleness in *The Unlit Lamp*. Other fictions had shown the necessity of renouncing marriage to pursue a career or fulfil desires. But in *The Unlit Lamp* Richard's proposal is based precisely upon her modern difference from other women. Richard wants to share carcens with Joan, to work with her in medicine. Marriage to Richard would not mean that Joan would have to give up her ambitions but that she would have the opportunity to fulfil them. Nor is Joan's refusal based upon her need to realise lesbian inclinations, after all Elizabeth loves her and yet Joan does not go with her to London. It is the tenacious hold of corrupt maternity which prevents Joan from achieving her freedom. Mrs Ogden defeats both Richard and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's dignity and asceticism presents an attractive alternative to Mrs Ogden's displaced eroticism and overwhelming emotional demands. And so Joan perceives her attraction to Elizabeth as a betrayal of her mother. Mrs Ogden uses the guilt Joan feels about this in the competition for possession of Joan's heart. Mrs Ogden finds Elizabeth menacing:

Elizabeth had goods for sale that Joan could buy; how was she buying them, that was the question? Was she paying in the copper coin of mere hard work, content if she did Elizabeth credit? Or would she, being Joan, slip in a golden coin of love and admiration, a coin stolen from her almost bankrupt mother? (*UL*, 54)

Elizabeth and Mrs Ogden come to resemble each other in their dependency upon Joan and manipulation of her sense of honour and duty. However, Radclyffe Hall does present Elizabeth as the more sympathetic character who is willing to sacrifice herself for Joan's self-realisation. The difficulty about self-sacrifice, Hall seems to indicate, is that it may entail living vicariously through others. Victims may turn into parasites; as Elizabeth tells Joan in a letter announcing her engagement to Lawrence Benson:

'I lived for you, for your work, your success; I lived in you, in your present, in your future which I told myself would be my future too. Oh! my dear, how I built on you; and I thought I had dug the foundations so deep that no waves or tempests could destroy them'. (*UL*, 260)

When Joan attempts to prevent Elizabeth's final departure, she employs strategies which resemble Mrs Ogden's, and she is described in the predatory imagery which has characterised descriptions of Mrs Ogden. "When she broke away there was one tentacle more tenacious than all the rest; it clung to her until she cut it through", Richard Benson tells Joan of her relationship with Elizabeth, "and that was you, who were trying unconsciously to make her a victim of your own circumstances" (*UL*, 301).

The final scene of conflict between Mrs Ogden and Elizabeth occurs when Joan has resolved that she and Elizabeth will move to London in spite of Mrs Ogden's demands. On the morning of her intended departure Mrs Ogden insidiously revives Joan's childhood memories of her; she dresses up in clothes associated with Joan's childhood:

She was all in grey; a soft pearly grey, the colour of dove's feathers. Her hair was carefully piled, high on her head, and blended in softness and shine with the grey of her dress; she must have bathed her eyes, for they

looked bright and almost young. She came forward, stretching out her arms. (UL, 258)

It is at this point that Joan renounces all possibility of independence from her mother, the unresolved, hesitant ego boundaries between mother and daughter merge into a shared infantile state. Joan tells Elizabeth that she will never leave home and Elizabeth gazes with despair at Joan and her mother 'standing hand in hand, like two children' (UL, 258). The identities of each have collapsed into an infancy which seems to be intended by Hall as an indictment of female dependency. Submissive motherhood proves so difficult to resist because its helplessness requires chivalry.

After the final break with Elizabeth nineteen years pass before the reader again sees Joan, who has spent her life caring for her mother. Joan has been defeated in her struggle for single independence and defeat has wrought physical change. She is aging and emotionally timid, she suffers from neuralgia and the veins in her legs are swelling:

... there was no joy in waking in the mornings; on the contrary, she had grown to dread the pulling up of the blind, because her eyes felt sensitive [...] her brain was littered with little things [...] She had long since ceased to care for study in any form, even serious books wearied her; if she read now it was novels of the lightest kind, and she really preferred magazines. (UL, 268)

If Joan's choice of fiction is a measure of her moral well-being, her preference for undemanding and easy literature indicates how far she has moved from autonomy and self-respect; she enjoys the same sort of reading matter, which neither tests her intellect nor challenges her circumstances, as Virginia Madden, one of the phalanx of broken, unhappy spinsters in *The Odd Women*. Joan is a shadow of her former articulate self and within the narrative of *The Unlit Lamp* Radclyffe Hall has created a disturbing and unusual story of female powerlessness and the misuse of female power.

A significant contrast between Joan and the 'new' single woman occurs near *The Unlit Lamp's* conclusion: Joan's cropped dull hair and shabby and unfashionable tailored dress are commented upon by two modern single women. As the women watch Joan in a hotel lobby, their masculine appearance is unambiguously projected as a sign of liberty and competence. They are:

Active, aggressively intelligent women, not at all self-conscious in their tailor-made clothes, not ashamed of their cropped hair; women who did

things well, important things [...] smart, neatly put together women, looking like well-bred young men. (UL, 284)

They describe Joan cuttingly as a "funny old thing with short grey hair" (UL, 284) but recognise her as a forerunner, a pioneer of the freedom they now enjoy. Joan overhears their conversation and realises the irony of her existence: her eagerness to conform has resulted in her peculiarity, hers is an unrealised liberty and her condition is anachronistic in a world she has no hope of entering. She has been unable to break from childhood; her mother still refers to her as a girl, although she is now forty-three:

... she, Joan Ogden, was the forerunner who had failed, the pioneer who had got left behind, the prophet who had feared his own prophecies. These others had gone forward, some of them released by the war, others who had always been free-lances, and if the world was not quite ready for them yet [...] if they were not all as happy as they might be, still they were at least brave, whereas she had been a coward, conquered by circumstances. (UL, 284)

Towards the close of the narrative, the figure of Joan fades. Mrs Ogden dies in her sleep and Joan is forced to sell her house and possessions. In order to support herself, a challenge that she is unqualified in every sense to face, she becomes companion-nurse to a distant mad relation. His emotional and intellectual development were arrested by an accident in childhood and Joan must spend her remaining years attempting to appease him. Joan's imbecilic relative can be taken as an ironic double for Joan herself, who could never leave her mother and had to stretch out her girlhood far beyond its natural span. There will never be any outlet for Joan's self-realisation and she is still acquiescing in the set of values which her mother used to dominate her: she is really and figuratively the companion of a sort of madness.

In *The Well of Loneliness* Stephen Gordon's mother, Lady Anna, also restricts her daughter's individuality. However, whereas in *The Unlit Lamp* the mother and daughter quarrel over issues of female autonomy, in *The Well of Loneliness* Stephen and her mother quarrel about Stephen's sexuality. Furthermore, Stephen's alienation from Lady Anna is more generally representative of the split between the figure of the lesbian and the heterosexual woman. The spinster of *The Unlit Lamp* who, under the influence of a diffuse feminism, wars with submissive womanhood over the right to self-fulfil, becomes the lesbian of *The Well of Loneliness*, whose adversary is her physical self. Stephen tells her mother, "It's my face, something's wrong with my face", to which her mother replies in the negative as "she turned away quickly to hide her

expression" (*WL*, 71). Stephen's oddity is thus physical; her dresses do not fit and she would rather wear suits. All of this is understood to be because Stephen is a man locked within a woman's body. Hall makes Anna Gordon's fear of her daughter explicit. When she says goodnight to the adolescent Stephen, she minimises any physical contact between them: 'So that the girl should not wake and kiss back, [Anna] [...] would kiss her lightly and quickly on the forehead (*WL*, 87). It is through her mother that Stephen is rejected; Anna voices the most prohibitive and negative responses to inversion in the narrative. Stephen inappropriately resembles her father rather than her mother; any reproduction of the female role is impossible. When Stephen is exposed as a lesbian, Anna is keen to vilify Stephen and admits to having felt physical repulsion towards her daughter, as she tells her: "now I know that my instinct was right; it was you who were unnatural, not I" (*WL*, 203). The lesbian and heterosexual woman's view of love is explicitly contrasted, as Anna tells Stephen: "And you have presumed to use the word love in connection with this -- with these lusts of your body; these unnatural cravings [...] I have loved your father, and your father loved me. That was love" (*WL*, 201). To which Stephen responds in defiance:

'As my father loved you, I loved. As a man loves a woman, that was how I loved -- protectively, like my father [...] It made me feel terribly strong [...] and gentle [...] I gave all and asked nothing in return -- I just went on hopelessly loving'. (*WL*, 201)

Stephen must constantly petition her mother to accept her sexuality; such acceptance is fundamental to her right to exist as a lesbian, while Anna's response typifies the larger social response to the lesbian in its insistence upon banishment and exclusion.

Singleness and the Self in the Struggle with Maternity in *Mary Olivier*

As a novel which centres on the mother-daughter relationship, *The Unlit Lamp* closely resembles May Sinclair's novel *Mary Olivier* (1919), with which it can most fruitfully be compared. The subject of both novels is a single woman's quest for self-identity in the context of issues of reproduction and maternity. Joan Ogden's struggle to be a doctor rather than a daughter and Mary Olivier's quarrels with her mother over the right to study Greek both flow from the same source. Both heroines are trying to find new values and their struggles are marked by feelings of guilt, doubt and anxiety. Joan and Mary feel they are different from

other women, see that difference makes life more difficult for them, but at least clearly recognise their right to individuality. They see the life options represented by their mothers as stultifying; and both heroines operate between two sets of polarities: dependency and enclosure versus independence, vocation and liberty. Neither Sinclair nor Hall identify singleness with failure. Both recognise that such indentification is part of the common social construction of spinsterhood, the relativity or dependency of which makes it appear such a poor option.

C. S. Franks suggests *Mary Olivier* as a possible model for *The Unlit Lamp*:

If any single book served as a model for *The Unlit Lamp* (although the conclusions of the two novels differ profoundly), it was surely *Mary Olivier*, for Sinclair was one of the few Georgian authors to centre a work of fiction upon the intricacies of a mother-daughter relationship.⁸⁶

Certainly, Sinclair and Hall were friends during the twenties and met frequently in literary circles during this time -- both were members of the international writers' club PEN. Sinclair was unmarried, a feminist, an ex-suffragette, who had worked in the Field Ambulance Corps in Belgium during the war. *Mary Olivier* was intended to be a semi-autobiographical novel. It deals with the plight of a single woman as she refuses to conform to the more conventional female role involving marriage and reproduction. May Sinclair anticipates later feminists in her stress on the importance of women's mothering for the family structure and her emphasis on the socialising and nurturing as well as the reproductive role. In this view of motherhood women are often the props and perpetuators of patriarchy. According to Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering*: 'women's mothering is a central and defining feature of the social organization of gender and is implicated in the construction and reproduction of male dominance itself.'⁸⁷ May Sinclair recognised that the Angel in the House was no spectre: sentimental, dreamy and refined she may be, but hers was a stubborn presence throughout the vicissitudes of the spinster. Sinclair believed that domesticity and work were incompatible and welcomed the suffragette movement as a release from the bonds of domesticity, believing that the franchise was at the cutting-edge of female self-expression. Sinclair expressed these convictions in a signed statement entitled 'How it Strikes a Mere Novelist' which appeared in *Votes for Women* in December 1908:

⁸⁶ C. S. Franks, *Beyond the Well of Loneliness: The Fiction of Radclyffe Hall* (England: Avebury Publishing Company, 1982), p. 37.

⁸⁷ *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 9.

The coming generation will, I believe, witness a finer art, a more splendid literature [...] The Nineteenth Century was an age of material cocksureness, and of spiritual doubt. The Twentieth Century will be the age of spiritual certainty -- And this thing, this desire of all the ages, this spiritual certainty will, I believe, come through the coming revolution, by the release of long captive forces, by the breathing in among us of the spirit of Life, the genius of enfranchised womanhood.⁸⁸

Sinclair's own life was characterised by a struggle between sacrifice and iconoclasm. She was the only female child in a family of five brothers, her father was alcoholic and, following the separation of her parents, Sinclair remained with her mother. Sinclair's mother encouraged her brothers to regard themselves as entitled to all the privileges of masculinity and she constantly sought to provide for their needs. She was oppressively gentle and named by her offspring 'the Lamb', exercising her will, however, to keep Sinclair religiously orthodox. Her effort to restrict Sinclair's interests to pursuits which were passive, 'feminine' and unintellectual enraged her daughter. Gladys Stern mentions in a letter of 1919 to May Sinclair that Sinclair had described how she had suffered a nervous breakdown caused by the pressure of attempting to write in the same room as her mother⁸⁹.

Sinclair remained single and fulfilled her familial duties until early middle age, caring for her aging mother until her death in 1901 heralded Sinclair's own freedom. Sidney Janet Kaplan describes *Mary Olivier* as 'a protest novel' in a social sense, 'that is, it protests the conditions which force talented women to live empty lives'.⁹⁰

Sinclair was influenced by the new science of psychoanalysis (she helped to establish the first clinic in London to apply Freudian methods to the treatment of mental disorders) and the narrative of *Mary Olivier* draws on Freudian concepts of repression and sublimation. To some extent the heroine Mary Olivier's struggle as a single woman is constructed by means of a Freudian apparatus. In her attempt to achieve self-fulfilment, she manages through sublimation to express her energies in music, poetry and mystical experiences of nature. Mary is also victimised by the institution of the family, which constructs her gender as self-sacrificing, domestic and dependent. Sinclair explores the effects of the mother-daughter relationship on the structure of female personality. She uses much of the same symbolism as Radclyffe Hall to question dependent motherhood. Sinclair also

⁸⁸ May Sinclair, 'How it Strikes a Mere Novelist', *Votes for Women* (December 1908).

⁸⁹ quoted in Theophilis E. M. Boll, *Miss May Sinclair: Novelist* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1973), p. 27.

⁹⁰ Sydney Janet Kaplan, "'Featureless Freedom' or Ironic Submission: Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair" *College English* 32 (1971), p. 915.

uses stream-of-consciousness techniques to convey Mary's sexual longings and resentment of her mother. *Mary Olivier* is an attempt to explore the subconscious mind and in it Sinclair struck a new style in the 'stream-of-consciousness' genre. Her contemporary R. Brimley Johnson aligned Sinclair with other modernist writers:

They are conspicuously of the moment: keen to seize, and eager to present, the manifold currents of thought, experience and philosophy, that make up the big wave of mental activity through which we have been hurried by war and its consequences.⁹¹

As a modernist woman writer, Sinclair was engaged in a period of experimentation and reaction against some of the modes of Victorian fiction. Writing during the flurry of literary experimentation of the early decades of the twentieth-century, Sinclair was aware of the direction the novel was taking and helped create the critical vocabulary to assess it; she first used the term 'stream-of-consciousness' in a literary context when she applied William James's concept to Dorothy Richardson's fiction in a 1918 review.⁹² Richardson preceded Virginia Woolf in her use of this innovatory narrative method to investigate the feminine mind, developing a concept of 'feminine consciousness'. Both Richardson and Woolf sought to explore the 'feminine consciousness' for its own sake, and stressed the unique quality of 'feminine' perception as opposed to 'masculine' realism. In contrast, Sinclair chose to manipulate third, second and first-person narrative voice in an attempt to make contact with the 'reality' of her characters' lives.

In *Mary Olivier*, Mary seeks mental freedom above all else. She is intellectual and rebellious and her creativity is to some extent the outcome of the suppression of her desires. She constantly struggles to protect at least partial freedom: 'ecstasy and [...] happiness had one quality in common; they belonged to some part of you that was free. A you that had no hereditary destiny; that had got out of the net, or had never been caught in it'.⁹³

While Mary's brothers receive an education for public life, Mary is trained in domesticity. She employs various means to gain access to books, and the

⁹¹ R. Brimley Johnson, *Some Contemporary Novelists (Women)* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), p. 7.

⁹² May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson' *The Egoist* 5 (April 1918), 57-59.

⁹³ May Sinclair, *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919), (repr. London: Virago, 1980), p. 312. All subsequent references to *Mary Olivier* will be taken from the Virago edition.

tedium of household tasks is alleviated by browsing through Kant and Hegel, while Plato and Spinoza protect her from the religion promulgated in the home.

But the struggle of wills between Mary and her mother is the central drama of the novel. Mrs Olivier holds the family within her power through a mixture of gentleness and transparent suffering when she is disobeyed. The novel is written against the now threatened model of motherhood which sanctifies woman as the household angel or queen of the hearth and which Sinclair identified as a characteristic of oppression. Mrs Olivier extols submission as a virtue which should irradiate women's lives. Sinclair links Mrs Olivier's role as an advocate of female submission to her maternal function. Mary desires the love of her mother and yet deeply resents her control:

Her thoughts about her mother went up and down. Mamma was not helpless, she was not gentle. She was not really like a wounded bird. She was powerful and rather cruel. You could only appease her with piles of hemmed sheets and darned stockings. If you didn't take care she would get hold of you and never rest till she had broken you, or turned and twisted you to her own will. She would say it was God's will. She would think it was God's will. (MO, 124)

While May Sinclair was exposing Mary's oppressive mother, Virginia Woolf was assaulting the Angel in the House. Woolf believed that women's maternal role largely conditioned the place of women in culture and so chose to confront not society or the family generally but more specifically the figure of maternity, the Angel in the House. Woolf claims that the shadow of this iconic figure persistently falls upon her pages, the perfume of her purity stifles perception and so Woolf has repeatedly to drive her out of her prose:

... whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her.⁹⁴

The Angel's traditional contribution consisted of the emotional and moral guidance she provided for women and this contribution is principally made in her role as wife and mother. Thus female liberation and fictional matricide came to seem to be linked. *Mary Olivier* is the classic example of the 'her or me' struggle between

⁹⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women', *Collected Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), volume 2., p. 286.

daughter and mother. Mrs Olivier's power derives from gentleness and humility, but it is murderous, nevertheless, as Mary explains to her brother Mark:

'Ever since I began to grow up I felt there was something about Mamma that would kill me if I let it. I've had to fight for every single thing I've ever wanted. It's awful fighting her, when she's so sweet and gentle. But it's either that or go under [...] She doesn't know she hates me [...] And of course she loved me when I was little. She'd love me now if I stayed little, so that she could do what she liked with me [...] It's your real self she hates [...] Selves are sacred. You ought to adore them.' (MO, 249-250)

A common onslaught on the ideal of the wife and mother can then be identified in Radclyffe Hall, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf; they share a belief that self-effacing motherhood need no longer be even a desirable model for women.

Sinclair's later novel *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1920)⁹⁵ depicts the inner life of a spinster who becomes so immersed in the practice of self-denial that she lacks any individuality. Sinclair denies Harriett Frean 'the ebullience required to forge an independent life for herself or to rebel against her mother's morality. For her the sensation of moral rectitude proves so appealing, that she indulges in it at the cost of veracity. The symbols which May Sinclair uses throughout the narrative debunk the concept of self-sacrifice; submissive service to others may lead to the greatest of wrongs. At the beginning of the novel Harriet's childhood doll, Ida, is made to figure Harriet's authentic self and Harriett is expected to discard Ida in favour of the new doll with which her parents present her:

Ida, the wax doll [...] had real person's eyes made of glass and real eyelashes and hair. Little finger and toe-nails were marked in the wax [...] But Emily, the new birthday doll, smelt of composition and of gum and hay; she had flat, painted hair and eyes, and a foolish look on her face [...] Although Papa had given her Emily, she could never feel for her the real, loving love she felt for Ida. (HF, 5-6)

Harriett does not want any other children to handle Ida, and yet her mother forces her to allow others to play with the doll. Ida is the self that Harriett wants to preserve as her own and by inflicting polite renunciation upon her, Harriett's mother causes her to consider her 'self' dead: 'When it was all over she took the wax doll and put her in the long narrow box she had come in, and buried her in the bottom drawer in the spare room wardrobe (HF, 7). Harriett buries this

⁹⁵ May Sinclair *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1920), (repr. London: Virago, 1980). All subsequent references to *Harriett Frean* will be taken from the Virago edition.

representative of herself and accepts the parental choice of a new doll, Emily, as its substitute. In the description of Emily it becomes clear that Harriett's substitute self is false, domesticated and made inauthentic by her mother.

In the years that follow Harriett loses the capacity to have feelings of her own and glides into her mother's consciousness. She becomes incapable of differentiating herself from her parents, even to the point of refusing to marry. Harriett never becomes a self with feelings of her own. When she is sixty-eight years old she is proud to learn she has cancer, rejoicing in sharing the illness that caused her mother's death. She tries to reinstate her mother's personality through the fibre of her pain: 'Harriett felt nothing but a strange, solemn excitement and exaltation. She was raised to her mother's eminence in pain. With every stab she would live again in her mother. She had what her mother had' (*HF*, 178).

Throughout *Mary Olivier*, on the other hand, mother and daughter contest the daughter's right to self. Mrs Olivier wants Mary to work at tasks that are sanctioned as 'feminine'. Sinclair conveys a kind of a symbolic anguish each time Mary sews for her mother:

Mary went on darning. The coarse wool of the socks irritated her fingers. It caught on a split nail, setting her teeth on edge. If you went on darning for ever -- if you went on darning -- Mamma would be pleased. (*MO*, 110)

It becomes increasingly apparent that what Mary fears is not simply absorption in the identity of her mother, but maternity itself as the death of identity and self. To have an active self is unfeminine, Mrs Olivier tells her, femininity can best be fulfilled through passivity. Mary protests: 'Your self? Your self? Why should you forget it? [...] They would kill it if you let them [...] would it always have to stoop and cringe before people hushing its own voice, hiding its own gesture?' (*MO*, 168) Mary's mother uses fiction to support her teaching. She denies Mary books but endlessly repeats one story:

Mamma would tell her a story, always the same story, going on and on, about the family of ten children who lived in the farm by the forest. There were seven boys and three girls. The six youngest boys worked on the farm with their father [...] and the eldest boy worked in the garden with his mother, and the three girls worked in the house. They could cook and make butter and cheese, and bake bread; and even the youngest little girl could knit and sew. (*MO*, 70)

The 'feminine' values which Mary's mother seeks to implant are viewed by Sinclair as destructive; the cluster of feminine character traits which Mrs Olivier embodies

prove to be socially dangerous to the single woman. The milieu of the home allows the young girl no direct expression of desire or self. Mary is taught to express herself through family ties, while her brothers are judged to be independent individuals. For a girl to desire books is considered wilful and arrogant, and Mary reads by stealth and subterfuge:

The big puce-coloured books stood in a long row in the bottom shelf behind her father's chair. Her heart thumped when she gripped the volumes that contained the forbidden knowledge of the universe [...] When she was away from the books she liked to think of them standing there on the hidden shelf, waiting for her. The pages of 'Pantheism' and 'Spinoza' were white and clean, and she had noticed how they had stuck together. Nobody had opened them, she was the first, the only one who knew and cared. (*MO*, 101)

Mary is grateful that Kant is written in German so that his 'secret was hidden behind the thick bars of the letters' (*MO*, 208) and she compares volumes of Hegel to strong ships which will carry her away to dangerous adventure (*MO*, 277).

The relationship between mother and daughter is partly depicted by May Sinclair in psychoanalytic terms characterising both the desire and the resentment in single women's responses to femininity. Femininity in the guise of maternity is, after all, a component part of the process which socialises Mary to devalue her desires. Mary observes her mother's response to the prospect of her daughter studying Greek:

If you talked about it her mouth buttoned up tight, and her eyes blinked, and she began tapping with her foot [...] There was something queer about learning Greek. Mamma did not actually forbid it; but she said it must not be done in lesson time or sewing time, or when people could see you doing it, lest they should think you were showing off. You could see that she didn't believe you could learn Greek and that she wouldn't like it if you did. (*MO*, 78)

Sinclair clearly intends the reader to see Mrs Olivier in an unpleasant light and Mrs Olivier serves as a personification of unjust moral conventionality. It is also the influence of conventional opinion that leads Mrs Olivier to pretend her husband has not degenerated into alcoholism in the course of their marriage. The reader is encouraged to infer that Emilius Olivier, Mary's father, is a weak and malleable figure, but Sinclair also indicates that his difficulties stem from Mrs Olivier's inability show him any genuine affection. She encourages his sons to view him as threatening their access to her:

Every morning Mark and Dank and Roddy knocked at Mamma's door, and if Papa was there he called out, 'Go away, you little beasts!' If he was not there she said, 'Come in, darlings!' and they climbed up the big bed into Papa's place and said 'Good morning, mamma!' (*MO*, 8)

Mary's love for her father is also diverted to her mother. For Mary too Emilius seems to act as a barrier between her and her mother: 'When Papa was away the lifted curtain spread like a tent over Mary's cot, shutting her in with Mamma. When he was there the drawn curtain hung straight down from the head of the bed' (*MO*, 8).

Mrs Olivier enlists religion to instruct Mary in the duties of women; the religious virtues of humility and duty to others support Mrs Olivier's struggle to dominate Mary's individuality. Mary pictures her mother's insistence that she learn her catechism as an attempt to stuff her mind with grey wool:

'Don't look like that,' her mother said, 'as if your wits were wool-gathering.'

'Wool?' she could see herself smiling at her mother, disagreeably. Wool-gathering. Gathering wool; wool flying about; hanging in the air and choking you. Clogging your mind. Old grey wool out of pew cushions that people had sat on for centuries, full of dirt [...] Wool, spun out, wound round you, woven in a net. You were tangled and strangled in a net of unclean wool [...] You would have to cut and tug and fight your way out. (*MO*, 113)

Sinclair reports Mary's thoughts in the second-person, using also a kind of stream-of-consciousness. Thus the reader is made to share Mary's panicky sense of being trapped. Mary's spinster aunt, Lavinia, has met with a similar fate. Her beliefs are outlawed by the family: she is forbidden to discuss or ever fully express her unitarian principles. Mary realises that the part of her character that has been shaped by her mother can never be free. In a recurrent dream of searching the family home for her brother, only to find a dead child, Mary visualises her dependent self as the dead child:

The part that cared was not free. Not free. Prisoned in her mother's bedroom with the yellow furniture that remembered. Her mother's face that remembered. Always the same, vexed, disapproving, remembering face. And her own heart sinking at each beat, dragging remembrance. A dead child, remembering and returning. (*MO*, 170)

Mary's brothers force their sister to conform to Mrs Olivier's will. They guiltily realise that some member of the family must care for their mother but happily are convinced this kind of task should fall upon the girl of the family. The

'humble' tasks of care of relatives and work within the home comply with notions of female industry and righteousness. Mary explains to her brother that she must fight an aspect of herself: "'The bit of me that claws on to her [mother] and can't get away. My body'll stay here and take care of her all her life, but my self will have got away'" (*MO*, 252). What Mary calls her 'self' is her spiritual aspect which she distinguishes from the mere physical expression of her life, her body, which will fulfil her duties to her mother. The escape of her self, and thus any degree of liberty, depends, then, upon the division of her personality.

Mary learns to counter the values of her mother, to realise they cannot be more important than the preservation of her self. The novel then considers issues similar to those raised by other women writers of the period. Writing in the twenties R. Brimley Johnson aligned Sinclair with the new movement of women writers:

They recognise much tragedy arising from what they believe essential to individual freedom and development. Whether the home, the family, self-sacrifice and the other Victorian ideals may ultimately survive, we cannot perhaps yet determine; but they have been rudely knocked off their pedestal by a wave of youthful impatience and indignation.⁹⁶

Personal development might necessitate the rejection of the maternal ideal. Virginia Woolf closely followed the interaction between female creativity and maternity in her essays. Examining the experience of past women writers she observed that childbirth was in any case a dangerous ordeal which often resulted in death as well as suffering. As a formative life experience and symbol of Victorian domestic heroism childbirth proved rough and bloody. Woolf had only to recall the lives of feminist predecessors to find paradigms for the incompatibility between intellectual creativity and reproduction: the agonising decline of Charlotte Brontë during pregnancy;⁹⁷ the death of Mary Wollstonecraft in parturition; and even Sara Coleridge who 'wished that she could be given three years respite from childbearing'. Her wish proved futile, and her children made demands upon her health and hindered her writing.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ R. Brimley Johnson, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Woolf has assumed, like many other commentators, that Charlotte Brontë was pregnant at the time of her death, but Tom Winnifrith points out, in his biography of Charlotte Brontë, that there is no firm evidence that Brontë died because of the effect of severe morning sickness rather than of tuberculosis, although Brontë did suspect that she was pregnant at the time of her death. For further information see Tom Winnifrith, *A New Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 117.

⁹⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967), volume 3, p. 225. In her analysis Woolf's views bear some similarity to those espoused by many earlier Victorian commentators, many of whom held that writing fiction was one of the most acceptable outlets

Adrienne Rich traces the unusual prevalence of acts of matrophobia in early twentieth-century women's writing:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individual and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.⁹⁹

According to Judith Kegan Gardiner in her article 'A Wake for Mother', women's relationship to mothers may be described as a reverse Oedipus myth. In the Oedipal scenario the son murders the father in order to replace him whereas in the female version of this myth the daughter must kill her mother in order to avoid taking her place.¹⁰⁰

Mary Olivier focuses on the single woman's individual development through her own conscious, informed and responsible choices. In practical terms her singleness is the source, and in figurative terms the metaphor for the distinctive strengths and the urge to selfhood that mark women's independence. Sinclair's immediate aim was to make her readers question the assumption that a woman who had never married must experience an enormous sense of loss.

But, as a single woman, Mary must avoid the inappropriate role models for spinsterhood of her maiden aunts, Charlotte and Lavinia (Lavvy). Aunt Lavvy is a unitarian convert who can only enter Mary's parental home conditionally, if she

for the energies of the spinster. However, there was the occasional suggestion that there was a fundamental incompatibility between aspiring single women writers and their ability to write good fiction. The full expression of femininity through maternity and marriage made women better writers, according to such commentators, as only married women would be able to fully represent the workings of the heart in their fiction. A reviewer of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Ruth* (1853) suggests that the spinster novelist is constantly in danger of being too 'abstract' or 'morbid' or even 'immodest' in her fiction and notes of writers such as Jane Austen or Maria Edgeworth that 'their excellence lies always away from the depths of the most passionate human affections' and consists mostly of 'accuracy' of expression. The reviewer advises single women to seek other, more suitable, occupations: 'Endeavour to find for your gifts other employments. Precisely because your lot is a solitary one, do not make it more so by literary labours [...] you will be exposed to unsex, and unhumanize yourself by degrees [...] To you belongs the daily working, the drudgery of all charitable institutions. The adoptive motherhood of the school may be yours, yours the adoptive sisterhood of the Nurses' Institution, of the simple district-visitor.' Anonymous, 'Ruth: A Novel', *North British Review* 19 (May-August 1853), 151-74, (p. 171). Even as late as 1912 Rebecca West suggests that spinsters cannot make good writers of fiction as they are inevitably sentimentalists. Therefore, West concludes, 'what is the good of all these spinsters?' Rebecca West, 'Spinsters and Art', *Freewoman* (11 July 1912), 147-9, (p. 149).

⁹⁹ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born, Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 236.

¹⁰⁰ Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'A Wake for Mother: The Maternal Deathbed in Women's Fiction' *Feminist Studies* 4, 2 (June 1978).

refrains from mentioning her nonconformist religious beliefs. Taken as a whole her life is dominated by what is traditionally supposed to be the chasm in the spinster's life between desire and its fulfilment. She is a partial representation of what Mary becomes: the family stand-by with eccentric opinions. She nurses the psychologically unstable Aunt Charlotte and seems half-ashamed of her religious convictions, secretly practicing her religion. Mary anticipates her fate as a maiden aunt: 'You would be like Aunt Lavvy. You would live in Morse with Mamma for years and years as Aunt Lavvy had lived with Grandmamma [...] No; when you were forty-five you would go like Aunt Charlotte (*MO*, 291).

Mary is haunted by the fear of inheriting the insanity which has afflicted her Aunt Charlotte. Charlotte is a victim of the patriarchal family, which stigmatises the 'oddness' of independent womanhood and relegates the single woman to an empty life. Mary's mother repeatedly presents Charlotte as a warning to Mary to control her own 'dangerous' propensities toward passion. Mrs Olivier actively discourages Mary's relationships with men, hinting that Mary obsessively fantasises their interest in her. Sinclair implies that Charlotte's neurosis is the end result of the familial control of her desires, which were considered inappropriately direct. Mary's first view of Charlotte is in a photograph in the family album:

The other people in The Album were sulky, and wouldn't look at you. The gentlemen made cross faces at somebody who wasn't there; the ladies hung their heads and looked down at their crinolines. Aunt Charlotte hung her head too, but her eyes, tilted up straight under her forehead, pointed at you. And between her stiff black curls she was smiling -- smiling. (*MO*, 10-11).

The price that Charlotte must pay for the directness of her gaze in the photograph, and for her inability to contain her sense of self within respectable forms is that she is considered to be unruly and hysterical. Charlotte's restlessness is deemed unfeminine and irrational. The family are scandalised by Charlotte's open pursuit of whatever she desires and try to isolate her from men and society. As a result Charlotte becomes obsessed with the forbidden.

Aunt Charlotte does suffer from sexual neurosis; she exaggerates male attention to her. In her madness she is haunted by the ghosts of romance, writes love letters to passing strangers, sets wedding dates to men who are scarcely aware of her existence: 'she had lived all her life in a dream of loving and being loved, a dream that began with clergymen and ended with the piano-tuner and the man who did the clocks' (*MO*, 288).

Charlotte is fortyish, unmarried and hysterical, and Sinclair does relate her madness not only to the female condition but also to her marital status. Sinclair portrays Charlotte, in keeping with Freudian responses to female singleness, as a neurotic, sexually deprived spinster. She is fascinated by romance and has a predilection for sexual or reproductive symbols. She keeps miniature dolls that she refers to as her babies and that she gives away to Mary whenever she convinces herself that she is about to be married:

... there was a matchbox, and inside the match-box there was a china doll no bigger than your finger. It had blue eyes and black hair and no clothes on [...] 'That's Aunt Charlotte's little baby [...] I'm going to be married and I shan't want it any more'. (MO, 37)

The dolls are symbols of the frustrations of Charlotte's life and she willingly parts with them when she feels she is about to escape.

Eventually, Charlotte's madness becomes violent and Mary overhears Aunt Charlotte going berserk and being physically removed to an institution. She leaves only a piece of white tulle lying on the garden path as a reminder of her existence. The discarded shred of wedding veil functions as a reminder of the repressed sexuality of the spinster. Charlotte's actions hint at connections with *Jane Eyre* (1847). Bertha tears up Jane Eyre's wedding veil in what functions as a warning about the nature of marriage itself. Similarly, in *Great Expectations* (1861), Miss Havisham's ruined wedding-dress not only commemorates the moment when she was jilted by her lover, but is also intended as a warning to all lovers. Sinclair wrote an introduction to a reissue of Mrs Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë in 1908. She also wrote her own biography of the Brontë sisters, *The Three Brontës*, and introductions to the Everyman editions of their novels between 1908 and 1914. Sinclair felt that the most original element in Charlotte Brontë's novels was the psychological analysis of the inner lives of women, in particular those women who attempted, despite the odds, to create viable lives for themselves.

Mary Olivier contains obvious links with *Jane Eyre*: Sinclair's uses the Brontë motif of the madwoman in the attic -- Aunt Charlotte is kept in the attic rooms of Mary's childhood home, after Mary's family move to Yorkshire. Both writers use the incarceration of the woman in the attic as a metaphor for the repression of aberrant womanhood: the habitual cultural response to it is to restrain it and rob it of any public means of expression. Both Bertha Mason and Aunt Charlotte can be read as representing an alienated female consciousness with madness as a kind of half-justified opposition to submission.

Mary Olivier sublimates her passions into poetry and music; she plays the piano without touching its keys and silently composes poems that seem to float companionably around her in the air. Such mute occupations are Mary's only means of resistance to her family. Her protracted residence in the family home involves Mary in a kind of martyrdom; she sleeps in a room in the shape of a cross, which resembles a nun's cell.

Mary is briefly engaged to an elderly suitor, Maurice Jourdain, whom she eventually realises she does not love. Maurice is initially attracted to Mary when she is a child and dislikes the scholarly, strong-willed woman that she develops into:

'And she was pretty too. She had lots of hair, hanging down her back. Curling [...] And they take her away from me and I wait three years for her. She knew I was waiting. And when I come back to her she won't look at me. She sits on the fender and stares at the fire. She wears horrible black clothes [...] She goes and cuts her hair all off'. (*MO*, 213)

Although she recognises that she and Maurice are incompatible, Mary becomes aware of her sexual desires: 'She didn't want him. But she wanted Somebody. Somebody. Somebody. He had left her with this ungovernable want. Somebody. If you lay very still and shut your eyes he would come to you' (*MO*, 226). Sinclair's emphasis on the erotic rights of her spinster heroine represents a hiatus, a break in continuity with Victorian depictions of spinsters. Previously, in narratives that dealt with the lives of single women, the sexual longings of the heroine were heavily draped in metaphor and euphemism; spinsterhood and celibacy were inseparable for the middle-class woman, and, as we have seen, this reached its political apex within the militant celibate discourse of the suffragette movement. But Mary Olivier cannot relate to the celibate ecstasies which other single female characters urge upon her. The recently jilted Miss Wright sings 'Cleansing Fires' at a social function, advising Mary that 'as gold is refined in the fi-er,/ So a heart is tried by pain':

She sang it to comfort you [...] Her head quivered slightly as she shook the notes out of her throat in ecstasy [...] She was sorry for you; but she was like Aunt Lavvy; she thought it was a good thing to be jilted; for then you were purified; your soul was set free; it went up, writhing and aspiring, in a white flame to God. (*MO*, 223)

Mary steadfastly continues into middle-age to care for her aging mother. She terminates her only physically and emotionally fulfilling love affair because she cannot abandon her mother. Freedom arrives only with the death of her

mother, by which time she has realised that writing can offer her far more happiness than marriage. In one sense, Mary seems to fulfil the role her mother had urged upon her from childhood; as a resident spinster in the family home who tends to the needs of others. It is also possible that her mother functions as an excuse for Mary's avoidance of marriage. Thus, to a very limited extent, it may be that Mrs Olivier protects Mary from the need to marry, albeit unintentionally, as well as oppressing her in a different way.

When Mary finally enjoys success as a writer, following years of service in the family home, her success comes almost as a reward for self-sacrifice. After all May Sinclair appears to establish, perhaps unintentionally, a correspondence between Mary's freedom and her years of self-denial. The novel's position on female self-sacrifice is finally equivocal.

Mary derives true peace of mind from the solitude she has earned and Sinclair seems to imply that human relationships may actually inhibit the development of the inner life of the independent woman. Mary at last enjoys a new spiritual consciousness:

She had never been aware of it before; she had only thought about and about it, about Substance, the Thing-in-itself, Reality, God [...] She made it out more and more. For twenty-three years something had come between her and reality. She could see what it was now. She had gone through life wanting things, wanting people, clinging to the thought of them, not able to keep off them and let them go. (*MO*, 378)

Although she gives Mary an active female sexuality, Sinclair shows that Mary's attainment of true freedom is not necessarily dependent on the expression of her sexual needs. Sexual fulfilment is still not the main issue with heroines such as Mary, her longings are still primarily for books and rooms to read them in, not for lovers. Mary's femaleness becomes one of the mind, which is removed almost from its connection with the body; and the happy result is paradoxically a sense of full being and the vindication of personal freedom. Mary will not become an unfulfilled spinster like Aunt Lavinia or Aunt Charlotte, she is released from the determinism of heredity and environment. Nor is Mary's realisation of self dependent on a network of social affection: 'If you looked back on any perfect happiness you saw that it had not come from the people or things you thought it had come from, but from somewhere inside yourself' (*MO*, 378).

In *Mary Olivier*, May Sinclair works against the implication that single women are self-centred or unwomanly, if not deviant, in selecting goals other than those of sexual fulfilment or motherhood. The place of mothers in the female world was no longer assured by perpetual self-generation. Nor in spite of *Mary*

Olivier's equivocation, was self-effacement the condition of virtuous spinsterhood. Harriet Stanton Blatch observed during a visit to Britain in the early twentieth-century:

Throughout my stay in England I searched for, but could not find, the self-effacing spinster of former days. In her place was a capable woman, bright-eyed, happy. She was occupied and bustled at her work. She jumped on and off moving vehicles with the alertness if not the unconsciousness of the expert male [...] England was a world of women.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Blatch, Harriet Stanton, *The Mobilization of Woman Power* (1918), quoted by Nina Auerbach *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 162.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Loving Mirror: Spinsterhood and the Sororal Bond in Barbara Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle*

Barbara Pym's first novel *Some Tame Gazelle* (1950) uses its focus on the relationship between two spinster sisters to question the partial vision of a culture founded upon marital union. In a quiet way it provides a wider view of human relationships. Pym gives a central place in her fiction to single lives and unorthodox pairings, ironically challenging the sentiments which she expressed in a diary entry of June 1972 that: 'The position of the unmarried woman -- unless, of course, she is somebody's mistress, is of no interest whatsoever to the readers of modern fiction', although with characteristic optimism Pym asks if this is 'the beginning of a novel?'.¹ Pym may also be obliquely lamenting the relative failure of her own novels to gain wide popularity. Her perplexed view of modern fiction was compounded by the rejection of her fiction by publishers between 1963 and 1977. Pym deeply felt her failure: she observed that sixties publishing houses specialised in novels by 'men and Americans'.² As she puzzled over *The Naked Lunch* and *The Tropic of Cancer*, she tried desperately to rework her novel *An Unsuitable Attachment*. She writes to Philip Larkin:

... why is the material in a novel so recalcitrant? It ought to be easy when you think that you can do exactly as you like with these people and have absolute power to change them in any way you will. I like writing, but am rather depressed at future prospects for my sort of book. Once you said, I think, that not everybody wants to read books about Negro homosexuals. It seems appropriate that I am now reading James Baldwin's *Another Country* lent to me by a young friend. A 'powerful' very well-written book, but so upsetting -- one is really glad never to have had the chance of that kind of life.³

Pym's single women do not fit the female models normally valued by society and its fictions. In *Some Tame Gazelle* and more generally throughout her fiction

¹ quoted in Hazel Holt, *A Very Private Eye*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), p. 269.

² *A Very Private Eye*, p. 213.

³ *ibid.*, p. 226.

Pym concentrates upon the meaning of single lives. In Pym's unpublished 'Finnish novel' a young woman considers one of the phrases commonly used to describe spinsterhood, 'she never married', and reflects; 'Oh, the quiet finality of those words! It's like the shutting of a door. The very sound of them conjures up the whole of that woman's life'.⁴ Cultural patterns for single women's lives may be ridiculed by Pym, yet her protagonists do, on some level, continue to accept that such paradigms reflect what is expected of them. They often feel that cultural prescriptions about single life (miserable and unfulfilling as these may be), place a peculiar responsibility on them to perpetuate traditional models of the single life. Thus they devote themselves, for example, to selfless parish work and convey a seeming contentment with life, although they are still supposed to desire marriage.

The significance of *Some Tame Gazelle* is many-layered: in terms of theme, it treats the issue of single women's lives from Pym's perspective in the nineteen-thirties; in terms of Pym's own development as a writer, it anticipates her concern with the socially marginalised in her later fiction. Features of Pym's writing practice begin then to emerge in *Some Tame Gazelle*. The novel already displays the generosity of spirit and playful inventiveness which characterise her fiction and she begins here to invent the characters who circulate through her later fiction.

In *Some Tame Gazelle*, two middle-aged sisters, Harriet and Belinda Bede, share a house in a small rural village. The plot appears to hinge upon the marriage choices which the two sisters may still make, and Pym provides each with eligible suitors. And yet the novel ends with the sisters observing other people's marriages, their shared spinsterhood intact. Belinda and Harriet joyfully reaffirm their singleness against a backdrop of others' wedding vows. Pym firmly suggests that the lives of these spinsters are not solitary and loveless: their love for each other is profound and their companionship is affectionate.

Pym's ironic humour distances her from her subject matter and yet at the same time the novel is written from the vantage point of informed spinsterhood and can be connected with Pym's own reality as a single woman. Her reworking of spinsterhood shows remarkable detachment, humour and originality. Pym was only twenty-nine when she published this novel but already displays a tendency to self-describe, self-fictionalise. The mutual impulses to shape her life like a fiction and to translate her own life into fiction are already evident. In anticipation of her fate, she already chooses to satirise herself in correspondence as 'this so dull spinster':

⁴ quoted in Mary Strauss-Noll, 'Love and Marriage in the Novels' in *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, edited by Dale Salwak (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 72-87, (p. 77).

... which is like the old brown horse walking with a slow majestic dignity [...] But this spinster, this Barbara Mary Crampton Pym, she will be smiling to herself -- ha -- ha she will be saying inside. *But I have that within which passeth show* -- maybe she will be saying that, but she is a queer old horse, this old brown spinster, so I cannot forecast exactly what she will be saying.⁵

There is also something defensive about such an account of herself: self-parody may perhaps preempt the parodies of others.

Following her arrival at Oxford University in 1931 Pym filled her diaries with details of the relationship of a pair of fictional lovers, 'Sandra' and 'Lorenzo'. Pym's chosen persona, the glamorous and adventurous 'Sandra', (a name which she embroidered on the cushions of her room at St. Hilda's) was cast opposite the unresponsive object of her affections, 'Lorenzo', otherwise known as Henry Harvey, for whom Pym professed love throughout her Oxford years and whom she cast later in *Some Tame Gazelle* as Archdeacon Hoccleve.

At this stage in her life a persona may have been Pym's preferred way of apprehending her personal experiences. Pym created several separate personas for herself in her twenties, which appear to have been intended to burlesque aspects of her own personality. In her letters to Robert Liddell she posed as the 'old brown spinster'. Later when she journeyed to Poland as governess to the Alberg family in 1938, she re-created herself as a 'Vikki Olafsson' through whom she recounts her experiences. The two spinsters in *Some Tame Gazelle* may function, albeit partially, as authorial surrogates within the narrative.

Janice Rossen explicitly characterises Pym's work as 'autobiographical', and such a characterisation is tempting.⁶ Pym habitually transcribed the detail of her life into a series of notebooks and used it as material for her fiction. It is obvious that her life and fiction are linked but in complex ways. Pym sustained the notebook practice for years: from 1948 she kept regular notebooks which were a combination of diary, plans for novels and local observations. 82 small spiral-backed books form the main body of these writings. However, her novels are clearly fiction and not fictionalised autobiography. Undoubtedly the fictional world she created is based on the one she inhabited and can provide an abundance of information about Pym's world view. She says: 'I prefer to write about the kinds of things I have experienced and put into my novels the kind of details that amuse me'.⁷

After leaving Oxford in September 1934 Pym wrote the original version of *Some Tame Gazelle* which she then revised extensively over a period until it was

⁵ *A Very Private Eye*, pp. 68-9.

⁶ Janice Rossen, *The World of Barbara Pym* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 1.

⁷ quoted by Jane Nardin, *Barbara Pym* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), p. 1.

eventually published by Jonathan Cape in 1950. The early draft of *Some Tame Gazelle* seems to have been written for the purposes of self-dramatisation, as Pym commented in a later diary entry of 1943; 'It's better to be dramatic than just a lonely spinster, though it comes to the same thing in the end'.⁸ Pym constructed a self in the process of writing and the reader can through this writing glimpse a female subject in the process of construction; in this case, a private and resilient individual who, in her prose, articulates her sense of exclusion and determinedly constructs for herself a spinsterish identity.

Pym projects an audience for herself, directly identifying herself as a spinster figure in her correspondence with Henry Harvey and Robert Liddell. She poses as an eccentric spinster in a letter of 1938:

And Miss Pym is looking out of the window -- and you will be asking who is this Miss Pym, and I will tell you that she is a spinster lady who was thought to have been disappointed in love, and so now you know who is this Miss Pym.⁹

Given that Pym wrote this when she was only twenty-six, she appears premature in identifying herself as a spinster, yet to name herself as such, to point out her cultural identity, does seem to allow her ultimate control of the role she assigns herself.

Pym's relationship with her sister Hilary and her first infatuation with Henry Harvey provided much of the material for *Some Tame Gazelle*. It retells and extends the narrative which Pym constructed in her Oxford diaries: Pym inserts herself and her contemporaries at Oxford into the narrative; she called it her 'novel of real people'.¹⁰ Pym even circulated chapters of her novel among her friends as she wrote. Following her departure from Oxford Pym told Hilary that she was writing a novel in which they appeared as two sisters living together in a small village. Pym projected the sisters into middle-age and set them in a rural context. The later details of Pym's life take on an uncanny relevance when one considers that from as early as 1946 Barbara and Hilary lived together continuously and that in 1974, when Pym retired from the International African Institute, she and Hilary shared a cottage in the village of Finstock. Despite the time scale of the life Jane Nardin seems accurately to describe Pym's relationship to the period of the novel:

Though the novel commonly projects Barbara and Hilary's personalities thirty years into the future, Pym did not in any way attempt to write a futuristic novel. *Some Tame Gazelle* is an accurate portrait of country life

⁸ *A Very Private Eye*, p. 157.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 45.

in the thirties, and, though it purports to be a picture of the Pym sisters' middle age, it really tells us about their youth.¹¹

In September of 1934 Pym wrote of the genesis of the novel:

Sometime in July I began to write a story about Hilary and me as spinsters of fiftyish. Henry and Jock and all of us appeared in it. I sent it to them and they liked it very much. So I am going on with it and one day it may become a book.¹²

The narrative of *Some Tame Gazelle* is centred on Belinda Bede. Belinda maintains continuity and acts widely throughout the novel; Robert Long identifies her as 'the focal character' of the novel.¹³ From the beginning Belinda's consciousness provides the reader with an entry into the experience of the text. Belinda's perception with its combination of 'motherly' indulgence and sharp, if incongruous, deflationary vision, becomes the primary mode of the narration. The narrative opens with Belinda's speculative commentary on a curate's underwear: 'The new curate seemed quite a nice young man, but what a pity it was that his combinations showed, tucked carelessly into his socks, when he sat down'.¹⁴

Although Belinda's consciousness is given prominence, Pym uses third-person narrative to maintain distance from all her characters. The narrator remains detached from the characters by means of an objective and comic perspective, shifting with ease in and out of their consciousnesses. Pym's narrative method consists of comic understatement and indirection. Pym's narrative mode is rarely, if at all, experimental, her narrative is linear and moves from one episode in the sisters' lives to the next. The reader's interests are never diverted from the subject of single women by innovative narrative modes and Pym's artistic interests remain firmly grounded in her subject matter. Although the lives of single women may not be unusual in themselves, Pym's narrative practice is unusual in its concentration upon the figure of the single woman. What is heterodox is the narrative practice not the life experiences that it is based upon.

Pym's narrative moves in and out of Belinda's consciousness, never becoming really distant from her. Belinda rarely elucidates large truths but hovers over smaller truths, evades our gaze at times, allows reality and day-dream to compete for her attention and often cannot quite complete her thoughts, as in her doubts about her love, the Archdeacon's, behaviour: 'it could not be that dear Henry

¹¹ Nardin, p. 3.

¹² *A Very Private Eye*, p. 44.

¹³ Robert Long, *Barbara Pym* (New York: Ungar, 1986), p. 36.

¹⁴ Barbara Pym, *Some Tame Gazelle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950), p. 7. All subsequent references to *Some Tame Gazelle* will be taken from the Cape edition.

had just said the first prayer that came into his head' (*STG*, 34). There are moments when her perceptions depend upon comic euphemism, as in her vague sense of connection between curates and boiled chicken: 'The coldness, the whiteness, the muffling with sauce perhaps even the sharpness added by slices of lemon, there was something appropriate there, even if Belinda could not see exactly what it was' (*STG*, 13). The intensity of Pym's style comes from oblique statement and understatement, the reader having to fill in the gaps of feeling or observation. Self-knowledge whistles past Harriet's ear and miscellaneous observations befuddle Belinda's perceptions.

Pym's text celebrates her characters' successful retention of their *joie de vivre* in a culture which seems to promise them only joylessness and cultural redundancy. There is an awareness in her fiction that the habitual form and pattern of spinsters lives may limit the options available in both the real lives of spinsters and in narratives which concentrate on the spinster. Her heroine Belinda is aware of how others would see her as: 'dowdy and insignificant, one of the many thousand respectable middle-aged spinsters, the backbones or busybodies of countless parishes throughout the country' (*STG*, 176). But Pym is anxious to subvert social representations of spinsters as unhappy through her ebullient fictional representations of single women.

Some Tame Gazelle is never frivolous: Pym recognises that comedy is as large as tragedy, as serious and encircles mutual issues. However, despair and loneliness are never cruelly unmasked; her characters' anguish is gentle and their confusions remain at a romantic level. Pym's writing retains clarity of vision. Her observation of the discrepancies and collusions between ideals and reality and of the quirky relationships that form ordinary life, enables Pym to generate comedy through wry and subtle commentary. Statements of unhappiness are always embedded in surrounding irony and comic detail is carefully balanced and arranged. Pym herself explains:

I had a quiet but enjoyable life and I believe that this is reflected in some of my novels [...] I like to think that what I write gives pleasure and makes my readers smile, even laugh. But my novels are by no means only comedies as I try to reflect life as I see it.¹⁵

Pym's spinsters tend to be quiet, serious, straightforward, unassuming, careful women, with unimaginative exteriors, which cause them to be underrated, a tendency with which they are complicit. Their causelessness differentiates them from their fictional predecessors, the feminist single women of late nineteenth and

¹⁵ quoted by Strauss-Noll, p. 85.

early twentieth century fiction who used their spinsterhood within a political agenda. Pym's spinsters do not appear to be specifically politically located, her analysis of the single condition deals not so much with the social ramifications of singleness, with how the spinster will outwardly order her life, as with how she deals emotionally with the disquieting forces of heterosexual union which threaten to play havoc with her peace of mind. Pym explores the unofficial, confidential aspects of singleness. Pym's early spinster heroines have no larger missions than the pursuit of their inoffensive desires but what they do have in common with their feminist spinster predecessors of the late nineteenth century is their unshakeable belief in the supportive character of communities of women and the compensatory delights of romantic friendship between women. They are at a far remove from the fragile unpoliticised spinsters of fiction which unambiguously supports heterosexual romance, who float through the secondary plots of such stories with drooping shoulders and a habit of wistfulness, tending the dahlias and wondering what love is like. In *Some Tame Gazelle* the sisters refuse offers of marriage, accepting full responsibility for their position as spinsters. They are not victims of society, circumstance, or economic necessity.

The two spinster heroines of *Some Tame Gazelle* behave with great resource: Harriet, a spinster in her mid-fifties, is amorous, an adventuress in tweeds, animated by innocent vanity. Her personality seems to confer life upon its environment, as in the scene when the flowered voile she is wearing seems to come alive, to assist in her colourful wooing of Mr Donne, a local curate and 'whim' of Harriet's:

Harriet came into the room, radiant in flowered voile. Tropical flowers rioted over her plump body. The background was the green of the jungle, the blossoms were crimson and mauve, of an unknown species. Harriet was still attractive in a fat Teutonic way. (STG, 11)

Harriet has a great regard for appearances whether she is 'splashing about in the bath like a plump porpoise, her curls [...] protected by a round cap of green oilskin and the room [...] filled with the exotic scent of bath salts' (STG, 115) or is determined to impress her most dependable suitor Count Ricardo Bianco with 'a green suit with a cape trimmed with monkey fur', set off by her 'new python-skin shoes' (STG, 58). Harriet has a penchant for pale young curates, all of whom have a sameness about them. Harriet's passion for them approaches fetishism; she has little regard for the individual features of the receptacles of her passion, they are of the day and though she may be thwarted by one, as he ventures forth to work as a missionary or to do good works in the East End of London, there are whole oceans of curates to replace him. The church procures for her with remarkable good will.

Harriet's and Belinda's romantic interests occupy different territories, although they are united by the unattainability of the objects of desire; Harriet's being the beauty and youth of curates and Belinda's the beauty of Archdeacon Hoccleve. If both lose at love, however, Pym ensures that their losses do not reduce them. Their response to their own exclusion as spinsters is inventive; they respond positively to the postponement of fulfilled desire and constantly speculate about heterosexual relationships without ever having to test their hopes.

Pym sets her spinsters against a heterosexual marital background; differences between spinsters and married women are highlighted by Belinda's relationship with Agatha Hoccleve, the Archdeacon's wife. Belinda's attitude to Agatha oscillates between an awed respect for Agatha's marital status, and nervousness about the power which the status confers. This attitude characterises Pym's ambivalence towards marriage throughout her fiction. Pym, neatly mocks the imbalance which exists between Agatha as married woman, and Belinda as old maid. Effectively she reduces their difference to Agatha's exclusive access to the Archdeacon in his bath.

Silent hostilities bristle between Agatha and Belinda, as in their skirmish over the wrapping of Lady Clara Boulding's marrows at the rectory garden party. Belinda chooses newspaper to wrap them in rather than Agatha's blue tissue paper. Belinda considers, 'All this fuss about two marrows. But it might go deeper than that, although it did not do to think so' (*STG*, 36). The place of conflict between Agatha and Belinda is largely interior, its site of combat being Belinda's mind. Agatha's femininity seems more ordered and appropriate to successful womanhood, as when Belinda notices Agatha's shoes during one of the Archdeacon's interminable prayers: 'Belinda looked down at the grass and then at Agatha's neat suede shoes, so much more suited to the occasion than her own' (*STG*, 33).

Both sisters sometimes find their relationships with other women complex. The antagonism between Belinda and Agatha is mirrored by Harriet's envy of Olivia Berridge, the fiancée of the curate, Mr Donne. Such tensions serve to suggest that Belinda and Harriet are from time to time insecure in their role as spinsters. But Pym is too subtle to allow any uncomplicated view of singleness as inferior. Belinda and Harriet come to understand that the women they are in danger of resenting are indeed as vulnerable as themselves; in a loving gesture Agatha knits ridiculously ill-fitting socks for a Bishop who has no interest in her, and Mr Donne's fiancée was herself a spinster who was forced to propose to him.

Spinsterhood may be a viable alternative to marriage, but it does not preclude or prevent infatuation and love. Belinda, in her late fifties, dowdy in her shapeless dresses, still feels that she has all the glory of a fading star, her life is set in a

constellation of romantic encounters, secret love has made her different and she considers her romantic capacities in a slightly awestruck, diffident way:

Once, she knew, she *had* been different, and perhaps after all the years had left her with a little of that difference. Perhaps she was still an original shining like a comet, mingling no water with her wine. But only very occasionally, mostly she was like everyone else, rather less efficient, if anything. Even her paper decorations had been taken down and rearranged. There was nothing of her handiwork left on the garden-produce stall. (*STG*, 28-29)

For Belinda marriage would have been too pragmatic a response, too much of a compromise with reality. A condition of faint romantic expectation is preferable, more exciting than the concessions and compromises that marriage would have involved. In choosing singleness, the sisters preserve what Robert Long calls the 'sanctuaries of their imaginations'.¹⁶

Both sisters make use of the conventional notions about romance. Belinda knows that the code dictates that she should be attentive to the Archdeacon's material needs, sit rapt and admiring as she listens to his interminable poetry recitations and, in return, she can enjoy all the glory of having a dark secret, an unrequited love and the guilty thrill of flirting with him. The focus of Belinda's need to love may be Archdeacon Hoccleve, whom she worships at a distance, but with a passion which she realises contains 'a certain pleasure in not doing something; it was impossible that one's high expectations should be disappointed by the reality' (*STG*, 89).

Belinda has every reason to fear that marriage to Henry Hoccleve would be disappointing; she has had ample opportunity to observe his behaviour. She knows that he is selfish and lazy, and spends time playing 'Patience' on the floor of his study when he should be attending to the spiritual needs of his congregation. She has witnessed the physical change he has wrought upon his wife whose frail charms have faded. When Agatha returns from a trip to Karlsbad looking exceptionally well, Belinda is 'shocked to find herself wondering whether a month's absence from her husband could have anything to do with it' (*STG*, 163). Belinda's comments make it clear that she realises that it is easier to indulge a romantic fiction: 'I love him even more than Agatha does, but my feeling may be the stronger for not having married him' (*STG*, 161). Belinda's predilection for imaginary joys means that she can never be disappointed since she remains independent of the object of her love. Belinda may seem to have been upstaged by Agatha's marriage to Henry, but Pym reveals that marriage is limited by convention and offers no simple salvation.

¹⁶ Long, p. 39.

Belinda, musing over the lover of her dreams thinks of 'Some tame gazelle or some gentle dove:/Something to love, oh, something to love!' a quotation from Thomas Haynes Bayly which clarifies the imperative need which motivates Belinda and Harriet. Pym identified this need as a characteristic of her own personality. She wrote to Elsie Harvey in 1938:

Oh, said Barbara, in a quiet full tone, I do not grudge happiness to other people, although it is something I want for myself. It is known that every woman wants the love of a husband, but it is also known that some woman have to be content with other kinds of love.¹⁷

The point that Pym appears to be making is that it is the capacity for love that refreshes the soul -- it is better to love than to be loved -- and it is the selflessness of loving which keeps feeling fresh.

For the sisters the true object of love is each other; the curates and the Archdeacon represent a suitable focus of spinsterly attention, but the central relationship of the novel is between Belinda and Harriet. Their relationship allows for reciprocal love, belief in each other's value, empathy and unshakeable good will. This love obeys the imperative that the Pym protagonist must extend love to another, must exchange with another life.

The sisters support and enrich each other's fantasies -- Harriet announces to Belinda that she and Archdeacon Hoccleve love each other: "you love each other," beamed Harriet, as if she were giving her blessing to a young couple, instead of making rather a scandalous suggestion about a married archdeacon and a respectable spinster' (*STG*, 156). This mutual support of their shared fantasies of unrequited love enables the sisters to continue to enjoy contented spinsterhood without feeling that their love for each other is a lesser form of love than married love.

Without an appropriate object for her affections, the spinster's fate can come to resemble that of Harriet Frean in May Sinclair's novel *The Life and Death of Harriet Frean* (1920). Harriet spends her life rehearsing romance, performing sober acts of unselfishness for those who would rather not receive them. She 'burns' unwritten letters and blushes over silent desires. She cannot share her life with another human being, cannot communicate her humanity.

Some Tame Gazelle, although very episodic, derives unity from the sisters -- their conversations thread through the narrative and nearly every chapter begins with Belinda and Harriet talking, sitting, eating or plotting together. Pym wants to emphasise that the sisters choose to remain unattached except to each other, and, in order to mitigate such heterodoxy, she provides each with unrequiting and

¹⁷ *A Very Private Eye*, p. 84.

unrequited lovers. The entry of the outsiders, Mr Nathaniel Mold and Bishop Theodore Grote, as the sister's suitors provides the main tension of the novel. Their presence at first seems to threaten the sisters well-being and community of two. The suitors belong to the traditional courtship plot, but Pym's innovative, alternative outcome frees the narrative from the traditions and constraints of the courtship plot.

Harriet first meets Mr Mold outside the 'Crownwheel and Pinion', a local public house, on the morning of the first day of his visit to the village. He follows this unpromising entrance by offending Belinda with what she considers to be ungentelemanly behaviour, cracking crude jokes during dinner about water heating systems in Belgrade:

Belinda felt rather flustered at the interest which everyone was taking in her silly little story [...] 'I've never been to Belgrade myself, and even if I had I don't suppose I should have visited the public baths.' [...] 'Not the ones with the old man in them, we hope,' said Mr Mold, with almost a wink. (*STG*, 122-123)

From this, Belinda detects his 'low origins', origins which she feels are matched by his florid and coarse appearance. He is wooed by Harriet's rendering of 'The Harmonious Blacksmith' on the piano, closely followed by a gay Chopin Mazurka and decides to visit her next morning. If she still looks attractive in daylight, he intends to propose. Harriet feels no inclination to accept him and is vaguely offended by the prosaic nature of his proposal. Harriet refuses him by asserting that her spinsterhood is a positive, chosen state. She tells him that "'I'm afraid my sister and I are very confirmed spinsters'" (*STG*, 138) and thinks: 'who would change a comfortable life of spinsterhood in a country parish which always had its pale curate to be cherished, for the unknown trials of matrimony?' (*STG*, 136). Her source of joy in life is not the long attempt to find a husband, but her life with Belinda to which she will remain true: spinsterhood is not the result of unfortunate circumstances but is an identifiable allegiance.

Theodore Grote and Mr Mold are ironised anti-heroes; both have ventured abroad to establish their fortunes and their manhood in a manner which is reminiscent of the working excursions into the Empire of so many Victorian heroes in fiction. Theodore Grote has been Bishop of Mbawawa in Africa for many years, doing 'splendid work among the natives, at least, that was what everyone said, although nobody seemed to know exactly what it was that he had done' (*STG*, 116). Mr Mold is said to have completed a tour in Africa where 'He [...] penetrated the thickest jungles [...] where no white man, and certainly no deputy librarian, has ever set foot before' (*STG*, 81).

Theodore Grote, Belinda's suitor, is self-satisfied and conceited, cannot properly differentiate between Harriet and Belinda, or indeed between them and other doting spinsters; he confuses Belinda when he insists that she used to knit him scarves and did excellent work amongst fallen women at the Guild of St Agnes. Belinda even begins to wonder if she has actually worked at the Guild; 'after all, her memory was not always completely reliable. Perhaps she had also knitted the Bishop a beautiful scarf' (*STG*, 168). Grote's intrusions upon her identity are coupled more with what Belinda feels is his unforgivable lack of any sense of romance: 'Theodore was cold, a cold fish [...] Legless, unloving, infamously chaste, she thought detachedly [...] there *was* something fishlike about Bishop Grote. Fish and sheep. Was that possible?' (*STG*, 175). He frightens her by sending overly-familiar bunches of chrysanthemums when she has the 'flu and proposes to her when she is dishevelled and floury from making ravioli to Count Ricardo's recipe. His greatest transgression, however, is when he agrees with her that she is not special and probably not entirely deserving of his attentions. But the death-blow to his chances with Belinda comes when he quotes from 'Paradise Lost'; his misappropriation of the rhetoric of romance, which to Belinda is hallowed (because of its associations with the Archdeacon's poetry quotations) makes her refusal of him quite brutal:

A man needs a woman to help him into his grave, thought Belinda, remembering a remark Dr Parnell had made. Well, there would be plenty who would be willing to do that [...] 'I'm afraid I can't marry you,' she said, looking down at her floury hands. 'I don't love you'. (*STG*, 224)

Count Ricardo contrasts with these unwanted suitors -- his proposals to Harriet are entirely different from Mr Mold's; they have all the exaggerations of romance, he goes down on his knees and quotes 'the greater Italian poets'. Belinda is certain that: 'he would have no objection to Harriet making cakes and other dainties for the curates. He was such a kind-hearted man' (*STG*, 41). Count Ricardo also provides support for the sisters' delight in fantasy. He is like Miss Matty's brother Peter in *Cranford* who wins the confidence of Gaskell's spinsters with his stories of cherubim in the Himalayas. Similarly Count Ricardo is an ally in the expansive imaginative world of these single woman. The Count, along with Harriet and Belinda, practises impassioned celibacy, and the strength of his feelings defines him as single, for in Pym's fiction the corollary of singleness is lively passion.

When Belinda sympathises with the Count during Harriet's brief infatuation with Mr Mold, she tells him not to lose hope and suggests that "'it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all'". The Count finds this cliché

comforting because he is a participant in the fantastic and romantic world of unrequited love. Pym tells the reader that he 'preferred his gentle state of melancholy' (STG, 129) to more prosaically balanced behaviour. He is, then, a fellow collaborator; to Belinda he says "'You are so kind and understanding [...] I feel that there is a great bond between us'" (STG, 213).

It becomes apparent that it is not the proposals the sisters receive which are important so much as their response to them. Belinda and Harriet refuse their suitors with a note of challenge and their joy in each other and the evident relief with which they anticipate the continuance of their life together, supports a positive feminist reading of their singleness. They are not misfits, women without the spirit or attraction to be loved, but their love for each other is a more powerful life-enhancing and sustaining force than romantic love for a man.

The sisters provide each other with an alternative social mooring; they share a home and continue to do so in defiance of several offers of marriage. They offer each other a relationship which leaves neither single woman incomplete. Throughout the novel runs the barely spoken narrative of their relationship. Theirs is the relationship least commented on but crucially 'they had [...] decided to spend their old age together' (STG, 22). The sisters have realised that their lives are best enjoyed as a joint experience and they come to share an awareness of what is valuable.

The world of *Some Tame Gazelle* is populated largely by spinsters. Miss Prior is 'a little dried-up woman of uncertain age, with a brisk, birdlike manner and brown darting eyes' (STG, 46), about whom Belinda speculates 'perhaps Miss Prior's whole life is just a putting up with second best all the time' (STG, 46). Miss Beard is a Sunday School teacher. When Harriet makes a *risqué* visit to a curate she surprises Miss Beard, who is spying upon her from behind some ferns in the front room of her house, by crying out "'Good afternoon!'" at which Miss Beard scuttles furtively back into the shelter of lace curtains (STG, 55). Miss Jenner runs the wool shop and can be 'silly' with the travellers who visit the shop, but then after all, Belinda muses 'perhaps we are all silly over something or somebody without knowing it' (STG, 83).

The two spinsters who provide a foil for Harriet and Belinda are Edith Liversidge and Connie Aspinall, who live together but in a less equal relationship which is not life-enhancing and does not provide the sense of community which the sisters enjoy. Pym appears to be suggesting that although the relationship between the Bede sisters may not be wholly exceptional, it does depend upon equality and mutual respect. Edith is formidable; she oversaw sanitary arrangements in a Balkan refugee camp during World War One and later devotes herself to the efficient organisation of sanitary needs at Church fetes and in libraries. Harriet describes her

as a 'decayed gentlewoman' but she is the 'tough and wiry' variety who digs 'vigorously in her garden' and keeps goats (STG, 15). Altogether she is an unsuitable companion for Connie Aspinall who requires constant care. Connie 'used to be a companion to a lady in Belgrave Square' (STG, 15) and plays the harp -- her sole accomplishment. Belinda calls her 'elegiac', a description which indicates Belinda's perception of Connie's life as a song of mourning for the past. She is miserable with Edith who summons her almost as a dog, calling "'Connie! Connie! Connie! Come along. Time to go home to lunch.'" (STG, 30) She has no inner resilience which would enable her to be independent. She has been defeated by secret bitterness:

Nobody knew how much Edith got on her nerves and how different it all was from the days when she had been companion to Lady Grudge in Belgrave Square. Treated like one of the family, such kindness [...] Connie's eyes filled with tears and she had to turn away. (STG, 34)

She eventually marries just for the sake of being married, responding eagerly to Bishop Grote's prosaic proposal over tea, after he has encountered her in an Army and Navy Store in London. This saves Connie from spinsterhood but unites her to a man who has no more compassion than Edith nor any greater capacity for ensuring her happiness.

Belinda's contentment comes from her sense of community with Harriet and the dominant site of Pym's novels is the small community. Diana Benet writes in *Something to Love*:

In the country where we expect to find such small circles, and in the city, where we do not, Pym's characters live within, or make efforts to create, or tragically lack, a community.¹⁸

The sisters are happier with each other than with any suitor, and although the novel ends with one actual wedding and another projected, these marriages tend to be parodies of romance rather than providing any pleasurable sense of resolution. Connie Aspinall's marriage to Theodore Grote is an escape route out of spinsterhood. Mr Donne's betrothed, Olivia Berridge, an academic ten years his senior whom he describes as like an 'older sister', has had to propose to him. Belinda realises, to her joy, that this must have been the case with Agatha and Henry many years before. Olivia has had to pursue Mr Donne, and he has complacently agreed to their unromantic union. Both marriages are pragmatic and lacklustre.

Robert Long finds the situation of the Bede sisters essentially 'unresolvable' as their "idealistic" love seems like a consoling daydream for a larger, fuller life that

¹⁸ Diana Benet, *Something to Love* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 7.

they cannot broach; and there is a certain neuroticism [...] evident in both of them'.¹⁹ Long's response seems depend on his making a connection between protracted spinsterhood and a state of unreality or even of mental disturbance. The implication of Long's comments is that the Bede sisters experience unconscious conflict between the narrow sterile confines of their spinsterhood and the largeness of fulfilled heterosexual existence in which they cannot participate. Long suggests that they exercise their longings through daydream and obsession and that this indicates their psychological instability. But Pym seems rather to be proposing that romantic idealism can be used strategically and as a means of maintaining spinsterhood and rationalising its existence in a culture which privileges heterosexual union. In her analysis of the sororal bond, Pym suggests that the lives of Belinda and Harriet are fully complementary. There may be no painful collisions between imagination and reality but that is because the sisters, through their avoidance of formalised heterosexual union, have access to the free-flow of both reality and fantasy. And so marriage may be seen as actually limiting women's lives, representing closure and an end to possibility.

It is through the sisters that we are made to understand joy and the mutuality of happiness. Belinda identifies with Harriet's joy at the sight of the new pale-cheeked curate:

He was dark and rather Italian-looking, paler and more hollow-cheeked than the others. Now Belinda understood her sister's joy and suddenly she realised that she too was happier than she had been for a long time. (STG, 250)

The ending of *Some Tame Gazelle* also importantly signals what was in life to be Barbara Pym's reward for protracted and cheerful spinsterhood, a home with Hilary and peace of mind. In *Some Tame Gazelle* the future is revised to Pym's own satisfaction before it has arrived, complete with its unusual redemptions. When Harriet tells Belinda that she has decided not to marry Mr Mold, Pym tells the reader that the:

... look of relief that brightened Belinda's face was pathetic in its intensity [...] Belinda was so overcome with joy and relief at Harriet's news that she kissed her impulsively and suggested that they should have some meringues for tea, as Harriet was so fond of them. (STG, 142)

There is, of course, only limited excess, excitement or chaos in Pym's fictional world; her spinsters are essentially humble sensualists, enjoying ordinary

¹⁹ Long, p. 38.

life with all its dull blessings. Pym's own avocational interests were 'reading, domestic life, and cats' and there is a firm emphasis on ordinary life as it is lived in both her novels and her own existence. She writes in 1943:

I often pass the pre-Raphaelite tomb, or rather the path leading to it, but I have never been there again. But I will go one day. You (reader) may say, Why do you make such a thing of it all? To which I will snap (like Trivia) Well, what about your own life? Is it so full of large, big-wonderful things that you don't need tombs and daffodils and your own special intolerable bird, with an armchair or two and occasional readings from Matthew Arnold and Coventry Patmore?²⁰

Nosiness is a characteristic of many of Pym's heroines. Mildred Lathbury, the first-person narrator of *Excellent Women* (1952) faces the dilemma of whether she will be an 'excellent woman', observing the lives of others and always being found with a teapot in hand during any tragedy, a habitual dispenser of comfort to others, or whether she will work for her own benefit, for a fuller life. Mildred denies her own right to be a heroine, since she sees herself as too fussy and meticulous to be romantic. Mildred, an unmarried clergyman's daughter of thirty-one, admits that she is 'not at all like Jane Eyre, who must have given hope to so many plain women who tell their stories in the first-person'.²¹ She claims that she has no story of her own, and, though her consciousness provides the centre of the story, she must display the habitual selflessness of the spinster throughout her narrative by concentrating on what ostensibly is a narrative of other people. Philip Larkin, writing to Barbara Pym in 1964, described *Excellent Women* as:

... full of a harsh kind of suffering [...] it's a study of the pain of being single, the unconscious hurt the world regards as this state's natural clothing -- oh dear, this sounds rather extravagant, but time and again one senses not only that Mildred is suffering, but that nobody can see why she shouldn't suffer, like a Victorian cabhorse.²²

Mildred is kept alive by curiosity. The detective urge often surfaces in Pym's heroines and usually signals a love interest. The position of these heroines as spectators paradoxically goes along with deep engagement with life. Tracking people down or looking them up was part of Pym's absorbing 'Research into the lives of ordinary people', and she would go so far as to look them up in *Who's Who*, *Crockford* or street directories. Sometimes she indulged in the thrill of tailing the

²⁰ *A Very Private Eye*, p. 118.

²¹ Barbara Pym, *Excellent Women* (1952), (repr. London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 7.

²² quoted in Hazel Holt, *A Lot to Ask: A Life of Barbara Pym* (London, Macmillan, 1990), p. 61.

object of her interests. In her Oxford diaries she made meticulous timetables of sightings of young men in whom she felt a romantic interest. Pym frequently linked these practices to the familiarity with anthropological methods which she acquired in her years at the International African Institute. She felt that methods contributed to the development of her distinctive style. She explained in a biographical talk called 'Finding a Voice' for the BBC in 1978: 'I learned how it was possible and even essential to cultivate an attitude of detachment towards life and people and how the novelist could even do field work as the anthropologist did.'²³

Belinda and Harriet constantly use their detective skills. They try, for example, to determine the Archdeacon's response to his wife's travelling to a German spa:

When the day came for Agatha to go away, Belinda and Harriet watched her departure out of Belinda's bedroom window. From here there was an excellent view of the vicarage drive and gate. Belinda had brought some brass with her to clean and in the intervals when she stopped her vigorous rubbing to look out of the window, was careful to display the duster in her hand. Harriet stared out quite unashamedly [...] She even had a pair of binoculars, which she was now trying to focus. (*STG*, 70)

Pym views curiosity about the lives of others as harmless, indeed, even benign, in its generous concern with human behaviour. In another narrative Harriet's binoculars might indeed be a function of neuroticism; in Pym they signify joyous and life-affirming curiosity.

Another common feature of Pym's fiction is the bookishness of her heroines; in *Some Tame Gazelle* Belinda constantly refers her experiences to her reading. And *Some Tame Gazelle* draws upon fragments of other texts in a way that is indicative of Pym's own literariness; she writes in full consciousness of literary tradition and threads quotations through her texts. Much critical effort has concentrated upon attempts to identify the literary debts of Pym's fiction: Robert Smith aligns Pym with Austen claiming that they share the same 'woman's view' dealing humorously and wittily with middle-class life. But he does not offer an appropriate history of Pym's use of the figure of the single woman, claiming of Pym's single heroine that she is of a 'new kind': 'the 'excellent woman' [...] good aunt, good churchwoman, informed spinster'.²⁴ Jane Nardin, on the other hand, suggests that Pym's spinsters are anachronisms, in need of special explanation. In Nardin's opinion 'Pym is, in some ways, a displaced nineteenth- or even eighteenth-century writer'. Nardin also

²³ quoted in Nardin, p. 47.

²⁴ Robert Smith, 'How Pleasant to Know Miss Pym', *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, 58-63, (pp. 58-9, 60).

claims that questions of social justice are unimportant for Pym.²⁵ On the other hand, Janice Rossen sees Pym as developing a nineteenth-century tradition, which Rossen feels is based primarily in Trollope and Austen and concedes that Pym's choice of single women as heroines provides a distinct connection with the nineteenth century. Rossen writes 'in a brilliant anachronism, Pym transfers the typical Victorian figure of the distressed gentlewoman to the twentieth century':

Pym preserves the Victorian moral frame of the woman as a useful, domestic servant to her family; yet in her twentieth-century settings, this ideal acquires an ironic twist. Spinsters no longer remain in the family [...] Thus Pym heroines inherit some qualities from their Victorian sisters, in their domesticity and earnestness, yet they often remain single and isolated.²⁶

Janice Rossen is, however, sceptical about links between Pym and Austen and John Halperin describes the coupling as a misalliance, suggesting that Pym herself would have found it inappropriate. A comparison between Pym and Austen is a convenient one, seeming to provide a thematic shortcut, but, according to Halperin, if any similarity exists between the writing of Pym and Austen it is that neither writer provides a 'relationship between the sexes which is entirely satisfactory'.²⁷ Many would contest that conclusion as far as Austen is concerned.

Pym's concerns link her to both Victorian and twentieth century writers and offer intriguing connections with both her Victorian predecessors and her contemporaries. Pym has been critically placed in the tradition of Austen and of domestic comedy, largely because of her wry vision of small, enclosed middle-class communities. Some stylistic debts to Austen may be conceded but it may be preferable to associate Pym in her treatment of single women with that tradition which develops from the mid-nineteenth century onwards of narratives which protest and debate the specific issue of the social position of the spinster. In Pym's case her analysis of the single woman's cultural placement is no less of a protest for being couched in informal and gentle satire rather than direct or fierce invective.

Pym wrote from an unusually personal vantage point in that her own single status appears conspicuously to inform her stance on marriage and her treatment of the single woman's response to the place of heterosexual institutions within culture. Jane Nardin writes of the single woman that she:

²⁵ Nardin, p. 9.

²⁶ Rossen, pp. 55, 42.

²⁷ John Halperin, 'Barbara Pym and the War of the Sexes', *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, pp. 88-100, (p. 88).

[...] has her areas of competence and insight, her moral triumphs, though she has them in forms so muted, so odd, that few novelists other than Pym would have been interested in asserting their value or even in demonstrating their existence.²⁸

Nardin seems right when she suggests that the single woman's life does not immediately offer the substance and colour required for accessible and rewarding narratives and plots. But one could also claim that to record the experience of the single woman in fiction requires in part a new or differently shaped narrative structure which neither privileges the traditional events of heterosexuality nor displays the rewards of heterosexuality, a structure that does not depend on the ultimate justice of rewarding appropriate heroines with marriages and inclusion in the lives of heroes. In *Psyche as Hero*, Lee Edwards attacks the control which heterosexuality exercises over fictional heroines. He attributes this control to a literary tradition which has 'derived female identity from an equation linking limited aspiration and circumscribed activity to institutionalized heterosexuality'. The new heroine must then nullify 'these conjunctions and the conclusions they require'.²⁹

Spinsterhood is then more than Pym's subject matter; it may be seen as the conditioning force of her art. It is spinsterhood that supplies questions about solitude and community. And it is spinsterhood that forces a revisioning of narrative structures. Pym shows how women's stories can be stories of fulfilment and love without paying lip service to the conventional shapes of life and fiction. The seclusion of single women from the normative communities which depend on heterosexual alliance may lead to the creation of smaller joyful outlaw communities in which single women may live together not wholly separated from the world of the Archdeacon but not subordinated to it either. Pym's single woman is no disappointed or usurped bride, always rattling the gates of the heterosexual paradise. She may instead have created a place for herself in other paradises, with new companions and without the fantasy of marriage.

²⁸ Nardin, p. 16.

²⁹ Lee R. Edwards, *Psyche as Hero. Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), p. 237.

EPILOGUE

In the hundred years from the mid-nineteenth century to the publication of Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle* most of the distinctive features, particular types and significant transformations of representations of middle-class celibate single women are revealed. The texts discussed have different textual and cultural conditions of production, but an overall history can be discerned.

In the mid-nineteenth century texts of Collins and Dickens the spinster is a powerful but subordinate figure, immured in a domestic context and featuring as a minor player in marriage dramas. Narratives from *Villette* onwards place the figure of the spinster centrally and reveal a new concern with women's relationship to work and vocation. In mid-century narratives the spinster still derives some degree of importance through plots of unrecognised or unfulfilled love, though a new emphasis upon the spinster as a working heroine begins to emerge, albeit as a secondary plot. *The Woman in White* reveals real ambivalence about how to fit the spinster as narrator into the overall narrative structure. Collins also finds difficulty in expressing the potential heroism of the spinster. Marian Halcombe, apparently lacking the attributes of the sweet heroine, regards her femininity with despair and functions temporarily as a substitute for the hero. Increasingly narratives scrutinise the issues of spinsters and employment, offering fresh perspectives on the identity of the working middle-class woman. New modes of representing female experience begin to emerge, and the search for meaningful vocation crops up again and again in fiction which centres on the single woman. In Oliphant's *Kirsteen*, the heroine leaves home specifically to earn a living.

Nineteenth century texts are also increasingly concerned with the modes by which a spinster can become a heroine: she displays heroism, for example, through self-sacrifice, through her gentle encouragement of other lovers, through her selfless love of undeserving or deserving heroes or other less deserving women. But in later nineteenth century texts the spinster is viewed more overtly as a political figure, a proselytising feminist who seeks to reshape other women's lives and who, as often as not, represents a formidable force in the drive towards the transformation of heterosexual union.

Both *The Bostonians* and *The Odd Women* emphasise the middle-class spinster's militancy and hostility to corrupt heterosexual relations. Olive Chancellor and Rhoda Nunn are bold enough to protest the conventions of heterosexual romance. The heterosexual love plot is placed in opposition to the growing intimacy between women. This intimacy possesses a political dimension

in that such relationships are formed through, and transformed by, feminist critiques and alliances. Such relationships between women are positioned centrally, challenging the primacy of heterosexual romance. What happens within women-women relationships is a sort of courtship: Lucy Snowe's feigned wooing of Ginevra becomes Olive Chancellor's very real bid to draw Verena into the world of feminism and to oust the hero from his role as wooer.

The spinster's quest for self-fulfilment and satisfying love and community tends to return to domestic settings in the texts I have discussed from the nineteen twenties and thirties. Yet within those settings both Radclyffe Hall and May Sinclair attach varying degrees of importance to sexual fulfilment and the bodily needs of single women. New sexologically-based models of lesbian desire have their impact upon the construction of spinsterly desires. Cultural nervousness about both working spinsters and lesbianism is apparent in *Regiment of Women*: Clemence Dane links lesbianism with vampirism in the effect that spinster teacher Clare Hartill has upon both Alwynne and Louise Denny. Alwynne's prolonged contact with Clare means that she physically deteriorates: she appears bloodless and lethargic and loses weight, her health is only restored when she grows rosy with healing heterosexual love. Yet, paradoxically, by far the most powerful and colourful love scenes in the novel take place between Clare and Alwynne. Such 'conservative' fiction prohibits close female attachments and education and independence while simultaneously exploiting them.

The relationship between mothers and daughters is another distinctive issue for Hall and Sinclair whose fictions respond in complex ways to the social construction of both maternity and femininity. Mrs Ogden's total incomprehension of the extent of her daughter's gifts and Mrs Olivier's imposition of a stultifying morality upon her daughter's rebellious sensibilities are bleakly portrayed.

Sisterly love in *Some Tame Gazelle* offers a more fulfilling version of love between women than these earlier accounts of the relationships between mothers and daughters. Pym's representation of spinsters has none of the emphasis upon the pathology of the spinster found in earlier texts, drawing as they did on the new 'science' of sexology and on Freudian concepts of sublimation, concepts exploited in *Regiment of Women* or even in *Mary Olivier* and *Harriet Frean*.

Pym's representation of spinsterhood in the figure of Belinda Bede at first appears to stand in marked contrast to representations in the texts which precede it. Belinda has none of Lucy Snowe's anxiety about earning a livelihood, she is untouched by the audacious anger that fuelled Rhoda Nunn's response to singleness. Olive Chancellor's tense political hostility and longing for voice are

absent. She feels no discomfort like Joan Ogden's at the prospect of remaining in the family home. Nor does she experience any of the guilt and responsibility towards her family that so plagued Mary Olivier.

Like Bronte in *Villette* and Gaskell in *Cranford* Pym exploits the narrative unorthodoxy of centring the mode of narration around the preoccupations of single women. Pym's narrative focuses on the experience of the Bede sisters to reveal the limits and artifices of traditional romance plots.

Pym's early fiction can be read in the light of the new coloration of the interwar feminism and it provides fresh cultural readings of spinsterhood. By the time Pym begins writing *Some Tame Gazelle* in the early thirties, celibate spinsterhood as a political challenge had declined, if not vanished. During the interwar period, feminism had very different concerns from those which dominated the militant suffragette movement. Interwar feminism was largely concerned with issues such as family allowances, birth control, and benefits to mothers. Criticism of marriage persisted in divorce law reform, but feminist discourses no longer sought to theorise female singleness and celibacy, and there was no dominating or specific vision of the spinster's role in feminist action.

The spinster's public world of work and feminism that was so strongly presented in earlier fiction may have vanished, as has the political context for celibate single women, nevertheless there is a clear connection to nineteenth century narratives in Pym's choice of subject, the experience of the celibate middle-class single woman. The benefits of singleness are again asserted.

A prominent feature which links *Some Tame Gazelle* to earlier texts is the celibacy of Pym's spinsters. Belinda is rarely seen in the bedroom and when she is it is with only a head cold or Harriet for company; unsuitable attachments remain at a romantic rather than a practical level. The passions of Pym's spinsters find no consummation in heterosexual relationship. Indeed, Pym's early fiction still reveals a sense of the distasteful in contrived marriages. By the time that she is writing *Some Tame Gazelle* the sense of the direct cultural threat posed by celibate female singleness has diminished, nor do her spinsters mouth any critiques of the patriarchy or corrupt heterosexual relations. However, a sense of their marginality to heterosexual life, of losing out in terms of social importance, because of their singleness, does occasionally rankle. There is still a sense, as in *Kirsteen*, that the felicity of these spinsters' later lives may to some extent represent a reward for self-sacrifice. And, again, *Some Tame Gazelle*, does encourage us to be critical about self-centredness.

In *Some Tame Gazelle* the sororal bliss of the Bede spinsters still overtakes conjugal bliss. Pym's spinsters are heroic spinsters not because they are

typesetters or militants; gone is the printing press and the platform, these spinsters do not have to fight for economic independence and security, nor do they struggle to enter the labour market. The Bede sisters are viewed persistently in a domestic context. Yet they remain heroic because of their gentle and faithful commitment to each other -- itself a depoliticised version of the spinster's ability to love other women dearly. Pym's fiction is certainly not visionary, and, to some extent, the Bede sisters seem to represent a partial return to the quieter smaller world of Cranford, to the old certainties. Belinda Bede may seem to embody the re-entry of the Cranfordian spinster, complete with her social graces and comic attributes. But it is worth reflecting that Pym's spinsters are not the victims of their own gentility nor do their lives suffer the same social misfortunes and sense of financial threat that caused so many Cranford spinsters to shed tears. There is no Drummle railway line forcing its way into Pym's spinsters' lives, no sense of the imminent death of community.

Pym's spinsters make no journeys to London nor is there any of the colonial imagery we find in *The Woman in White*, *Villette* or *Kirsteen*. The only use Pym does make of colonial experience is through the Bede sisters' satirised suitors, Theo Grote, bishop of Mbawawa, and the librarian, Mr Mold. Both men's experiences of Africa are made ridiculous, and in a sense these anti-heroes are ironic subversions of all those beautiful young men, so often loved by spinsters, who vanished during working excursions to the furthest reaches of the British Empire. Arguably, Grote and Mold are these mid-Victorian heroes returned, middle-aged, defeated, ridiculed and with unromantic waist sizes. Indeed, the Bede sisters encounter no truly frightening or threatening male figures, no Parson Jenkyns or Basil Ransom. A degree of threat is still posed by suitors, but never with bitterness or genuine fear. For these sisters marriage could only involve loss.

Belinda's complex response to questions of identity is played against the duller backdrop of parish affairs, cauliflower cheese and romantic longings or unromantic courtships. However, Belinda's unsuitable shoes, ill-defined dress, and her belief that she may not be worthy of notice recalls Lucy Snowe's habit of concealing and facilitating the ambitions and desires of her inner life beneath the cloak and hood of hoddenn grey spinsterhood. Both representations reveal a continuing tension between the exterior expression of spinsterhood and the passions of the human heart. Belinda and Lucy share a similar predicament in that their self-conscious projection of their spinsterhood as practical, dull, sedate and mousy involves a degree of self-denial. Each is engaged in a struggle with the incompatible terms of her own identity. Belinda and Lucy may seek to present themselves as observers of life rather than as participants in life. But these very

different figures always opt for fierce participation. They are, in the end, incapable of selflessness or passivity. Belinda's urge to detect is a gentler version of Lucy Snowe's watchful gaze. Both women feel a sense of struggle with hidden desires, and suffer from a degree of social indifference towards spinsters. The central dilemma for each is how to resolve this without denying life its potential for fullness.

These spinsters may lack the theoretical feminist coherence of Rhoda Nunn or even Gertrude Marvell or Clare Hartill, but singleness, for Belinda and Harriet, still remains resistance. It is again apparent in *Some Tame Gazelle* that marriage plots will never be the same. They no longer stop single women from constructing their own stories. And in this story beneficent and benign sisterhood is the reward for virtuous spinsterhood, gently debunking the marital goal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Allen, Grant, *The Woman Who Did* (London: John Lane, 1895)
- Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre* (1847), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980)
- *The Professor* (1857), (London: Penguin, 1989)
- *Shirley* (1849), (London: Penguin, 1974)
- *Villette* (1853), (London: Penguin, 1985)
- Collins, Wilkie, *The Woman in White* (1860), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Dane, Clemence, *Regiment of Women* (1917), (London: Heinemann, 1966)
- Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield* (1850), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- *Great Expectations* (1861), (London: Penguin, 1985)
- Gaskell, Elizabeth, *Cranford* (1853), (London: Penguin, 1976)
- Gissing, George, *The Odd Women* (1893), (London: Virago, 1987)
- Hall, Radclyffe, *The Unlit Lamp* (1924) (London: Virago, 1989)
- *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) (London: Virago, 1990)
- James, Henry, *The Bostonians* (1886), (London: Penguin, 1986)
- Oliphant, Margaret, *Hester* (1883) (London: Virago, 1984)
- *Kirsteen* (1890) (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1984)
- *Old Mr. Tredgold* (1896) (London: Longmans and Green, 1898)
- Pym, Barbara, *Excellent Women* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978)
- *Some Tame Gazelle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950)
- *Passages in the Life of Margaret Maitland* (1849) (London: Henry Colburn, 1850), 3 vols
- Sinclair, May, *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922) (London: Virago Press, 1980)
- *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919) (London: Virago Press, 1980)
- Ward, Mrs Humphrey, *Delia Blanchflower* (London: Ward and Lock, 1917)
- Wells, H. G., *Ann Veronica* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909)

Secondary Sources

- Abel, Elizabeth et al, eds, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983)
- ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982)
- Adam, Ruth, *A Woman's Place 1910-1975* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975)
- Adams, Margaret *Single Blessedness. Observations on the Single Status in Married Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1976)
- Ainslie, C. E., 'The Education of Girls and the Position of Women Teachers in Scotland', *Educational News* (12 January 1917), 39-41
- Alcoff, Linda, 'Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', *Signs* 13 (1988), 405-36
- Allen, Elizabeth, *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James* (London: Macmillan, 1984)
- Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971)
- Anderson, Gregory, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976)
- Anonymous, 'The Autobiography and Writings of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant', *Edinburgh Review* (July 1899), 26-47.
- 'Kettledrum', *Kettledrum Magazine* (January 1869), 1
- 'The Spinster', *The Freewoman* (23 November 1911), 10-11
- Untitled Review of Margaret Maitland, *Atheneum* (24 November 1849), 1178
- 'What Are Women Doing?', *English Woman's Journal* 7 (1 March 1861), 51-3
- 'Woman's Crusade', *Kettledrum Magazine* (1869), 88
- Apple, Michael, 'Teaching and 'Women's Work': A Comparative Historical and Ideological Analysis', *Teachers College Record* 86 (1984-85), 455-73
- Ardener, Shirley, ed., *Defining Females. The Nature of Women in Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1978)
- Arnold, Roxanne, and Chandler, Olive, eds, *Feminine Singular: Triumphs and Tribulations of the Single Woman. An Anthology* (London: Femina Books, 1974)
- Arthur, William, 'Female Philanthropists', *London Quarterly Review* (October 1881), 49-81
- Auchincloss, Louis, *Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of Nine American Women Novelists* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965)
- Auchmuty, Rosemary, 'Victorian Spinsters' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1975)

- Auerbach, Nina, *Communities of Women. An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1978)
- *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982)
- 'Women on Women's Destiny: Maturity as Penance', *Massachusetts Review* 20, 2 (1979), 326-34
- Baker, Michael, *Our Three Selves* (London: GMP, 1985)
- Banks, Joanne, *Congenial Spirits. The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989)
- Banks, Olive, *Faces of Feminism. A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)
- Banner, Lois, and Hartman, Mary, eds, *Clio's Consciousness Raised. New Perspectives on the History of Women* (London: Harper and Row, 1974)
- Barickman, Richard, et al, *Corrupt Relations: Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Collins, and the Victorian Sexual System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
- Barker, Francis, et al, eds, *1848: The Sociology of Literature* (Essex: University of Essex, 1978)
- Barlow, George, 'Why I oppose woman suffrage', (The Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, n. d.), Box no. 281, Fawcett Library
- Barrett, Michele, and Phillips, Anne, eds, *Destabilizing Theory. Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992)
- et al, eds, *Ideology and Cultural Production* (London: Croom Helm, 1979)
- Basch, Francoise, *Relative Creatures. Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67* (London: Allen Lane, 1974)
- Bauer, Carol, and Ritt, Lawrence, *Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism* (Oxford: Pergamon Press 1979)
- '"A Husband is a Beating Animal": Frances Power Cobbe Confronts the Wife-Abuse Problem in Victorian England', *International Journal of Woman's Studies* 6 (1983), 99-118
- Beer, Patricia, *Reader, I married Him. A Study of the Women Characters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1974)
- Belkin, Roslyn, 'Rejects of the Marketplace: Old Maids in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *International Journal of Women's Studies* IV, 1 (1981), 50-66
- Benet, Diana, *Something to Love. Barbara Pym's Novels* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986)
- Bernikow, Louise, *Among Women* (New York: Harmony Books 1980)

- Besant, Annie, *Marriage as it was, as it is, and as it should be: a plea for reform* (London: Freethought Publishing, 1879)
- Betham-Edwards, Matilda, *Mid-Victorian Memories* (London: John Murray, 1919)
- Bewley, Marius, *The Complex Fate. Hawthorne, Henry James and some Other American Writers* (New York: Gordian Press, 1967)
- Billinghamurst, R. May, Catalogue of Papers of and Relating to R. May Billinghamurst, 05 Box 5, Fawcett Library
- Billington-Grieg, Theresa, *The Non-Violent Militant: Selected Writings of Theresa Billington-Grieg*, (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987)
- private papers, Box 397, Fawcett Library
- 'The Trade in Sex', Box 404, n. d., Fawcett Library
- Bjorhorde, Gerd, *Rebellious Structures. Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel 1880-1900* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, Oxford: distributed by Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Blake, Kathleen, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature: The Art of Self-Postponement* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983)
- Bland, Lucy, 'Purifying the Public World: Feminist Vigilantes in Late Victorian England', *Women's History Review*, 1, 3 (1992), 397-412
- Blease, W. Lyon, 'Against Prejudice', (London: Women's Freedom League, n. d.)
- Bleier, Ruth, *Science and Gender* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1984)
- Boll, Theophilus E. M., *Miss May Sinclair: Novelist. A Biographical and Critical Introduction*, (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1973)
- Borer, Mary Cathcart, *Willingly to School: A History of Women's Education* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1976)
- Bouchcrott, Jessie, *Hints on Self-Help. A Book for Young Women* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1863)
- Branca, Patricia, *The Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975)
- Brittain, Vera, *Radchylfe Hall: A Case of Obscenity* (London: Femina Books, 1968)
- Brooks, Van Wyck, *New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915* (London: Dent, 1940)
- Brodetsky, Tessa, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986)
- Brome, Vincent, *Havelock Ellis, Philosopher of Sex: A Biography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979)
- Broner, E. M., and Davidson, Cathy, eds, *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980)
- Brookes, Barbara, 'Women and Reproduction 1860-1939' in *Labour and Love* edited by Jane Lewis, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 149-171

- Browne, Stella, *The Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and Their Bearing Upon Social Reconstruction*, (London: British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, 1917)
- 'Studies in Feminine Inversion', *Journal of Sexology and Psychoanalysis* (1923), 51-8
- Brownstein, Rachel M., *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels* (New York and Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984)
- Brunet, Ariane, and Turcotte, Louise, 'Separatism and Radicalism', *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology* edited by Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope (London: Onlywomen Press, 1988), 448-56
- Brunt, Rosalind, and Rowan, Caroline, eds, *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982)
- Buckley, Jerome H., *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)
- *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1975)
- Buitenhuis, Peter, *The Grasping Imagination. The American Writing of Henry James* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970)
- Bulley, Miss, 'The Employment of Women', *Fortnightly Review* (January, 1894), 39-48
- Bullough, Vern, *Homosexuality: A History* (New York: Meridan Press, 1979)
- and Bullough, S., 'Lesbianism in the 1920's and 1930's: A Newfound Study', *Signs*, 2, 4 (1977), 895-904
- Burkhart, Charles, *The Pleasure of Miss Pym*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987)
- Burton, Emily, 'The New Woman', *The Woman's Signal* (30 April 1896), 276-277
- Butler, Josephine, ed., *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture. A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1869)
- Caine, Barbara, 'John Stuart Mill and the English Women's Movement', *Historical Studies* (1978), 52-67
- Caird, Mona, 'A Defence of the so-called "Wild Women"', *Nineteenth Century* 31 (May 1892), 811-829
- *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (London: George Redway, 1897)
- Calder, Jenni, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Literature* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976)
- Calder-Marshall, Arthur, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959)

- Carpenter, Edward, *The Intermediate Sex* (London: Mitchell Kennerley, 1912)
- *Love's Coming-of-Age: A Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes*
(London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915)
- Chapple, J. A. V., and Pollard, Arthur, eds, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966)
- Chase, Karen, 'The Literal Heroine: A Study of Gissing's *The Odd Women*',
Criticism, 26, 3 (1984), 231-244
- Chodorow, Nancy, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in *Women, Culture and Society*, edited by Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 43-66.
- *The Reproduction of Mothering*, (London: University of California Press, 1978)
- Clarke, William M., *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: W. H. Allen, 1988)
- Claus, Ruth F., 'Confronting Homosexuality: A Letter from Frances Wilder', *Signs*, 2, 1 (1977), 928-33
- Cobbe, Frances Power, 'Celibacy v. Marriage' (1862), in *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863), 38-57
- 'Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors', *Fraser's Magazine* 78 (1868), 774-94
- *Duties of Women* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881)
- *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863)
- *Life of Frances Power Cobbe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1894)
- 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?', *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1862), 594-610
- 'Wife-Torture in England', *Contemporary Review*, 32 (1878), 55-87
- Colby, Robert A., 'Villette and the Life of the Mind', *P. M. L. A.* 75 (1960), 410-19
- Colby, Vineta, *The Equivocal Virtue: Mrs Oliphant and the Victorian Literary Market Place* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1966)
- Collett, Clara, 'Prospects of Marriage for Women', *Nineteenth Century* 31 (1892), 537-52
- Cook, Blanche, '"Women alone stir my Imagination": Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition', *Signs*, 4, 4 (1979), 718-39
- Cornillon, Susan K., ed., *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*
(Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972)
- Cott, Nancy F. and Pleck, Elizabeth H., eds, *A Heritage of Her Own. Toward a New Social History of American Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979)
- 'Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology 1790-1850', *Signs*, 4, 2 (1978), 219-36

- Courtney, Janet, *Freethinkers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920)
- Coustillas, Pierre, ed., *Gissing. The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972)
- *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1964)
- ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978)
- Coward, Rosalind, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983)
- Craik, Dinah Mulock, *Plain Speaking* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1882)
- *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858)
- Cronwright-Schreiner, S. K., ed., *The Letters of Olive Schreiner, 1876-1920* (London: Unwin, 1924)
- Cross, Wilbur, 'Some Novels of 1920', *Yale Review* 10 (1921), 396-411
- Cruse, Amy, *The Victorians and Their Books* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962)
- Cunningham, Valentine, *In the Reading Gaol. Postmodernity, Texts and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)
- Dane, Clemence, *The Women's Side* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1926)
- Davis, Nuel, *The Life of Wilkie Collins* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956)
- Davis, Sara de Saussure, 'The Bostonians Reconsidered', *Tulane Studies in English*, 23 (1978), 39-60
- Davison, Emily Wilding, private papers, Box 554, Fawcett Library
- de Courtivron, Isabelle, and Marks, Elaine, eds, *New French Feminisms. An Anthology* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981)
- Deegan, Dorothy Yost, *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975)
- Degler, Carl, 'What ought to be and what was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century', *American Historical Review*, 79, 5 (1974), 1467-90
- Delamont, Sara, 'The Domestic Ideology and Women's Education' in *The Nineteenth Century Woman* edited by Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin, (London: Croom Helm, 1978)
- and Duffin, Lorna, eds, *The Nineteenth-Century Woman.: Her Cultural and Physical World* (London: Croom Helm, 1978)
- De Salvo, Louise, 'Lighting the Cave: The Relationship between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf', *Signs* 8, 2 (1982), 195-214

- and Leaska, Mitchell A., eds, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* (London: Hutchinson, 1984)
- Despard, Charlotte, 'Can Women Combine?', *The Vote* (9 September 1911), p. 246.
- 'Why We Want the Vote: the Woman Worker', *The Vote* (29 April 1911), 5
- Diamond, Arlyn, 'Practicing Feminist Literary Criticism', *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 1, 2 (1978), 149-52
- Dobie, G. Vera, *Alphonse Daudet* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1949)
- Dodsworth, Martin, 'Women Without Men at Cranford', *Essays in Criticism* 13 (1963), 132-45
- Donovan, Josephine, 'Feminism and Aesthetics', *Critical Inquiry* 3, 3 (1977), 605-8
- Doughan, David, *Lobbying for Liberation. British Feminism, 1918-1968* (London: City of London Polytechnic, 1980)
- DuBois, Ellen, and Gordon, Linda, 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Thought', *Feminist Review* 13 (1983)
- Dupee, Frederick W., ed., *Henry James. Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- Dusinberre, William, *Henry Adams. The Myth of Failure* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980)
- Dyer, Richard, 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism', *Sweet Dreams. Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 47-72
- Dyhouse, Carol, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976)
- *Myths of Power. A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Macmillan, 1988)
- Eakin, David, 'Gissing and the Feminist Critics', *Gissing Newsletter*, 2 (1966), 1-3
- Easson, Angus, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1991)
- Edel, Leon, *Henry James* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960)
- ed., *Henry James. Letters, 1843-1875* (London: Macmillan, 1974) I
- ed., *Henry James. Letters, 1883-1895* (London: Macmillan, 1981) III
- ed., *Henry James. Letters, 1895-1916* (London: Harvard University Press, 1984) IV
- *Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1883* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962)
- *Henry James: The Middle Years, 1884-1894* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963)

- ed., *The Diary of Alice James* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1964)
- and Powers, Lyall, eds, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- and Ray, G. N., eds, *Henry James and H. G. Wells* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958)
- Edwards, Lee R., *Psyche as Hero. Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984)
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Hess, Elizabeth, *Re-making Love. The Feminization of Sex*, (New York: Anchor Press, 1986)
- Eigner, Edwin, and Worth, George, eds, *Victorian Criticism of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Eisenbud, Ruth-Jean, 'Early and Later Determinates of Lesbian Choice' *Psychoanalytic Review*, 69, 1 (1982), 85-109
- Eliot, George, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856), 442-61
- Ellis, Havelock, *Questions of Our Day* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1936)
- *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vols. II, III, IV (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1908 and 1911)
- Ellis, Sarah Stickney, *The Daughters of England* (London: Fisher, 1852)
- Ellis, Stewart, *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and others* (London: Constable, 1951)
- Ellman, Mary, *Thinking About Women* (London: Virago, 1979)
- Elwin, Malcolm, *Victorian Wallflowers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934)
- Engels, Frederick, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Penguin, 1985)
- Epstein, Joseph, 'Miss Pym and Mr. Larkin', in *Quadrant*, 12 (1986), 9-17
- Evans, Mary, *The Woman Question* (London: Sage Publications, 1994)
- Ewbank, Inga-Stina, *Their Proper Sphere. A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Female Novelists* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966)
- Ezell, Margaret, "'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?': Barbara Pym and the 'Woman Question'", *International Journal of Women's Studies* 7 (1984), 450-465
- Faderman, Lillian, 'Lesbian Magazine Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of Popular Culture* 11, 4 (1978) 800-17
- *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981)
- Faithfull, Emily, *On Some Drawbacks Connected with the Present Employment of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1862)

- 'The Unfit Employments in Which Women are Engaged', *The Victoria Magazine* II (November-April 1863), 65-73
- Faraday, Anne, 'Social Definitions of Lesbians in Britain 1914-1939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1985)
- Fassler, Barbara, 'Theories of Homosexuality as sources of Bloomsbury's Androgyny', *Signs*, 5, 2 (1979), 237-251
- Fawcett, Millicent, *Joan of Arc* (London: National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1912)
- 'The Woman Who Did', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 625-31
- Fernando, Lloyd, *'New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977)
- Fetterley, Judith, ed., *Provisions. A Reader from Nineteenth-Century American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985)
- *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach in American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978)
- Flax, Jane, 'The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism', *Feminist Studies* 4, 2 (1978), 171-89
- Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)
- Ford, Ford Madox, 'Henry James' in *Mightier than the Sword* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938)
- Foster, Jeanette, *Sex Variant Women in Literature: A Historical and Quantitative Survey* (London: Frederick Muller, 1958)
- Foster, Shirley, *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London: Croom Helm, 1985)
- Foucault, Michel, 'An Introduction', *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, translated by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990)
- Franklin, Sarah, et al, eds, *Off Centre. Feminism and Cultural Studies* (London: Harper Collins, 1991)
- Franks, C. S., *Beyond the Well of Loneliness: The Fiction of Radclyffe Hall*, (England: Avebury Publishing, 1982)
- Fredeman, William, 'Emily Faithfull and the Victoria Press: an Experiment in Sociological Bibliography', *The Library*, 29, 2 (June 1974)
- Freedman, E. B., et al, eds, *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985)
- Fryer, Peter, *The Birth Controllers* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966)
- Fulford, Roger, *Votes for Women: the Story of a Struggle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957)

- Fulford, William, 'The Work of Young Men in the Present Age', *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (September 1856), 558-64
- Gallichan, Walter, *The Poison of Prudery: An Historical Survey* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1929)
- Gardiner, Judith Kegan, 'A Wake for Mother: The Maternal Deathbed in Women's Fiction', *Feminist Studies* 4, 2, (1978), 146-65
- Garner, Les, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty. Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918* (London: Heinemann, 1984)
- Gaskell, Elizabeth, *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters* (1862) (London: John Murray, 1929)
- Geismar, Maxwell, *Henry James and the Jacobites* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962)
- Gerin, Winifred, *Elizabeth Gaskell. A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976)
- Gezari, Janet, 'Marriage or Career: Goals for Women in Charlotte Brontë's Novels', *Bucknell Review* 24, 1 (1978), 83-94
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Gubar, Susan, *The Norton Anthology of Literature* (New York: Norton, 1985)
- Gissing, Algernon and Gissing, Ellen, eds, *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family* (London: Constable, 1927)
- Gissing, George, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Blackie, 1898)
- Glum, Tabitha, 'A Bewailment from Bath; Or, Poor Old Maids' *Blackwood's Magazine* (February 1844), 199-201
- Gorham, Deborah, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982)
- Gornick, Vivian, 'The Whole Radclyffe Hall: A Pioneer Left Behind', *Village Voice*, (1981), 10-16
- Grand, Sarah, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review* 158 (1894), 270-6
- Grant, Linda, *Sexing the Millenium: A Political History of the Sexual Revolution* (London: Harper Collins, 1993)
- Greenberg, David F., *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988)
- Greene, Gayle, and Kahn, Coppelia, *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985)
- Greenwell, Dora, 'Our Single Women', *North British Review* (February 1862), 62-88
- Greenwood, George, '"This England" in Contemporary Fiction', *World's Work* 41 (March 1923), 383-8

- Greg, William Rathbone, 'False Morality of Lady Novelists', *National Review* 8 (1859), 144-66
- 'Why are Women Redundant?', *Literary and Social Judgements* (London: Trubner, 1868), 336-79
- Grey, Mrs William, 'Old Maids', reported in *Women and Work* 43 (27 March 1875), 5-6
- Griest, Guinevere, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970)
- Grogan, Mercy, *How Women May Earn a Living* (London: Cassell, 1880)
- Gronno, Arthur Chas., *The Woman M. P. A Peril to Women and the Country* (Manchester: Manchester Branch of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, n. d.)
- Grosskurth, Phyllis, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1980)
- Grylls, David, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986)
- Habegger, Alfred, *Henry James and the 'Woman Business'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- Haire, Norman, ed., *The Sex Reform Congress* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1930)
- Haldane, Charlotte, *Motherhood and Its Enemies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927)
- Hall, Catherine, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology', in *Fit Work for Women*, edited by Sandra Burnam, (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 15-32
- Hall, Ruth, ed., *Dear Dr Stopes* (London: Penguin, 1978)
- Halperin, John, *Gissing. A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- Hamer, Diana, 'Significant Others: Lesbians and Psychoanalytic Theory', *Feminist Review* 34 (1990), 134-151
- Hamilton, Cicely, *Marriage as a Trade* (1909), (London: The Women's Press, 1981)
- *Women's Franchise*, (2 January, 1908), 311.
- Hamilton, Helen, 'Spinsters in the Making', *The Freewoman* (14 December 1911), 66-8
- Hammerton, A. James, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration 1830 -1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979)
- Hanscombe, Gillian and Smyers, Virginia L., *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910 - 1940* (London: The Women's Press, 1987)
- Harrison, Brian, *Peaceable Kingdom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)
- *Prudent Revolutionaries. Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)

- Hartsock, Mildred, 'Henry James and the Cities of the Plain', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 29 (1968), 297-311
- Hawthorn, Jeremy, *Unlocking the Text. Fundamental Issues in Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987)
- Heape, Walter, *Sex Antagonism* (London: Constable, 1913)
- Heilbrun, Carolyn, and Higonnet, Margaret, eds, *The Representation of Women in Fiction* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkin's University Press, 1983)
- *Towards Androgyny: Aspects of Male and Female in Literature* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973)
- Heller, Tamar, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)
- Herndl, Diane, and Warhol, Robyn, eds, *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991)
- Hickok, Kathleen, 'The Spinster in Victoria's England: Changing Attitudes in Popular Poetry by Women', *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, 3 (1981), 119-31
- Higonnet, Margaret et al, eds, *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1987)
- Hill, Ethel, 'Miss Beatrice Harraden', *The Vote* 1, 3 (11 November, 1909), 28
- Hindshaw, Winifred, 'The Maternal Instinct', *The Freewoman* (23 May 1912), 13-14
- Hirsch, Marianne, 'Mothers and Daughters', *Signs* 7,1 (1981), 200-22
- Hobby, Elaine, and White, Chris, eds, *What Lesbians do in Books*, (London: The Women's Press, 1991)
- Holt, Hazel, *A Lot to Ask. A Life of Barbara Pym* (London: Macmillan, 1990)
- and Pym, Hilary, eds, *A Very Private Eye. An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984)
- Holtby, Winifred, 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide* (4 May 1935), 647-8
- Untitled Review of Louisa Alcotts' Fiction, *Time and Tide* (13 July, 1935), 1056-8
- *Women and a Changing Civilization* (London: The Bodley Head, 1934)
- Holtzman, Ellen, 'The Pursuit of Married Love: Women's Attitudes Toward Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939', *Journal of Social History* 16 (1982-3), 39-52
- Houghton, Walter E., *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830 - 1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957)
- Howard, David, 'The Bostonians', *The Air of Reality. New Essays on Henry James* edited by John Goode (London: Methuen, 1972), 60-80
- Hueffer, Ford Madox, 'A Haughty and Proud Generation', *Yale Review* 11 (July 1922), 703-17

- Hughes, Judith, and Midgley, Mary, *Women's Choices: Philosophical Problems Facing Feminism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983)
- Humble, Nicola, and Reynolds, Kimberley, *Victorian Heroines. Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993)
- Hunt, Margaret, 'The De-eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys', *Feminist Review* 34 (Spring 1990), 23-46
- Hutton, Isabel, *The Hygiene of Marriage* (London: Heinemann, 1923)
- Hyde, Montgomery, *The Other Love* (London: Heinemann, 1970)
- Hyder, Clyde K., 'Wilkie Collins and *The Woman in White*', *P. M. L. A.* 54 (1939), 297-303
- Jacobson, Marcia, 'Popular Fiction and Henry James's Unpopular *Bostonians*', *Modern Philology* 73 (1976), 264-275
- Jacobus, Mary, 'Villette's Buried Letter', *Essays in Criticism* 28 (1978), 228-44
- Jacobus, Mary, ed., *Women Writing and Writing about Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979)
- Jacox, Francis, 'Of Old Maids', *Bentley's Miscellany* 45 (March 1859), 344-355
- Jalland, Patricia, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986)
- James, Henry, *Essays, American and English Writers* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1984)
- Jameson, Anna, *Sisters of Charity* (London: Longman, 1855)
- Jardine, Alice, 'Pre-texts for the Transatlantic Feminist', *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), 220-36
- Jay, Karla, and Glasgow, Joanne, *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, (New York: New York University Press, 1990)
- Jeffreys, Sheila, 'Creating the Sexual Future', *The Woman Question*, edited by Mary Evans (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 54-75
- 'Sex reform and anti-feminism in the 1920's', *The sexual dynamics of history* edited by The London Feminist History Group, (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 177-202
- *The Spinster and Her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1987)
- Jeune, Lady, et al, *Ladies at Work* (London: A. D. Innes, 1893)
- Johnson, E. D. H., "'Daring the Dread Glance": Treatment of the Supernatural in *Villette*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 20 (1965-1966), 325-37

- Johnson, R. Brimley, *Some Contemporary Novelists (Women)* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920)
- Kamm, Josephine, *Hope Deferred, Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965)
- *How Different from Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London: The Bodley Head, 1958)
- ed., *Our Freedom and Its Results* (London: Hogarth Press 1936)
- *Rapiers and Battleaxes* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966)
- Kaplan, Cora, 'Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist-Feminist Criticism', *British Feminist Thought* edited by Terry Lovell, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990)
- Kaplan, Sydney Janet, '"Featureless Freedom" or Ironic Submission: Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair', *College English* 32 (1971), 914-17
- Katz, Jonathan, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1976)
- Kauffman, Linda, *Gender and Theory. Dialogues on Feminist Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989)
- Keener, Frederick, 'Barbara Pym Herself and Jane Austen', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 (1985), 89-110
- Kelley, Mary, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)
- 'A Woman Alone: Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Spinsterhood in Nineteenth Century America', *New England Quarterly*, 51 (1978), 209-225
- Kenealy, Arabella, *Feminism and Sex-Extinction* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1920)
- Kendrick, Walter M., 'The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32 (1977-78), 18-35
- Kennedy, Hubert C., 'The Third Sex Theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' in *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality*, edited by J. Licata Salvatore and Robert Petersen (New York: Haworth Press, 1981), 103-12
- Kent, Susan, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Kerr, R. B., 'The Sexual Rights of Spinsters', *The Sex Reform Congress* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1930), 91-4
- Kolodny, Annette, 'A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts', *New Literary History* 11, 3, (1979-80), 451-67
- Krafft-Ebing, Richard von, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, translated by C. A. Chaddock (Philadelphia and London: F. A. Davis, 1892)
- Kristeva, Julia, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980)

- Lacey, Candida, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987)
- Lansbury, Carol, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Paul Elek, 1975)
- Leavis, F. R., 'Henry James' in *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth)
- Legget, Jane, *Local Heroines: Women's History Gazetteer to England, Scotland and Wales* (London: Pandora, London, 1988)
- Lenta, Margaret, 'The Tone of Protest: An Interpretation of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *English Studies* 64 (1983), 422-32.
- Lerner, Lawrence, *Love and Marriage: Literature and its Social Context* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979)
- Lesbian History Group, eds, *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840-1985* (London: The Women's Press, 1989)
- Levin, Amy, *The Suppressed Sister. A Relationship in Novels by Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century British Women*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992)
- Levine, George, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981)
- Lewis, Jane, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)
- *Women in England 1870-1950. Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984)
- Light, Alison, *Forever England. Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991)
- Linehan, Katherine B., 'The Odd Women: Gissing's Imaginative Approach to Feminism', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40 (1979), 358-375
- Linton, Eliza Lynn, *The Girl of the Period and other Social Essays* (London: Richard Bentley, 1883)
- *Ourselves. A Series of Essays on Women* (London: G. Routledge, 1870)
- Lodge, David, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1992)
- London Feminist History Group, ed., *The Sexual Dynamics of History* (London: Pluto Press, 1983)
- Long, Robert, *Barbara Pym*, (New York: Ungar, 1986)
- Lore, Deborah L., '"The Atmosphere of the Unasked Question": Women's Relationships in Modern British Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kent State University, 1981)
- Lovell, Terry, ed., *British Feminist Thought. A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990)

- Ludlow, J. M., 'Ruth: A Novel', *North British Review* 19 (May-August 1853), 151-74.
- Ludovici, Anthony, *Lysistrata or Woman's Future and Future Woman* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927)
- Mackinnon, Catherine, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory', *Signs* 7, 3 (1982), 515-44
- Mais, S. P., 'Clemence Dane', *Books and Their Writers* (London: Grant Richards, 1920)
- McLaren, Angus, 'Abortion in England, 1890-1914', *Victorian Studies* 20 (1976-7), 379-400
- McMahan, Elizabeth 'Sexual Desire and Illusion in *The Bostonians*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 25, 2 (1979), 241-251
- Mann, Arthur, *Yankee Reformers in the Urban Age. Social Reform in Boston, 1880-1900* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966)
- Marcus, Jane, *Art and Anger. Reading Like a Woman* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988)
- Markow, Alice B., 'George Gissing: Advocate or Provocateur of the Women's Movement?', *English Literature in Transition* 25 (1982), 58-73
- Marshall, Denise, 'Slaying the angel and the patriarch: The grinning Woolf', *Women's Studies* 15, 1-3 (1988), 149-77
- Marshall, Rosalind K., *Virgins and Viragos: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980* (London: Collins, 1983)
- Marshall, William H., *The World of the Victorian Novel* (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1967)
- Martin, Robert B., *The Accents of Persuasion. Charlotte Brontë's Novels* (London: Faber, 1966)
- Martin, Theodora P., *The Sound of Our Own Voices. Women's Study Clubs 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987)
- Martin, Wallace, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986)
- Martineau, Harriet, untitled review, *The Edinburgh Review* (April 1859), 293-336
- Martinez, Incz, 'The Lesbian Hero Bound: Radclyffe Hall's Portrait of Sapphic Daughters and Their Mothers', *Journal of Homosexuality* 8, 3-4 (1983), 127-37
- Marxist Feminist Literature Collective, 'Women's Writing: 'Jane Eyre', 'Shirley', 'Villette', 'Aurora Leigh', 1848: *The Sociology of Literature*, edited by Francis Barker et al, (Essex: University of Essex, 1978), pp. 185-206
- Matthiessen, F. O., *The James Family* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947)

- Meikle, Wilma, *Towards a Sane Feminism* (London: Grant and Richards, 1916)
- Meisel, Martin, 'Miss Havisham Brought to Book', *P. M. L. A.* 81 (1966), 278-285
- Merck, Mandy, *Perversions* (London: Virago Press, 1993)
- Mews, Hazel, *Frail Vessels. Woman's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot* (London: Athlone Press, 1967)
- Millard, Elaine, et al, eds, *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989)
- Miller, Betty, 'Amazons and Afterwards', *The Twentieth Century* 164 (August 1958), 126-35
- Miller, D. A., 'Cage aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*', *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel* edited by Jeremy Hawthorn, (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 95-126
- Miller, Jane, *Seductions. Studies in Reading and Culture* (London: Virago, 1990)
- *Women Writing about Men* (London: Virago, 1986)
- Miller, Theodore C., 'The Muddled Politics of Henry James' *The Bostonians*', *The Georgia Review*, 26, (Fall 1972), 336-346
- Mitchell, David, *Queen Christabel* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977)
- Mitchell, Juliet, and Oakley, Annie, *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (London: Penguin, 1976)
- *Woman's Estate* (London: Penquin, 1971)
- Mitchell, Sally *The Fallen Angel. Chastity, Class and Women's Reading* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1981)
- 'Sentiment and Suffering: Women's Recreational Reading in the 1860s', *Victorian Studies* 21 (Autumn 1977), 29-45
- Mitchison, Naomi, 'The Use of Contraceptives by Intelligent Persons', *The Sex Reform Congress* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1930), 182-8
- Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1978)
- Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985)
- Mort, Frank, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral politics in England since 1830* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987)
- Murray, Janet, *Strong-Minded Women and Other Lost Voices from Nineteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984)
- Myer, Valerie, *Charlotte Brontë: The Truculent Spirit* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1987)
- Nardin, Jane, *Barbara Pym*, (Boston: Twayne, 1985)
- Nead, Lynda, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990)

- Nestor, Pauline, *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)
- 'A New Departure in Women's Publishing: *The English Woman's Journal* and *The Victoria Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 15, 3 (Autumn 1982), 93-106
- Newton, Esther, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', *Signs* 9, 4 (1984), 557-575
- Newton, Judith, ed., *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983)
- Newton, Judith Lowder, *Women, Power, and Subversion. Social Strategies in British Fiction 1778-1860* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1981)
- Nicolson, Nigel, *Portrait of a Marriage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973)
- ed., *Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1992)
- Nightingale, Florence, *Cassandra* reprinted in Ray Strachey, *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1978)
- Noble, James Ashcroft, 'The Fiction of Sexuality', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 490-8
- Nordau, Max, *Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1895)
- Oliphant, Margaret, 'The Anti-Marriage League', *Blackwood's Magazine* 159 (January 1896), 135-149
- et al, *Art in the House and House Decoration, Dress and Music in the House* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1978)
- *Autobiography* edited by Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- 'Charles Dickens', *Blackwood's Magazine* 77 (April 1855), 451-466
- 'The Condition of Women', *Blackwood's Magazine* 83 (February 1858), 139-154
- 'Family History', *Blackwood's Magazine* 80 (October 1856), 456-471
- 'The Grievances of Women', *Fraser's Magazine* (May 1880), 698-710
- 'Modern Novelists -- Great and Small', *Blackwood's Magazine* 77 (May 1855), 554-568
- 'Novels', *Blackwood's Magazine* 102 (September 1867), 257-280
- 'The Old Saloon', *Blackwood's Magazine* 150 (November 1891), 712-735
- *The Victorian Age of English Literature* (London: Percival, 1892)
- Olivier, Edith, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* (London: Faber, 1938)

- O'Neill, Philip, *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property and Propriety* (London: Macmillan, 1988)
- Onlywomen Press, *Love Your Enemy? the debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1981)
- 'Ouida', 'The New Woman', *North American Review* 158 (1894), 610-19
- Page, Norman, ed., *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1974)
- Palmegiano, Eugenia, 'Feminist Propaganda in the eighteen-fifties and the eighteen-sixties', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 11 (1971), 5-8
- Pankhurst, Christabel, 'Confessions of Christabel: Why I Never Married' *Weekly Dispatch* (3 April 1921) 1, 7
- *The Great Scourge and How to End It, Plain Facts about a Great Evil* (London: Women's Social and Political Union, 1913)
- 'An Independent Press', *The Suffragette* (17 April 1914), 5
- Pankhurst, E. Sylvia, *The Suffragette Movement* (London: Virago, 1972)
- Parker, Gail, ed., *The Oven Birds. American Women on Womanhood 1820-1920* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972)
- Parkes, Bessie Rayner, *Essays on Woman's Work* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865)
- Pearson, Carol, and Pope, Katherine, 'Toward a Typology of Female Portraits in Literature', *C. E. A. Critic* 37, 4 (1975), 9-13
- Pearson, Ethel, S., 'Sexuality as the Mainstay of Identity: Psychoanalytic Perspectives', *Signs* 5, 4 (1980), 605-30
- Peinovich, Michael and Smith, Herbert, 'The Bostonians: Creation and Revision', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 73 (May 1969), 298-308
- Perry, Ruth, *Women, Letters and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980)
- Petersen, Robert, and Salvatore, J. Licata, eds, *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1981)
- Phillipps, L. F. March, *My Life and What Shall I Do With It?* (London: Longman, 1860)
- Poovey, Mary, *Uneven Developments. The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1988)
- Poston, Carol, 'Childbirth in Literature', *Feminist Studies* 4, 2 (1978), 18-31
- Pound, Ezra, 'Henry James' in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* edited by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954)
- Pratt, Annis, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982)

- Prochaska, F. K., *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)
- Pugh, Martin, *Women's Suffrage in Britain 1867-1928* (London: London Historical Association, 1980)
- Putt, S. Gorley, *A Reader's Guide to Henry James* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966)
- Radford, Jean, 'An Inverted Romance: *The Well of Loneliness* and Sexual Ideology' in *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, edited by Jean Radford (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 97-111.
- Radstone, Susannah, ed., *Sweet Dreams. Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988)
- Rahv, Philip, 'Henry James and his Cult', *New York Review of Books*, (10 February 1972), 18-22
- Ray, Gordon, ed., *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, vol. 3: 1852-1856 (London: Oxford University Press, 1946)
- Re-Bartlett, Lucy, *Sex and Sanctity* (London: Longmans, 1912)
- Reynolds, Sian, *Brittania's Typesetters. Women Compositors in Edwardian Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989)
- Rich, Adrienne, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (London: Onlywomen Press, 1981)
- *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976)
- *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London: Virago, 1980)
- Richardson, Diane, and Robinson, Victoria, eds, *Introducing Women's Studies. Feminist theory and practice* (London: Macmillan, 1993)
- Riegal, Robert E., *American Women. A Story of Social Change* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970)
- Rigby, Elizabeth, 'Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre and the Governesses' Benevolent Institution -- Report for 1847', *The Quarterly Review* 84 (December, 1848), 153-185
- Rigney, Barbara, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel. Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood* (Madison, Wisconsin, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978)
- Robb, Kenneth, 'May Sinclair', *English Literature in Transition* 18, 72-73
- Roberts, Helene, 'The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman', *Signs* 2, 3 (1977), 554-69
- Robins, Elizabeth, *Why?* (London: The Women Writer's Suffrage League, 1914)

- Robinson, Kenneth, *Wilkie Collins. A Biography* (London: The Bodley Head, 1951)
- Roe, Sue, *Writing and Gender: Virginia Woolf's Writing Practice* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, St. Martins Press, 1990)
- Rogers, Katherine M., *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966)
- Rolley, Katrina, 'Cutting a Dash: The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge', *Feminist Review*, 35 (1990), 54-66
- Romances, George, 'Mental Differences Between Men and Women' *The Nineteenth Century*, 21 (May 1887), 654- 672
- Rosen, Andrew, *Rise Up, Women. The Militant Campaign of the W. S. P. U., 1903-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974)
- Rossen, Janice, *The World of Barbara Pym* (London: Macmillan, 1987)
- Rover, Constance, *Love, Morals and the Feminists* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970)
- *The Punch Book of Women's Rights* (South Brunswick, N. J. : A. S. Barnes, 1970)
- Rowbotham, Judith, *Good Girls Make Good Wives. Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989)
- Rowbotham, Sheila, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973)
- and Weeks, Jeffrey, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977)
- Rowse, A. L., *Homosexuals in History: A Study of Ambivalence in Society, Literature and the Arts* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977)
- Rubinstein, David, *Before the Suffragettes. Women's Emancipation in the 1890s* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986)
- 'Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the Meaning of Women's Emancipation, 1886-99', *Victorian Studies* 34 (1990-1), 365-380
- Ruehl, Sonja, 'Inverts and Experts: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Identity' in *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, edited by R. Brunt and C. Rowan (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 15-36.
- Rugoff, Milton, *Prudery and Passion* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971)
- Rule, Jane, *Lesbian Images* (London: Peter Davies, 1976)
- Ruskin, John, 'Of Queens' Gardens', *Sesame & Lilies; The Two Paths Etc.*, edited by Ernest Rhys, (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1928)
- Russett, Cynthia, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989)
- Rye, Maria S., *Emigration of Educated Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1861)

- Sackville-West, Vita, and Nicolson, Harold, 'Marriage', *The Listener* 28 June 1929, 899-900
- 'Our Future Beckons', *Pictorial Review* November 1933, 19, 37, 40
- Salmon, Edward, 'What Girls Read', *The Nineteenth Century* 20 (July-December 1886), 515-29
- Salwak, Dale, ed., *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, (London: Macmillan, 1987)
- Savage, Gail, "'The Wilful Communication of a Loathsome Disease': Marital Conflict and Venereal Disease in Victorian England', *Victorian Studies* 34 (1990-1), 35-54
- Scanlon, Leone, 'The New Woman in the Literature of 1883 - 1909', *University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies*, 11, 2 (1976), 133-159
- Schor, Hilary, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace. Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
- Schupf, Harriet Warm, 'Single Women and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: The Case of Mary Carpenter', *Victorian Studies* 3 (March 1974), 301-18
- Segal, Lynne, *Is the Future Female?* (London: Virago, 1987)
- Selig, Robert, 'The Gospel of Work in *The Odd Women*', *Gissing Newsletter*, 15 (1979), 19-25
- Shallard, S. D., 'Warrior Women', *Votes for Women* (3 March 1911), 357
- Shattock, Joanne, ed., *Dickens and other Victorians* (London: Macmillan, 1988)
- Showalter, Elaine, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* edited by Elaine Showalter, (London: Virago, 1986)
- 'Literary Criticism', *Signs* 1 (1975-1976), 435-60
- *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978)
- ed., *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (London: Virago, 1986)
- *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* (London: Virago, 1992)
- Sicherman, Barbara, 'The Uses of Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients and Neurasthenia', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 32 (1977), 33-54
- Sinclair, Andrew, *The Better Half. The Emancipation of the American Woman* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966)
- Sinclair, May, *The Three Brontës* (London: Hutchinson, 1912)
- 'A Little Chat about Mrs Oliphant', *Blackwood's Magazine* 133 (January 1883), 73-91.

- Slater, Michael, *Dickens and Women* (London: J. M. Dent, 1983)
- Smart, Carol, ed., *Regulating Womanhood. Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992)
- Smith, Alice, 'Some English Women Novelists', *North American Review* 214 (December 1921), 799-808
- Smith, Blanche, *The Single Woman of Today: Her Problems and Adjustments*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952)
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll, *Disorderly Conduct. Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America', *Signs* 1, 1 (1975), 1-29
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer, *The Female Imagination* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976)
- Spark, Muriel, *The Essence of the Brontës. A Compilation with Essays* (London: Peter Owen, 1993)
- Spencer, Jane, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan, 1993)
- *The Rise of the Woman Novelist. From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)
- Spender, Dale, *For the Record. The Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge* (London: The Women's Press, 1985)
- *Mothers of the Novel* (London and New York: Pandora, 1986)
- *Time and Tide Wait for no Man* (London: Pandora Press, 1984)
- *Women of Ideas and What Men have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983)
- Spelman, Elizabeth, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (London: The Women's Press, 1988)
- Spurling, Hilary, 'Mothers and Daughters in Love', *The Sunday Observer* 25 January 1981, 29
- Stead, W. T., 'The Novel of the Modern Woman', *Review of Reviews* 10 (1984), 64-74
- Stevens, Michael, *Vita Sackville-West: A Critical Biography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973)
- Stimpson, Catherine, 'The Androgyne and the Homosexual', *Women's Studies* 2 (1974), 237-48
- 'Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English' in *Writing and Sexual Difference* edited by Elizabeth Abel (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982)
- Stone, Donald, 'Victorian Feminism and the Nineteenth Century Novel', *Women's Studies* 1 (1972), 65-91

- Stoneman, Patsy, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987)
- Stopes, Marie, *Married Love* (1918), (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923)
- Strachey, Lytton, 'Florence Nightingale', in *Eminent Victorians* (London: Penguin, 1975), 111-61
- Strachey, Ray, *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Britain* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1969)
- Strouse, Jean, *Alice James. A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981)
- Stubbs, Patricia, *Women and Fiction. Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920* (London: Methuen, 1981)
- Stutfield, Hugh, 'The Psychology of Feminism', *Blackwood's Magazine* 161 (1897), 104-17
- Swiney, Frances, *Awakening of Women* (London: William Reeves, 1905)
- *The Bar of Isis* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1912)
- *The Law of the Mother* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1919)
- *Sublime Feminism* (Cheltenham: League of Isis, n. d.)
- *Woman and Natural Law* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1912)
- Symington, John, and Wise, Thomas, *The Brontës. Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932), 4 vols, IV.
- Taylor, Barbara, *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983)
- Taylor, Mary, *The First Duty of Women. A Series of Articles Reprinted from The Victoria Magazine, 1865 to 1870* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1870)
- 'Marriage', *The Victoria Magazine* (January 1868), 194-203
- Thackeray, Anne, 'Toilers and Spinsters', *Toilers and Spinsters and Other Essays* (London: Smith and Elder, 1874), 1-34
- Thesing, William, 'Mrs Humphrey Ward's Anti-Suffrage Campaign', *Turn-of-the-Century Women* 1, 22-35
- Thompson, E. W., *Education for Ladies 1830-1860: Ideas on Education in Magazines for Women* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947)
- Thompson, Margaret, and Thompson, Mary, *They Couldn't Stop Us* (London: W. E. Harrison, 1957)
- Thorp, Margaret, *Sarah Orne Jewett* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966)
- Tickner, Lisa, *The Spectacle of Women. Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987)
- Tindall, Gillian, *The Born Exile. George Gissing* (London: Temple Smith, 1974)
- Thomson, Patricia, *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-1873* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956)

- Todd, Janet, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980)
- Trevelyan, Janet Penrose, *The Life of Mrs. Humphrey Ward* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1923)
- Trilling, Lionel, 'The Bostonians' in *The Opposing Self. Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), pp.104-117
- Troubridge, Una, *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall* (London: Hammond, 1961)
- Uglow, Jenny, *Elizabeth Gaskell. A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber, 1993)
- Veesser, H. Aram, ed., *The New Historicism Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994)
- Verney, Frances, 'The Powers of Women, and How to Use Them', *The Contemporary Review* 14 (July 1870), 521-39
- Vicinus, Martha, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985)
- 'Sexuality and Power', *Feminist Studies* 8, 1 (1982), 134-56
- ed., *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Indiana University Press, 1972)
- 'Vir', 'Speculations on Sex War', *The Freewoman* (14 December 1911), 65-6
- Walkowitz, Judith, *Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class and State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)
- Walters, R. G., 'The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism', *American Quarterly*, 25 (1973), 177-201
- Ward, Mrs Humphrey, 'An Appeal Against the Female Suffrage', *The Nineteenth Century* 25 (June 1889), 781-88
- Watson, K., 'George Eliot and Mrs Oliphant: A Comparison in Social Attitudes', *Essays in Criticism* 19 (1969), 410-419
- Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987)
- Watts, Marjorie, *P. E. N. : The Early Years, 1921-1926* (London: Archive Press, 1971)
- Webb, R. K. 'The Victorian Reading Public', *University Quarterly* 12 (1957), 24-44
- Weedon, Chris, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987)
- Weeks, Jeffrey, *Coming-Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quarter Books, 1977)
- *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London and New York: Longman, 1989)
- *Sexuality* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986)
- *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985)

- Welter, Barbara, *Dimity Convictions. The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976)
- West, Rebecca, *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log* (1931), (New York, Garden City: Doubleday and Doran, 1967)
- *Henry James* (London: Nisbet, 1916)
- 'Spinsters and Art', *The Freewoman* (11 July 1912), 147-9
- Wharton, Edith, 'Henry James' in *A Backward Glance* (London: Constable, 1972)
- Wheelwright, Julia, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora, 1989)
- Whitelegg, Elizabeth, et al, eds, *The Changing Experience of Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982)
- Whitlock, Gillian, '"Everything is Out of Place": Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Literary Tradition', *Feminist Studies* 13, 3 (1987), 554-82
- Williams, Juanita, 'Woman: Myth and Stereotype', *International Journal of Women's Studies* 1, 3 (1978), 221-47
- Williams, Merryn, *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1986)
- *Six Women Novelists* (London: Macmillan, 1987)
- *Women in the English Novel 1800-1900* (London: Macmillan, 1984)
- Winnifrith, Tom, *A New Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Macmillan, 1988)
- Wolfe, Patricia, 'Structure and Movement in *Cranford*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 23 (1968-1969), 161-76
- Wolff, Constance, *Love Between Women* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1973)
- Woolf, Virginia 'Henry James' in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1947)
- *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929)
- *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952)
- *Women and Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1979)
- Wright, Sir Almoth, 'On Militant Hysteria', *The Times* (28 March 1912), 7-8
- Wright, Edgar, *Mrs Gaskell. The Basis for Reassessment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965)
- Yellin, Jean F. *Women and Sisters: the Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989)
- Young, A., ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887 - 1903* (London: Constable, 1961).
- Young, James D., *Women and Popular Struggles. A History of British Working-class Women, 1560 - 1984* (Mainstream, 1985)

- Zaborszky, Dorothy, 'Victorian Feminism and Gissing's *The Odd Women*', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 8, 5 (1985), 489-496
- Zegger, H. D., *May Sinclair* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976)
- Zeman, Anthea, *Presumptuous Girls: Women and Their World in the Serious Woman's Novel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977)