# LOVE AND IDEOLOGY:

# FEMINISM AND BRITISH FICTION, 1880-1950.

by

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## SUMMARY

As women are emancipated into civil society, the ideology of their roles and even their nature is subjected to questioning, and so too are the traditional forms of relationship between the sexes. "Love" becomes a problematic concept. In late nineteenth-century Britain, criticisms of marriage as an institution coincide with a new assertion of the individual will against social restraints. In the literature of the period discussed in Chapter One, the figure of the "New Woman" is associated with wide-ranging demands for social change. Fiction produced by women writers at this time is beset by ideological inhibitions and artistic difficulties, the work of Olive Schreiner being the most significant example (Chapter Two). Hardy's last novel turned the "fiction of sex and the New Woman" into a tragedy of modern love, the defeat of an ideal spiritual affinity by the "cruel law of nature and society," and it is suggested in Chapter Three that the tragic undercurrent of Lawrence's _Sons and Lovers_ springs from the same ideological conflict. This loss of faith in the possibilities of social liberation is evident in novels dealing with the Suffragette period, where political action is commonly eschewed in favour of retreat into marriage (Chapter Four). In _The Rainbow_ and _Women in Love_, Lawrence explores the problematic nature of relations between the sexes, but it is demonstrated in Chapter Five that his idea of the salvation of the individual and the restoration of community in "ultimate marriage" fails. During the inter-war period the feminist movement disintegrated, but women's hopes of participating equally with men in the social world and freely developing their individuality were disappointed: in Chapter Six Virginia Woolf's feminist essays are read as representing and commenting on this phenomenon. Her self-assigned project as historian of the "obscure lives of women" in this period of transition is illustrated in a discussion

of The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse and Between the Acts in Chapter Seven. Themes which she treats elegiacally -- the young woman's emergence from the patriarchal family, her conflict between love and independence, the effort to find new modes of relationship -- are presented in an optimistic light in Christina Stead's The Man Who Loved Children and For Love Alone; but in later novels by this writer the "free" woman's quest for love is viewed ironically (Chapter Eight). In the work of both these women writers, the patriarchal ideology of sexual roles and relationships appears to be the major deterrent to the free development of women, the reinvention of love, and the creation of a new human community.

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material written or published by another person, except when due reference is made in the text.

Signed

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# INTRODUCTION

Kate Millett's ground-breaking feminist work, Sexual Politics (1969), challenged orthodox cultural history in two main ways: it insisted that any consideration of the literary culture of Victorian England acknowledge the "Woman Question" as a central and highly-charged ideological issue, and that this question at the level of ideology derived from feminist opposition to patriarchal power, a political struggle for the recognition of "the full humanity of woman and her right to define herself."[1] She argued that changing relations between the sexes under pressure from the movement for women's emancipation constituted the central organising theme of some major literary works of the period, including Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Hardy's Jude the Obscure as well as Charlotte Bronte's Villette; and she discussed the early novels of D.H. Lawrence as "instances of sexual politics" in response to the challenge of "sexual revolution" threatened by the first wave of feminism.

In establishing this second point she had, it was maintained by hostile critics, committed the literary sin of regarding certain fictional characters as spokesmen for their creator, who then became visible as an interested party in the novel's conflicts, rather than a remote fingernail-paring deity in the Joycean mould. But although her attack on Lawrence's male chauvinism aroused the ire of many literary critics, there was no comparable move to defend the aesthetic integrity of Charlotte Bronte against the assumption that the heroine of Villette often speaks for her. It was apparent that Millett's definition of sexual politics and its place in literature, rather than her revised version of Victorian culture, had drawn fire.

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[1] Laura Chester and Sharon Barba, "From the Editors," Rising Tides: 20th Century American Women Poets (New York: Washington Square Press, 1973), p. xxv.

Now that the tumult and the shouting about Sexual Politics has died down and the smoke of battle has cleared, it is apparent that the map of modern literature is being re-drawn. In the mountain range representing social problems in Victorian fiction, one peak has been renamed "The Woman Question": Virginia Woolf is sometimes seen returning to it and marvelling at its proportions, but Lawrence has never again been sighted in its vicinity. Beyond these mountains, however, a whole new territory of women's writing is being surveyed and explored by feminist critics. In the work of Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter[2] this territory is seen to run parallel to the male tradition of the novel until about the turn of the century, when it begins to take on a more distinctive character and to spread out in previously unrecognized directions, into autobiography, memoir and poetry as well as experimental fiction.

The present work does not venture far into this newly-opened territory, but locates itself on the border between the so-called male and female traditions in fiction, highlighting aspects of obvious confrontation rather than underground subversion or separate development. The new feminist criticism has been described as "specifically literary attempts to re-envision the relationship between tradition, male or female, and the individual female talent,"[3] whereas my own work originates in a more general critical concern with cultural hegemony and the way it projects exclusive "traditions" and isolates "the individual" from sex and class determinations. More specifically, one of my original intentions

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[2]Ellen Moers, Literary Women (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1977); Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[3]Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "A Revisionary Company," Novel, 10 (1977), 158.

was to refine and consolidate Millett's approach to the analysis of literary culture, and this is still strongly evident in the structure of the present work. Early chapters situate in historical context novels which acknowledge, explicitly or otherwise, the radical social and cultural implications of women's greater freedom. In the later studies of Virginia Woolf and Christina Stead the writers themselves are also seen as historians in the sense that they are recording "the obscure lives of women" during a period of ideological backlash against feminism between the wars.

Millett's feminist revision of literary achievement was an exercise in interpretive criticism:

> I have operated on the premise that there is room for a criticism which takes into account the larger cultural context in which literature is conceived and produced. Criticism which originates from literary history is too limited in scope to do this; criticism which originates in aesthetic considerations, "New Criticism," never wished to do so.[4]

Her conception of ideology was crude but polemically effective. She discussed the ideological content of a work as the conscious deployment of patriarchal attitudes, although she did not confine her analysis to explicit ideology (such as the Lawrentian doctrine of sex) and authorial point of view, but also tackled characterization (in relation to sex stereotypes) and narrative development (related to the notion that power-struggle defines the relations between men and women). What was needed, it seemed to me, was a definition of ideology more comprehensive and more materialist than Millett's, and a more complex conception of its relation to literature.

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[4]*Sexual Politics* (1969; rpt. London: Sphere-Abacus, 1972), p. xii.

In recent years Marxist critics have attempted to refine the theory of cultural, in particular of literary, production. The work of Lucien Goldmann is interesting for his historical materialist explanation of the social origins of literary themes and structures,[5] but it concentrates on political and religious ideology to the exclusion of sexual values and practices. Patriarchal ideology is unrecognizable as ideology because it does not appear in the form of a system of ideas, and Goldmann's definition of ideology finally enables him only to present a Marxist approach to what is conventionally defined as the history of ideas. On the contrary, argues Louis Althusser,

> Ideology is indeed a system of representation, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as _structures_ that they impose on the vast majority of men /sic/, not via their 'consciousness.'[6]

Raymond Williams, in _Marxism and Literature_, finds this definition too heavily dependent on the notion of a "decisive generalized system," which overrides "the relatively mixed, confused, incomplete or inarticulate consciousness of actual men /sic/." To cover this expanded definition of consciousness he offers the concept of "hegemony." It is a concept which "at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts," that of ideology and that of culture as a "whole social process."[7] This definition of hegemony, following Gramsci,

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[5] _Towards a Sociology of the Novel_, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1975).

[6] _For Marx_, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane - Penguin, 1969), p. 233.

[7] _Marxism and Literature_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 109, 108.

incorporates two essential factors in the working definition of ideology which I have employed in this thesis, seeing it as a structure of practices and values by which a dominant social group imposes its view of reality on a subordinate group, and as a primary constituent of the "inarticulate consciousness" of men and women. Because patriarchal ideology informs from the beginning the individual's sense of personal identity as a male or female human being, I refer to it as Williams refers to hegemony:

> It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living. . . . It is a lived system of meanings and values -- constitutive and constituting -- which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality.[8]

The feminist historian, Joan Kelly-Gadol, points out that since the relation of the sexes is now established as being socially rather than naturally constituted, having its own development, "we have made of sex a category as fundamental to our analysis of the social order as other classifications, such as class and race."[9] As a contribution to this historical analysis, I have examined some crucial transformations in the patriarchal aspect of the hegemonic order in British society, using fiction as a source of evidence. I have also, however, turned this process of enquiry dialectically on its head, attempting to determine to what extent certain significant novels have been shaped by the cultural transformations attendant on the gradual emancipation of women in civil society.

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[8] Williams, p. 110.

[9] "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History," Signs, 1 (1976), 816.

When any such novel is re-grounded in its historical context, its active relation to the dominant ideology of sexism -- of sexual difference and relationship -- can be discerned:

> [T]he work is precisely not complete in itself but is handed down to us as a kind of gesture or verbal thrust incomprehensible unless we are able to understand the situation in which the gesture was first made, and the interlocutors to whom it was a reply.[10]

But whereas the more polemical novels which I discuss (topical works about the "New Woman" and the Suffragettes) are indeed "completed," their significance exhausted, by a re-grounding of this kind, the better novels are opened up. The artistic process of "recast[ing] the historical contradictions . . . into ideologically resolvable terms"[11] becomes evident, and one sees more clearly the coherence and continuity in the lifelong creative projects of a Virginia Woolf or a Christina Stead.

Without attempting to re-situate fiction in a total social context, I have taken the feminist movement as an index of those social changes challenging most directly the patriarchal social order. It is a source of the most radical statements of women's dissatisfaction with their subordinate status and of their aspirations for a new social order. Feminism cannot be regarded as expressing any "objective" truth about the situation of women as opposed to the "subjective" truths of fiction, for its theories and practices are necessarily to a certain extent determined by the dominant ideologies of class and race as well as sex. I have used feminism as a specific focus for this enquiry into the ideological dimensions of fiction, not as the "material" which the fiction transforms.

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[10] Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 377.

[11] Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: NLB, 1976), p. 112.

As a further sharpening of focus in the general area of "women and fiction" I have selected novels in which there is a central concern with questions of love and marriage, of the actual and ideal relations between women and men. It has often been observed that "fictional marriages have traditionally enacted [the] union of Self and Other, and have thus resolved the tensions between the individual and the larger human community which have informed the novel from its very beginnings."[12] But the central importance of marriage as a literary device is most clearly evident in cases where the protagonists' major problem is their exclusion from the larger human community in which the novel is set, because of their class or national origins or, most often, because of their sex. For the vast majority of female protagonists, marriage is the end and object of their fictional lives. To this day most women writers use marriage as a structuring theme in their novels; but Lawrence's early works were perhaps the last major novels written by a man to do so, for reasons suggested in my discussion of The Rainbow and Women in Love. And in the work of the two women writers whom I consider to have contributed most creatively to British fiction during the period, Woolf and Stead, love between the sexes is problematic. It is, to borrow Goode's formulation of "the nature of woman" as a literary project in Victorian fiction, "the object of a quest, not the subject of a demonstration."[13]

I have not attempted to explore all those novels "exposing the situation of women as the key to a critique of society," as Jenni Calder

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[12] Ruth Yeazell, "Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics," Novel, 8 (1974), 37.

[13] John Goode, "Woman and the Literary Text" in The Rights and Wrongs of Women, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 252.

commends Meredith for having done.[14] Rather, I have concentrated on fiction which tends towards the tragic mode, representing "society" as an area of conflict within which no satisfactory personal solutions can be found. For example, while Meredith's heroines find happy marriages in which the comic mode of his fiction promises to allow them complete fulfilment and while George Eliot's heroines subject themselves to the higher demands of social harmony, in both cases the woman's aspirations are "recast into ideologically resolvable terms." The novels which I find most interesting, however, are those in which the protagonists are granted no such spiritual triumph or social integration: their defeat as individuals still reverberates as an indictment of a social structure which contains no space, social or spiritual, for their accommodation.

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[14] _Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction_ (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 170.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE WOMAN QUESTION I: THE NEW WOMAN

### "The Fiction of Sex and the New Woman"

The last two decades of the nineteenth century were a slow time for the feminist movement in Britain. There were repeated setbacks to the suffrage campaign, few signs of progress in opening the professions to those women now acquiring university education, and only tentative moves by others to unionize and improve their working conditions. In the area of public debate, however, feminism had made its mark. Discussion of the "Woman Question" was now conducted more in terms of women's rights than women's duties. Criticisms of the established Victorian ideology of woman's nature and role were widespread, and are evident in the fiction of the period.

Such criticisms were generally expressed through and articulated by a type of heroine who appeared in novels as diverse in quality and intention as Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* and Grant Allen's best-seller, *The Woman Who Did*. She was dubbed the "New Woman" but she was not a wholly new literary character. The high-minded, outspoken, well-born girl with decided opinions belongs, as A.R. Cunningham has noted, to "a recognizable tradition of the problem novel going back to Disraeli's Sybil and Mrs Gaskell's Margaret Hale."[1] But she was now able to articulate her views on such controversial issues as marriage and prostitution, and even to discuss her own sexual feelings; she expressed her desire for education and spiritual independence more vehemently than her predecessors had done, and often supported (although she seldom participated in) public struggles waged by the feminists for women's rights to employment and suffrage.

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[1] "The 'New Woman' Fiction of the 1890's," *Victorian Studies*, 17 (1973), 179.

It was her explicit interest in sexuality and her radical criticism of the institutions within which it was defined and confined that made the New Woman shocking. The sexual theme of Jude the Obscure, "the apparent attack on the institution of marriage and the intimate knowledge of the protagonists' sexual affairs which Hardy imposed on his readers,"[2] enraged conservative critics more than any of the radical views on religious and educational matters aired by Jude and Sue. When this tragic tale of modern love was published in 1896 it was classed by R.Y. Tyrrell, with obvious intent to insult Hardy, with "the fiction of sex and the New Woman, so rife of late;"[3] and Mrs Oliphant, a prominent anti-feminist, attacked Hardy and Grant Allen together as conspirators in an "Anti-Marriage League."[4] The creators of fictional New Women shared more than the ire of reviewers: they met similar problems with publishers as well. Rejected by established houses like Macmillan, Blackwood and Cassell, they found a better reception from the new publishers such as Hutchinson, Heinemann, Lane and Methuen. "In this period Hardy's rejection letters read like a roll-call of the traditional houses," notes the historian, Kay Daniels. She found that the Macmillan's reader at that time consistently sent any work which treated "the problem of sex" off to Lane or Heinemann.[5] A decade earlier, Olive Schreiner was fortunate to have had Meredith read the ms. of her novel at Chapman and Hall and recognise its promise; but The Story of an African Farm was published in 1883 in its original form only after an argument with the publisher, who wanted the heroine to be secretly married to the father of her child.[6]

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[2] Cunningham, p. 177.

[3] Fortnightly Review, NS 59 (1896), 858.

[4] "The Anti-Marriage League," Blackwood's Magazine, January 1896, p.144.

[5] "Rejecting the New Woman," Refractory Girl: A Women's Studies Journal, No. 1 (Summer 1972-73), p. 7.

[6] Vera Buchanan-Gould, Not Without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 67.

Apparently what was lethal for these novelists was their affirmative attitude to the New Woman. Not that she triumphs -- all these heroines die, go mad, or retreat from the quest for love -- but nor does she recant. She is generally portrayed as morally aware and true to her unconventional principles; and she is no sexual libertarian. The problem of "sex and the New Woman" was not that she did it but that she thought and spoke about it. She was the product of a widespread reaction against the Victorian notion of "purity" as carefully-nurtured sexual ignorance, the proponent of active virtue as a moral ideal for women as well as the major critic of a hypocritical sexual double standard. "Purity," then, was to be redefined along the lines suggested by Hardy's subtitling his story of the woman seduced and abandoned Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman. Such a project was held to be self-evidently repugnant to right-thinking citizens, as this review of Iota's A Yellow Aster indicates:

> A cardinal principle of our band of reformers, or iconoclasts, as you please, is that life can be purified only by delving for hidden impurity, by spreading it out for general inspection, and, above all, by insisting that it shall be the subject of a searching analysis conducted in partnership by young men and women contemplating matrimony.[7]

Rival novelists ridiculed the "new purity." Marie Corelli blamed Ibsen for it, and wrote in her novel, The Mighty Atom, of a housemaid shocked by her mistress's desertion of the family because, being ignorant of the New Morality, she "did not recognise that this was a 'noble' outbreak of 'white purity'."[8] But serious feminists also had their doubts: E.R. Chapman, writing on "Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction," approved of problem novels on marriage because she felt that "the solution to our problems lies within those sacred precincts"[9] but drew the line at Grant

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[7]Quoted in Cunningham, p. 180.

[8]Quoted in Amy Cruse, After the Victorians (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 128.

[9]Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction and Other Essays on Kindred Subjects (London: John Lane, 1897), p. 11.

Allen's "literary crusade for the abolition of marriage and the family."[10] Pointing to the male-supremacist views expressed in The Woman Who Did, and noting that Allen's "separate dwellings" idea for couples living in a free union allowed men to evade their paternal responsibilities, she concluded that "Such glad tidings as the hill-top gospel may contain are not for women at all, but for the imperfectly developed male."[11]

Mrs Chapman was highly suspicious, indeed, of the New Woman herself, referring to her as a "journalistic myth" which obscured the "reasonable claims and aspirations of the mass of thinking women."[12] The justice of this view is confirmed by the way the new type of woman is treated in journal articles and sensational fiction of the eighteen-nineties. She serves the social purpose of a "myth," as a figure upon which current fears and desires could be projected: she was both venerated as a model of womanhood and reviled as an insult to women and a danger to society. These conflicting attitudes can be seen clearly in two of the most sensational New Woman novels: in Mrs Lynn Linton's The New Woman: In Haste and At Leisure she is associated with lesbianism, political subversion and (worst of all, as it threatened the British Race) the rejection of motherhood; and in Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did a heroine of "stainless soul" chooses to bear her child out of wedlock and dies a martyr's death when later the child rejects her and her radical ethics. Given the psychological shallowness of such characterizations, these novels provide little insight into the experience of women who were rebelling against aspects of the Victorian ideal of womanhood. For this kind of insight one must look through the often shadowy glass provided by

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[10] Chapman, p. 33.

[11] Chapman, p. 36. "A Hill-Top Novel" was the subtitle of Grant Allen's The British Barbarians (1895), which was written in an atmosphere of wholesome freshness "on a heather-clad hill-top," he claimed, and which "raises a protest in favour of purity" (Cunningham, p. 179).

[12] Chapman, p. xiii.

the feminist novelists whose work will be discussed in the next chapter; but Linton and Allen do provide interesting evidence of the general ideological upheaval with which the Woman Question became associated at the end of the century. And for contemporary portraits of "the real reformer and the friend of her sex," the feminist whom Mrs Chapman opposed to the "phantom" of the New Woman,[13] one can turn to two novels by major writers of the period, The Bostonians by Henry James and The Odd Women by George Gissing.

Odd Women

Neither of these books raised the storm of controversy which greeted "the fiction of sex and the New Woman." The views and actions of these fictional feminists gave no offence to patriarchal morality, apparently. The reasons for this, when examined, help to reveal the meaning of the New Woman as an ideological construct, as well as reflecting accurately the conservative attitude of most nineteenth-century feminists to questions of sexual morality.

Firstly, there is a notable lack of erotic interest in both of the novels about feminists. In The Odd Women, the relationship between the lovers, Rhoda and Everard, is marked less by passion than by a conflict of wills, in which the feminist's pride in her independence proves stronger than the male's determination to break it down. The marriage between Monica and Widdowson is one of convenience, motivated by her need for material security and his desire to possess and dominate the child-woman; frustration, not a Grand Passion, drives her into the arms of a weak young man who dares not respond and so, contrary to her husband's jealous accusations, she does not commit adultery. In this novel, as in The Bostonians, the strongest emotional tie is between the two women, Rhoda

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[13] Chapman, p. xiii.

Nunn and her colleague, Mary Barfoot. In James' version of the relationship between women, Olive Chancellor's feeling for her younger friend, Verena Tarrant, is depicted as a powerful and near-tragic passion - the prevailing irony of the narrative, however, saved James from all but the mildest accusation of indiscretion.[14]

Secondly, neither novel radically challenges the institution of marriage in an explicit way.[15] James allows his charming young man, Basil Ransom, to win Verena in the end, although we leave her in tears, "not the last she was destined to shed" in this "far from brilliant union."[16] Gissing offers Monica's marriage as an example of the mistaken commitments that many women who have no other means of livelihood are forced to make - the parallel with prostitution is clearly implied. He even has his "advanced" lovers debate the morality of a free union, but his criticism is directed towards the motivation and commitment of the couple, not against the institution itself. The ideal of marriage implicit in the novel is that of a lifelong, monogamous union based on spiritual equality and mutual respect and, tested against this ideal, all the liaisons in the novel are found wanting. To remain single is considered preferable to making a bad marriage, and Gissing's admirable "odd women" cheerfully devote their lives to the work of improving the education and employment opportunities of others like themselves. Rhoda predicts that "when all women, high and low alike, are trained to self-respect, then men will

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[14] A reviewer in the Atlantic (June 1886), commenting on James' "exhaustive" interest in his characters, records that when the first interview between Olive and Verena carries them to "dangerous lengths" "we hesitate about accepting the relation between them as either natural or reasonable." Rpt. in Henry James: The Critical Heritage, ed. Roger Gard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 168.

[15] Although Gissing, at least, in imagining a life-long bond between two women as an alternative to marriage, was far more radical than the female novelists; see Susan Gorsky, "Old Maids and New Women: Alternatives to Marriage in Englishwomen's Novels, 1847-1915," Journal of Popular Culture, 7 (1973), 68-85.

[16] Henry James, The Bostonians (1886; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 390. All further references to this work appear in the text.

regard them in a different light, and marriage may be honourable to both."[17] The feminists' aim is ultimately a moral one: the regeneration of women and, through them, of men; social institutions will remain intact (p. 59).

The third potentially explosive aspect of their subject, organized public agitation for women's rights, is also defused in both "feminist" novels. The public world was a male domain and even the middle-class feminists, for the most part, felt it should stay that way. They wanted to extend the limits of what was then considered to be women's "proper sphere" but did not question the assumption of distinct male and female natures and functions that underlay this separation of spheres of activity. Gissing describes Mary Barfoot as a woman with intellectual abilities of a kind "very rarely developed in one of her sex" but with a character

> so strongly feminine that people who knew her best thought of her with as much tenderness as admiration. She did not seek to become known as the leader of a 'movement,' yet her quiet work was probably more effectual than the public career of women who propagandize for female emancipation. (p. 54)

Modesty and quiet effort for the social good - these essentially womanly virtues recall Dorothea Brooke, of whom George Eliot concludes: "Her full nature . . . . spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive. . . ."[18] The immodesty of women's participating in political life shocked the sensibility of the Victorian male to an extraordinary degree, if we can judge by Basil Ransom's response to Verena's public speaking. Where James merely hints at the sexual nature of this shocked response, a more robustly vulgar writer like Eliza Lynn Linton, in _In Haste and At Leisure_, spells it out in no uncertain terms that women, as soon as

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[17] George Gissing, _The Odd Women_ (1893; rpt. New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 99-100. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[18] _Middlemarch_ (1871; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 896.

they step outside the sanctity of the home, can only be seen as brazenly flaunting their sexuality. A beautiful woman speaking on a public platform "electrified her audience by her appearance as by her words," as Mrs Linton proceeds to elaborate:

> Her gown was of soft, flesh-coloured silken stuff, fitting as perfectly as if it had been a second skin, so that you scarcely knew which was flesh and which was silken stuff. . . . Not an ornament of any kind broke the lines which this 'liquefaction of her clothes' expressed. . . . Her voice filled the hall as if it had been a silver trumpet. To hear her discourse on the wrongs of women, down-trodden by circumstance, oppressed by nature, brutalized by men, made some of her audience enthusiastic almost to a frenzy. Men felt that for such a superb creature as this they would leap into any number of lions' dens . . . if she would but reward them for the peril they had undergone at her bidding.[19]

Men who invited women to assist in their electioneering campaigns are accused of "sheltering behind women's petticoats," and Mrs Linton foresees, with horror, "the future victory of the personal power of women over the reasonableness of men" if women enter political life in any capacity (p. 187).

Reading The Bostonians, we are obliged to share Basil's response to Verena's speeches and, even if his appreciation of her beauty is not exactly that of the Cavalier poets, it is a combination of delight in her manner with distaste for her situation that succeeds in invalidating completely the substance of her appeals for justice for women. In itself, the women's cause interests James not at all, but the propriety of the feminists' behaviour is his prime object of criticism. Although he presents with irony Basil's conviction that women ought "only be private and passive, . . . and leave publicity to the sex of tougher hide," adding that "it must be repeated that he was very provincial" (p.11),

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[19] Eliza Lynn Linton, The New Woman: In Haste and At Leisure (London: Heinemann, 1895), pp. 116-17. All further references to this work appear in the text.

James indicates that public life attracts only fanatics and charlatans, male and female alike. His rejection of such political activity as "vulgar" is fundamental to the thematic framework of The Bostonians. Feminism is exemplary here, and he ridicules it by the simple expedient of ridiculing the reformers themselves. They are, without exception, appallingly vulgar people: Verena's vacillating mother and her father, a mesmeric healer; Mrs Farrinder, the condescending "oratress"; Matthias Pardon, the brash young reporter; and the shabby, pathetic Miss Birdseye, who epitomizes the decline into mere crankery of the reform movement of the Abolitionist era,[20] "the age of plain living and high thinking, of pure ideals and earnest effort, of moral passion and noble experiment" (p. 157). Yet another way in which James defuses the political aspect of his feminist story is to present Olive's private musings on the oppression of women at great length and in faded rhetoric, so that they can only be interpreted as a commentary on her own tortured personality. She finds "a source of fortifying emotion" in the contemplation of "the history of feminine anguish":

> she was very eloquent when she reminded Verena how the exquisite weakness of women had never been their defence, but had only exposed them to sufferings more acute than masculine grossness can conceive. Their odious partner had trampled upon them from the beginning of time. . . . All the bullied wives, the stricken mothers, the dishonoured, deserted maidens who have lived on the earth and longed to leave it, passed and repassed before her eyes, and the interminable procession seemed to stretch out a myriad of hands to her. She sat with them at their trembling vigils, . . . walked with them by the dark waters that offered to wash away misery and shame, took with them, even, when the vision grew intense, the last shuddering leap. (pp. 158-9)

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[20] James made an effort in later episodes of the novel to give some dignity to Miss Birdseye, who had been recognized by some of his friends as a portrait of Elizabeth Peabody, Hawthorne's sister-in-law and a well-known figure in the New England reform movements; see Nan Bauer Maglin, "Fictional Feminists," in Images of Women in Fiction, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), p. 221.

It is quite true that, as F.R. Leavis notes, "the political interest . . . is incidental."[21] It must be stressed, however, that James' use of this "strong" and "rich" subject of the "so-called woman's movement"[22] as the setting for his most American story is in itself a political act. The novel's anti-feminist stand was clear to contemporary reviewers, one of whom notes, with obvious satisfaction, the book's "moral": that "all schemes must ultimately fail which seek to uncreate the woman God has made, and to reconstitute her as another kind of being."[23]

Of the two Bostonian heroines, Verena is obviously the womanly woman of the Great Patriarch's eternal scheme, despite her rebellion against parental authority and her embarrassing talent for inspirational oratory. By the same token Olive, the spinster feminist who takes on Verena as her companion and protégée and who vows revenge on the male sex, is "another kind of being" altogether. And yet James' "moral" is not so simple. Unattractive, compulsive, and finally pathetic in her loss of Verena to Basil Ransom, Olive is still the central character of the novel, the one who bears most of its human and symbolic weight, who most stimulates James' creative imagination. Childlike Verena, the classic Jamesian victim-figure, attracts an indulgent sympathy in which elements of both sentimentality and irritation are mixed. Basil is another recognisably Jamesian type, the man of feeling, charming and suave, but without moral sensibility. He wins the battle of wills over Verena, but it is something of a Pyrrhic victory. He is too perfunctory a creation to be attributed with the weighty achievement of restoring patriarchal authority to the

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[21] The Great Tradition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 135.

[22] From James' diary, 1883; quoted by Maglin, p. 218.

[23] The Academy, 6 March 1886; quoted by Maglin, p. 225.

world of the novel - and James is careful to disassociate himself from Basil's declared reactionary views.

James depicts Olive Chancellor as the epitome of the New England tradition of "plain living and high thinking" in a novel which he conceived of as "an attempt to show that I <u>can</u> write an American story."[24] To the degree that he is using this novel to confront his own American heritage, his ambivalence about Olive is understandable. Set apart from her vulgar colleagues, although still subject to the narrative's comic irony, she embodies all the rigidities and torments of a particularly cerebral idealism; but she also exhibits the strengths of the New England sensibility, qualities which her Southern cousin, Basil, immediately recognizes. She seems to him to be a "remarkable woman," one of those people, unlike himself, who "take things hard," one whom no-one could help -- and "that was what made her tragic" (pp. 11-12). While this makes her intensely interesting to the novelist, of course, it repels Basil, who characterizes her as "morbid," uncomfortably "strenuous," and "a signal old maid" (p. 17).

In using Basil as the principal observer of Olive's plight, James heightens the sense of conflict between them but he also runs the risk of turning her tragic potential into melodrama. In the later section of the novel, which takes place at Marmion, the seaside village where the Bostonians have retired to tend the dying Miss Birdseye and to prepare for Verena's debut on the lecturing circuit, James creates a vivid and sympathetic sense of Olive's suffering as her love for Verena is threatened by Basil's determined pursuit of the girl. The coy pose of the "innocent" narrator is set aside in this account of Olive's realization of defeat:

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[24]Quoted by Maglin, p. 218.

> What was before her now was the reality, with the beautiful, indifferent sky pouring down its complacent rays upon it. The reality was simply that Verena had been more to her than she ever was to Verena, and that, with her exquisite natural art, the girl had cared for their cause only because, for the time, no interest, no fascination, was greater. (p. 354)

But when James chooses to present Olive's final humiliation through the eyes of her successful rival, the ironic distance from his heroine appears all too obviously as a mere contrivance. He resorts to speculating about what Basil would have thought _if_ he had observed Olive at the moment of her sharpest shame:

> /I/t might have seemed to him that she hoped to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived, in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces. She might have suggested to him some feminine firebrand of Paris revolutions, erect on a barricade, or even the sacrificial figure of Hypatia, whirled through the furious mob of Alexandria. (p. 388)

The satire is strained, even melodramatic, a failure of tone that mars the finale of the tale; the true emotional climax is already past.

What James has achieved, nevertheless, is a moving portrait of the lesbian woman. Olive, strong and domineering, the eagle to Verena's dove, is shown to be a woman capable of intensely passionate, and painfully vulnerable, love for another woman. While her vague and diffused love for the downtrodden millions of her sex is shown to be "sentimental" (the conventional epithet for romantic friendships between women), there is no suggestion that her love for Verena is anything of the kind. In this, James perhaps contributed as much to the extension of possible fictional roles for women as the women writers of the period did by their exploration of more explicitly erotic impulses in their female characters.

However, having developed this highly unconventional triangle of love between a man and two women, James brings his novel to a conventional conclusion. Love between man and woman triumphs, in a realistically limited way, symbolizing also the union of the American North and South

in the post-Civil War era. The conflict, as James presents it, has little to do with the position of women in society and the feminist movement. When we turn to Gissing, on the other hand, we find an attempt to dramatize the social situation of the "odd women" who live, whether by choice or by necessity, without men:

> Gissing's particular talent as a novelist is to create a group like this while limiting the consciousness of its individual members so that their interaction is marginal or accidental: essentially each woman confronts her shared predicament, which is precisely the question of her status outside her assigned role as wife and mother, in a felt loneliness.[25]

Gissing's title refers to a phenomenon which had been the focus of much feminist attention since the publication in 1859 of Harriet Martineau's analysis of the 1851 Census, in which she pointed out that there were over half a million statistically "redundant" women in Britain.[26] In the same year that her article appeared, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women was formed to meet the need of these women for employment which would enable them to become self-supporting. One of the founders of this Society, Jessie Boucherett, later published an essay whose title, "Superfluous Women," echoed Martineau's term.[27] In it, she analysed the problems of the two million women known to be independent and self-supporting, in particular those of the middle-class women whose

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[25] John Goode, "Women and the Literary Text," in The Rights and Wrongs of Women, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 248.

[26] Lee Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work (Newton Abbot, Devon: David and Charles, 1973), pp. 10-11. Reasons for this disproportion of females to males -- the higher male mortality rate, low rate of female emigration, and the disinclination of middle-class men to marry -- are discussed in J.A. and Olive Banks, Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), pp. 28-30.

[27] In Women's Work and Women's Culture, ed. Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869).

upbringing demanded that they find some acceptably genteel employment, but whose education, such as it was, fitted them for nothing but the over-stocked and grossly exploitative occupation of governessing. The Society's attempts to remedy this situation are duplicated by the activities of the feminists in Gissing's novel: they set up an employment agency and a school to teach the skills of typing and bookkeeping which would gain their pupils an entry into the expanding field of commercial employment. They also published the Englishwoman's Journal, which was printed for some time by the Victoria Press, an all-women concern. In the continuous battle they had to fight against public criticism of their endeavours, members of the Society defended the right to work of all single women, not only those who would never marry because of the statistical surplus of females. "The want of power to earn her own livelihood makes many a girl barter soul and body for money and rank," they argued.[28] This could be the motto of Gissing's novel, where the Society's spirited defence of the dignity of single women is reflected in Rhoda's view of herself and her work:

> 'So many odd women - no making a pair with them. The pessimists call them useless, lost, futile lives. I, naturally - being one of them myself - take another view. I look upon them as a great reserve. When one woman vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world's work. . . . I want to help in that - to train the reserve.' (p. 37)

Typical "odd women" are the three Madden sisters. They exemplify the plight of so many genteelly-reared girls who, unexpectedly thrown back on their own meagre resources, had to resort to jobs such as govern-

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[28] Victoria Magazine, July 1876; quoted by Banks, p. 34.

essing, lady's companion and shop assistant.[29] Their father, a country doctor, had never considered directing their studies to any "professional object," for "the thought of his girls having to work for money was so utterly repulsive to him that he could never seriously dwell upon it" (p. 3). In accordance with his Victorian principles about the true nature and role of women, the daughters have been so "protected" from all talk of money matters that years after his death they dare not risk investing their small inheritance in a school or some other business concern, much to Rhoda's despair. "Think what capable women might do with eight hundred pounds," she exclaims. But the elder sisters have made Monica "half a lady and half a shop-girl. I don't think she'll ever be good for much. And the elder ones will go on just keeping themselves alive . . ." (p. 107). Gissing takes pains to emphasize the sordidness of their mental and physical poverty -- the ill-health, the lassitude, the day-dreaming and (the final touch) Virginia's secret alcoholism. They are indeed "superfluous" women in the social as well as the statistical sense. Monica, determined not to share their fate, refuses Rhoda's offer of training and marries Widdowson, a man much older than herself, "for a comfortable home" (p. 111), only to have him metamorphose into a domestic tyrant whose insane jealousy indirectly causes her death.

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[29] Like Gissing's own sisters, Ellen and Madge, who did, however, succeed in running their own school; see Gillian Tindall, The Born Exile: George Gissing (London: Temple Smith, 1974), pp. 170-72. Tindall points out that Gissing's friend, Clara Collet, a prominent social researcher, became known to him only after he had finished The Odd Women and so could not have been a model for his feminist characters; as I have suggested above, their ideas and activities correspond closely with those of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women a decade earlier than the setting of the novel.

The feminists, Rhoda and Mary, have, in contrast, energy, intelligence and initiative. They are admirable as workers, as companions, as examples to other women. Indeed, Gissing presents them so sympathetically that Mary's declaration that "it's better to be a woman, in our day" because the women have "all the joy of advance, the glory of conquering" sounds, not absurdly rhetorical, but simply optimistic. This "joyous confidence in themselves and their cause" (p. 87) meets its most vigorous challenge in Rhoda's relationship with Everard Barfoot, Mary's once-loved cousin. The similarity to the plot of The Bostonians is only on the surface: Gissing shows tension between the two women, but not jealousy or the desire to dominate. Rhoda responds to Everard's charming but determined courtship, unaware of the element of experimentation in it, the desire to bring this strongly independent woman to submission which is revealed in his musings:

> She must shed tears before him, declare her spirit worn and subjugated by torment of jealousy and fear. Then he would raise her, and seat her in the place of honour, and fall down at her feet, and fill her soul with rapture. (p. 279)

Everard is, of course, an idler and an egoist who stands for everything opposed to the feminists' ethic of hard work and self-respect; but even after she has given him up, Rhoda suffers bitterly, blaming herself for having been flattered by his attentions. Finally recovering her will-power and sense of purpose, she sadly concludes that he had never loved her with "entire sincerity," nor had he regarded the desirability of their free union in the earnestly revolutionary light that she had (pp. 326-7). Rhoda, it must be admitted, is almost too good to be true.

The great virtue of Gissing's novel is the way in which he recreates the relationship between a character's ideas and the real situation which helps to mould them; debates about "what ought to be" are placed firmly in the context of "what is." The situation of emotional conflict in which

the debate about marriage and free unions takes place gives it an authenticity entirely lacking in the polemical set-pieces that are featured in Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did. Avoiding the temptation to write a mere "narrative tract," Gissing has done more than simply "flesh out" the Woman Question[30] -- he enters the debate and takes sides. The fundamental ideological conflict between Ruskin's and Mill's conceptions of the proper relations between the sexes[31] is presented in the novel so as to show up the relation of these theories to the actuality of women's subordination. Widdowson takes Ruskin as his text:

> 'Woman's sphere is the home, Monica. Unfortunately girls are often obliged to go out and earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilization will altogether abolish. . . . If a woman can neither have a home of her own, nor find occupation in any one else's she is deeply to be pitied. . . . I sincerely believe that an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man.' (pp. 152-3)

This is particularly chilling, as Widdowson is reminding Monica of the debt of gratitude she owes him for giving her a home. Moreover, he believes he has bought her unquestioning obedience to him, as well as her eternal gratitude. "His devotion to her proved itself in a thousand ways; . . . yet in his view of their relations he was unconsciously the most complete despot, a monument of male autocracy" (p. 152). He is a pitiful character, but no caricature, for it is clear that he is motivated by insecurity and loneliness.

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[30]From an anonymous review in Pall Mall Gazette, 29 May 1893; rpt. in George Gissing: The Critical Heritage, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 219-20.

[31]"In Mill one encounters the realism of sexual politics, in Ruskin its romance and the benign aspect of its myth," Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (1969; rpt. London: Abacus-Sphere, 1972), p. 89.

On the other side, Mary's arguments for women's rights to education and work combine moral passion and a practical grasp of the realities of their situation in a way that does justice to the liberal feminist position and also extends the characterization of her as an individual. Here she is addressing not only her students but also Rhoda, with whom she has recently quarrelled:

> '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. Of the old ideal virtues we can retain many, but we have to add to them those which have been thought appropriate only in men. Let a woman be gentle, but at the same time let her be strong; let her be pure of heart, but none the less wise and instructed. Because we have to set an example to the sleepy of our sex, we must carry on an active warfare - must be invaders. . . .' (p. 136)

The women have quarrelled bitterly over Mary's kindness to a former student, Bella, whose fall from grace Rhoda could not forgive, for she feels their high moral standards must never be compromised. Mary's speech is by way of an apology to Rhoda for having accused her of hardness, and at the same time a defence of her own actions on the basis of the "old ideal virtues."

This quarrel, the main focus of Rhoda and Mary's relationship in the novel, reveals some significant contradictions inherent in the kind of middle-class feminism that Gissing represents so knowledgeably and so sympathetically. As the mistress of a married man, Bella is "fallen" from middle-class respectability, of which the standard of sexual purity is, for women, the major component. Mary and Rhoda agree that they can have nothing to do with women of the lower class, arguing that they have no vocation for charitable rescue work. But Mary goes on to give her opinion that class divisions are "anything but artificial" and that the lower classes are "lower in every sense." "I really don't think . . . that there can be any solidarity of ladies with servant girls," adds one of their pupils (p. 53). Clearly, the feminists do not object to Bella's

sexual misdemeanour per se, but to the lower-class status she has brought upon herself (although it is Rhoda's conviction that Bella has proved herself to be irremediably weak). They feel they cannot afford to jeopardize their project for raising the status of "respectable" women by associating with her (although Mary would prefer to regard her as a special case and offer her practical help).

In this, they were representative of the mainstream of middle-class feminists, whose attitudes can be gauged from their response to the campaigns on issues of sexual morality that were fought out in public in the eighteen-seventies and eighties. In 1877 Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh were brought to trial charged with having published an "indecent, lewd, filthy, bawdy and obscene book" -- a forty-year old American pamphlet on birth-control, The Fruits of Philosophy.[32] Conducting her own defence, Annie Besant pointed out the immense value of such information to working-class women in particular. None of the prominent feminists working for the suffrage and for women's education and employment publicly supported the defendants, and the Englishwoman's Review and the Victoria Magazine made no comment on the trial.[33] Their silence makes it hard to judge whether the feminists disapproved of birth control or merely feared losing the support they had already gained in respectable Society. At about the same time, however, many of them were joining in Josephine Butler's long campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864-9, which went on until 1883. The campaign was an attack on the sexual double standard as well as bringing the facts about prostitution into the open. This, and the crusade for the protection of young girls against

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[32] Banks, p. 90.

[33] Constance Rover, Love, Morals and the Feminists (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 105.

seduction which followed the publication in 1885 of W.T. Stead's revelations of the White Slave Trade in England, were discussed in the two prominent feminist journals. If not exactly an expression of the "solidarity of ladies with servant girls," these campaigns at least marked a conjunction of the charitable and the feminist streams of the middle-class women's movement, as this passage from the Englishwoman's Review of 1897 indicates:

> Side by side with the sustained effort to raise up a safe causeway, so to say, along which women might tread firm and secure towards the attainment of solid knowledge and honourable work, there has run . . . another effort, parallel in its course, but different in character. If one has striven to build a causeway, the other has striven to drain a slough - the Slough of Despond of immorality and vice. The two lines of effort are distinct, but they are in harmony: one is constructive of good, the other is destructive of evil. Both are needed. . . .[34]

At the time, only radical socialists conceived of the campaign for women's emancipation in terms of all social classes. Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, reviewing Bebel's Woman in the Past, Present and Future in 1885, stressed the basic economic cause of women's oppression and argued that economic equality, together with reforms like divorce, sex education and the integration of the sexes in all areas of life, would do away with the commercialization of women's sexuality in both marriage and prostitution.[35]

The distaste for the unregenerate lower classes expressed by Gissing's feminists in The Odd Women is to some extent an expression of his own dread of "vulgarism" in all its forms, his scorn for do-gooders, and his irritation with those who pass up opportunities for self-improvement. This revulsion against working-class life no doubt intensified the ambivalence about sexual passion that is evident in all of

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[34]Quoted in Banks, p. 96.

[35]"The Woman Question, A Socialist Point of View," rpt. in Marxism Today, 16, No. 3 (1972), pp. 80-88.

Gissing's fiction, often manifesting itself as outright misogyny.[36] The association of uninhibited sexuality with the "lower classes" is, of course, an amply-documented aspect of Victorian bourgeois ideology,[37] and from the middle-class male's point of view it easily becomes an association between lower-class women and sexual licentiousness. Gissing's refined women are susceptible to passion, but save themselves from capitulating to its demands. Indeed, Rhoda's passion for Everard is experienced as a kind of purification, in retrospect, for

> in her darkest hours she too had fallen among those poor of spirit, the flesh prevailing. But the soul in her had not finally succumbed. Passion had a new significance; her conception of life was larger, more liberal; she made no vows to crush the natural instincts. But her conscience, her sincerity should not suffer. (p. 291)

She regards it as a weakness, just like Monica's and Bella's unlawful infatuations, only in her case the man, though free to marry, was the wrong man. In *The Odd Women* sexual attraction always brings together the wrong people - it is the enemy of social stability. "Love revives the barbarian," opines Everard, not without satisfaction. Falling in love is an ideal vulgarized by the novelists, Rhoda believes, asserting at the same time her belief that *it* is possible:

> 'In real life, how many men and women *fall in love*? Not one in every ten thousand, I am convinced. . . . There is the sexual instinct, of course, but that is quite a different thing; the novelists daren't talk about that. . . . The result is that women imagine themselves noble and glorious when they are most near the animals.' (p. 58)

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[36] Lloyd Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 107-13.

[37] Peter T. Cominos, "Late Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System," *International Review of Social History*, 8 (1963), 18-48 and 216-50; Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians* (1966; rpt. London: Corgi, 1969); R.S. Neale, *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

Married love, then, appears to be a practical improbability in the world of the novel. It is better for exceptional individuals like Rhoda and Mary to devote themselves to the cause of women's social advancement than to waste their lives in a far from ideal marriage, Gissing implies -- a narrow set of choices, indeed.

As "problem novels" both The Bostonians and The Odd Women have as their central preoccupation the changing relations between the sexes brought about by the growing emancipation of women. The two novelists' ideological assumptions about human nature, social change, and its desirability are quite at odds, despite the similarities of character and plot in these two works. While James' abhorrence of the vulgarities of public activity and political commitment is expressed in his ridicule of the feminists, Gissing uses the same opposition of public and private to exalt his feminists' devotion to social usefulness as a sign of their refinement. To both writers, however, the feminist movement served as an illustration of their ideology. In the long view implied in both novels, feminism is seen as symbolic of other forces in human nature and society, just as women themselves have always been used in the art of patriarchal culture as symbols of qualities other than their own powers as human individuals.

Whereas in Victorian literature female figures had frequently symbolized the hidden life of the unconscious, spiritual innocence, or the moral ideal of submission, they now took on new meanings. The transition period may be characterized as a battleground between the "ethic of renunciation" preached by the Great Victorians in the interests of social harmony and the new assertion of the individual will against social restraints. Donald Stone argues that male writers like James, Gissing, Moore and Hardy "identified the struggle of the New Woman to assert herself and to employ her hitherto repressed energies to her own advantage with their own warfare against society on behalf of the right

of the individual," and so were responsible for making her a sympathetic figure in their novels, thus helping to popularize the feminist cause.[38] In another essay on the fiction of the period and the New Woman, John Goode makes the more specific connexion between the ideals of free subjectivity for woman and the free pursuit of truth for the artist. Drawing attention to the fact that the heroines of both The Woman Who Did and Diana of the Crossways are themselves novelists, he points out that just as Allen's novel

> postulates an aesthetic commitment which identifies the freedom of woman with the freedom of the novelist from the pressures of the market, so Meredith's novel, at a much deeper level, incorporates his own sense of the social limitations and contradictory aesthetic potential of fiction. The subject woman is summoned to declare her own power to a world that wants only statues, and the subject novelist, very consciously the presenter of that problematic woman, claims the freedom to substantiate a truth that is neither 'rose-pink' or 'dirty-drab' (Meredith's terms for romantic and naturalistic fiction) but 'wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight'.[39]

In the case of James' and Gissing's novels, the feminist protagonists embody their creators' projections of the social aims and activities they most admire or most abhor. Both writers gain by their concentration on feminist characters created within the specific and closely-observed milieu of the organized women's movement. Lesser writers, projecting wildly onto the myth of the New Woman, tend to woolly generalization. The female protagonists of The Woman Who Did and The New Woman: In Haste and At Leisure are merely revamped Victorian stereotypes of the good and the bad woman, uninteresting in themselves; but the views attributed to them reflect in a magnified and sensational way some of the more radical challenges to the older patriarchal ideology of sexual and social relationships.

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[38] "Victorian Feminism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel," Women's Studies, 1 (1972), 67-8.

[39] The Rights and Wrongs of Women, p. 244.

New Women

In Haste and At Leisure dramatized the exploits of the "Wild Women" that the author, Eliza Lynn Linton, had so vituperatively attacked in her articles in the Nineteenth Century in 1891. The unnatural behaviour of those "absolute libertarians" included drinking and smoking with men, playing dangerously active and ungraceful sports like golf and cricket, going into business even when they had private incomes, going "slumming" just because it was fashionable and exhibiting their meagre artistic and intellectual talents "on the market," not to mention their repudiation of motherhood and domestic duties in favour of "free love."[40] Feminists of all kinds - suffragists, educators, unionists and sexual radicals alike -- came under the lash of her scorn.

In the past, Mrs Linton had written in favour of education for girls and had criticized the "doll wife," whose literary embodiment is to be found in David Copperfield's Dora.[41] She herself was an independent, aggressive woman who had earned her own living as a journalist and novelist since 1848. At that time she had mixed with London's young radicals -- Blanc, Spencer, Owen and Lewes. Even after her marriage to W.J. Linton, a widower with several children, she had gone back to her professional life in London while he looked after the children. Her fierce opposition to the radical feminists and "New Women" of the nineties cannot, however, be explained merely as a reflection of "the inconsistencies of her times."[42] Rather, it was a reflection of the changing impact of the women's movement on society, and significant changes in the movement itself.

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[40]"The Wild Women as Politicians" and "The Wild Women as Social Insurgents," Nineteenth Century, 30 (1891), 79-88 and 596-605.

[41]The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1884).

[42]Vineta Colby, The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century (London: London University Press, 1970), p. 35.

The debate on the Woman Question had swung away from issues of women's rights to those of sexual morality, marriage and motherhood. During the eighteen-nineties, arguments appealing to biology and the future of the race took precedence over the kind of liberal appeal to social justice that had characterized the feminism of J.S. Mill and his contemporaries. Mrs Linton's attack on the "Wild Women" reflects, in her use of evolutionist terms, the great fear of "national degradation" and the defeat of Empire current at the time. She calls these "inverted" women and their "effeminate" male supporters "excrescences of the times," "products of peace and idleness, of prosperity and over-population." Would a national disaster, she wonders, purge the nation of this scourge?

The "Wild Women" in her novel, although guilty of most of the sins against True Womanhood listed in her articles as well as the ultimate one of publicly agitating for women's rights, are portrayed as misguided and possibly redeemable. They are all, of course, of genteel birth, and their circles still include exemplars of the True Woman whose worth the wild ones may eventually recognize and emulate, if only to gain the love of a Real Man like Sherrard Barrington, as Phoebe, his estranged wife, does in the final pages. Phoebe, in her progress from child-bride to almost-scarlet woman (her idea of "free love" applies to flirtation only), remains childishly reckless, impulsive and egocentric. Neglecting her child and exploiting her husband, she is motivated by boredom and vanity to strive for fame, first in the exclusive feminist Excelsior Club, later on public platforms. Mrs Linton makes it clear that, for a woman, real ambition is constitutionally impossible and fame can only mean notoriety. The only kind of power women may exercise is that of the Invisible Moral Influence emanating from the home and family, their proper sphere. Here they find their only true fulfilment, as wives, mothers, daughters; outside of it, women are vulnerable to the brute force of the male and to their own moral weakness. With this truth firmly demonstrated, the author

allows herself to indulge in highly sensational accounts of the shocking behaviour of Phoebe and the Excelsiorites; the *frisson* of the voyeur is unmistakeable in the following extract:

> These young, bejewelled and scantily clothed women, flirting with one another as if the party had been twy-sexed according to rule, discussed with airy serenity all sorts of delicate questions - questions which Phoebe had as yet approached by secret reading only, and even then with more than a slight touch of embarrassment - more than a slight shade of red on her cheek, and the undeniable heightening of her pulse and stinging of her blood. Here, however, at this 'dove' dinner, with its luxurious dishes and well-chosen wines . . . the mysteries of life, the shame of sin, the sore places of society, were spoken of as freely as if these pretty young creatures had been jurists or scientists. . . . (p. 45)

The association of beauty and sinfulness is evident in her lavish descriptions of Phoebe, of the sisters, Kate and Isabel, who are her rivals for the attention of the Excelsior's male hangers-on, and of the "epicene" Lady Constance. Other Wild Women who are not beautiful gain power through their enthusiasm and sincere (though of course wrong-headed) belief in the "new order of feminine supremacy." One of them, Mrs Norman, had "the rapt look of an enthusiast too much absorbed in her own ideas to be afraid of their consequences" (p. 39) and Rosina Corry, nicknamed "The Fly," dominates her weak husband and lectures to all and sundry on "the new morality, the new womanhood, the new relations between man and woman, children and parents, the new political program" (p. 68). The last mentioned, which would induce the "horny-handed sons of toil" to revolt, is represented as an inflammatory mixture of individualism, socialism and anarchism.

The New Woman, then, represents all the forces threatening the social order: the sexual independence of women, the self-assertion of the individual, and revolutionary socialism. "It was a time of experiment," wrote Holbrook Jackson of the Nineties. "The new man wished to assert himself, the new woman threatened to live her own life."[43] The connexion

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[43] *The Eighteen-Nineties* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 33.

between individualism and a socialist transformation of the relations of work and culture was a central tenet of British Utopian Socialism, from William Morris through to Edward Carpenter. The socialism they envisaged "by changing the conditions of labour and creating new forms of community would make possible a closer and more harmonious relationship to the external world. . . . They wanted to democratize beauty and transform the texture of living."[44] There would be no mass of workers, depersonalized "hands," but a community of artists, friends and lovers. But there were scant signs of the vision becoming a reality, and in the eighteen-eighties romantic socialism turned more towards the new scientific theories of society to buttress its faith. Havelock Ellis in 1889 welcomed the "spiritual awakening" of the time as a phenomenon to which the growth of science, the rise of the women's movement and the march of democracy all contributed.[45] The "New Spirit" (the title of his book) was seen as heralding a process of human evolution in which the social structure and the individual would soon reach a state of mutually-regulating harmony.

A concern for the development of the individual's natural capacities and talents within a gradually collectivized State is shared by all the contributors to Forecasts of the Coming Century, a collection of essays edited by Edward Carpenter. He foresaw a Utopian state of material and psychological freedom where "art becomes coterminous with life," as in the "natural" cultures of the South Pacific, and where the lost "sentiment of the common life" would flourish.[46] In such a long view, however, the

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[44] Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis (London: Pluto, 1977), pp. 72-3.

[45] Rowbotham and Weeks, p. 145.

[46] "Transition to Freedom," in Forecasts of the Coming Century, ed. Edward Carpenter (Manchester: Manchester Labour Press, 1897), p. 182.

Woman Question becomes submerged. In one of the essays, an overview of "A Century of Women's Rights," Enid Stacy predicts that the movement for individualistic "rights" would turn to an emphasis on collective duties to society, foremost among these being the duty of women as mothers of the Race. At the other end of the "socialist" spectrum, Grant Allen argues in his essay that a desirable aristocracy of natural talent would be fostered by the abolition of artificial social inequalities of birth and money. Sex is not even mentioned as a factor of social inequality, a strange omission on the part of the creator of that New Woman who was considered the most revolutionary of them all.

Allen had donned his feminist hat to good effect, however. The Woman Who Did had such succès de scandale that it brought him a thousand pounds in royalties per year between 1895 and 1899[47] -- rare good fortune for a writer for whom this was, he claimed, the first book "written solely to satisfy my own taste and my own conscience."[48] The title, echoing the old sexist adage about good and bad women, has titillating implications, but Allen earnestly contradicts their application to his heroine. The sensationalism is purely intellectual: her life is an experiment at putting into practice the ideas of the "New Spirit" of the nineties. On closer examination, however, the ideology of the novel reveals many conservative tendencies in the "New Spirit," and proves to be revolutionary in neither the feminist nor the socialist sense.

Allen is not concerned with the social and emotional difficulties of changing consciousness. His heroine, Herminia, experiences none of the self-doubt and disillusionment with the world of men suffered by the

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[47]Cunningham, "The 'New Woman' Fiction of the 1890's," p. 179.

[48]The Woman Who Did (London: Allen and Unwin, 1895), Preface. All further references to this work appear in the text.

women portrayed in feminist novels. Like Athene, she springs fully-formed from her male creator's head, a strong-minded, high-principled New Woman who proceeds to act out her views on the need for women to live independently of traditional marriage. Mistress of her own conscience, she persuades her lover, Alan, to accept her on her own terms, against his chivalrous desire to marry her as a protection against society's scorn. She is proudly resigned to being rejected by both his family and her own (her father is a clergyman, she a freethinker). The "free union" is never tested, however, for Alan dies just before the birth of their child, whom she names Dolores. Despite her trials as a "bachelor mother," she never doubts the rightness of her chosen course. Years later, she denies herself the love of a man she deeply cares for because he will not join her in repudiating the marriage bond. She is only defeated finally by her adored daughter's rejection, when "Dolly" finds out the truth about her parents' relationship. "I set out in life with the earnest determination to be a martyr to the cause of truth and righteousness," writes Herminia in her suicide note, "but I didn't foresee this last pang of martyrdom" (p. 238).

Herminia's character is that of the Victorian Pure Woman. She has none of the "Wild Women"'s petty vices and vanities. A hard-working and (of course) anonymous journalist, she is also a devoted mother, and her conception of "free love" is at the farthest possible remove from flirtatiousness. She is a modern type of the woman as Invisible Moral Influence: having saved her lover from the dishonour of marrying merely for convenience, she recognizes that "she had power in her purity to raise his nature for a time to something approaching her own high level. True woman has the real Midas gift: all that she touches turns to purest gold" (p. 29).

The areas of conflict and difficulty that a woman in Herminia's position might have experienced in life are plotted out of the novel. The narrative staggers under the weight of authorial generalization, interspersed with set dialogues to illustrate conflicting points of view, and Allen's conception of the social structure is as flat and simplistic as his conception of the individual who rebels against it. Herminia's "stainless soul" remains untouched even by hatred of the enemy, and the enemy is "Philistinism," its agents being male and female, rich and poor alike ("both Bower Lane and Belgravia").

Herminia is by no means a feminist. "The vote is a matter that troubles me little in itself," she claims; "what I want is to see women made fit to use it" (p. 8). Allen links this implied devaluation of women as infantilized creatures to Herminia's criticism of the newly-gained opportunities for higher education. A Girton graduate, she voices the often-heard complaint that the kind of education women got there was actually damaging, confining them to strenuous intellectual effort while "morally and socially they want to mew us up just as close as ever" (p. 8). Allen shows no appreciation of the difficulties under which feminist reformers laboured in this area. Emily Davies, the founder of Girton, demanded complete equality of women with men in the universities, with no special concessions, knowing that these were the only grounds on which women's achievements would gain recognition. Her opponents were not only the conservatives who ridiculed the suggestion that women could be the intellectual equals of men, but also reformers who argued that the examination system was already moribund and that a new women's college following a separate system could be "a model for men's colleges to follow, instead of a slavish copy of their faults."[49] But even these advocates

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[49] Josephine Kamm, Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 252.

of separate development, who assisted Annie Clough to set up Newnham College, did nothing to offset the effects of the moral and social restrictions suffered by their students, "mewing them up just as close as ever," while trivializing their studies as well.[50]

The problems faced by feminist educational reformers pinpoint the limitations of reformist actions in any one area of a social system totally oppressive to women. As for marriage as part of this system, only the most radical socialists saw this problem with clarity. Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling quote J.S. Mill on marriage as "the only actual form of serfdom recognised by law," but they go on to point out that this serfdom is a matter of economics, "not of sentiment." After outlining some of the legal disabilities of women in marriage, they present an argument which is highly relevant to the treatment of the marriage question in problem novels of the time:

> Many advanced thinkers plead for greater facility of divorce now. They contend that divorce ought to be made at least as easy as marriage; that an engagement entered into by people who have had little or no opportunity of knowing one another ought not to be irrevocably, or even stringently binding; that incompatibility of temper, non-realization of deep-rooted hopes, actual dislike, should be sufficient grounds for separation; finally, and most important of all, that the conditions of divorce should be the same for the two sexes. All this is excellent, and would be not only feasible but just, if -- but mark the if -- the economic positions of the two sexes were the same. They are not the same. . . . The annulling of the union would be to him freedom, to her, starvation for herself and her children.[51]

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[50]"About Prof. Seeley's lectures -- a babe could understand them. I think they only serve as recreation, like Mr Gosse's," wrote one student: Victoria Glendinning, <u>A Suppressed Cry: The Life and Death of a Quaker Daughter</u> (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 100-101. The subject of this biography died at twenty-two after her stay at Newnham was cut short by an apparently psychosomatic illness which Glendinning attributes to the conflict between her desire to go out into the world and her fear of it.

[51]"The Woman Question," p. 86.

Allen's criticism of the marriage institution took little account of such practical matters. He had in the past criticized the advocates of women's rights for having "constantly spoken, thought, and written as though it were possible and desirable for the mass of women to support themselves, and to remain unmarried for ever,"[52] although it was in fact the case that the "mass of women" did need to support themselves at some time in their lives and that there was a substantial proportion of the female population who had no choice, statistically speaking, but to remain single. His impatience with reformist demands resulted in the millenarian proposals aired in The Woman Who Did, some of which have distinctly reactionary implications. He suggests, for instance, that a state endowment for mothers would not only free women from economic dependence in marriage but would also relieve them of the need to compete with men on the labour market:

> /O/bviously the prospective mothers of a community should be relieved as far as possible from the stress and strain of earning a livelihood, should be set free to build up their nervous systems to the highest attainable level against the calls of maternity. (pp. 74-5)

"Prospective mothers" did not mean all women, it would seem. Elsewhere in the novel it is clear that he is thinking, not of that "mass of women" ruining their health working long hours for inadequate pay in factories and private homes, but of "the finest and noblest women in our civilized communities"-- those demographically "surplus" middle-class women who formed the backbone of the feminist movement. These women, he says, were being deprived of motherhood, not civil rights:

> /Herminia/ knew that to be a mother is the best privilege of her sex, a privilege of which unholy man-made institutions now conspire to deprive half the finest and noblest women in our civilized communities. (p. 145)

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[52] "Plain Words on the Woman Question," Fortnightly Review, NS 46 (1889), 455.

Marriage, Motherhood and "the Race"

Thus the myth of motherhood as woman's only true fulfilment is incorporated into the progressive social vision of the "New Spirit." Many socialist and neo-Malthusian views on motherhood had anti-feminist and even racist tendencies. Karl Pearson, for example, author of The Ethic of Freethought and self-proclaimed feminist and socialist, still argued in favour of British imperialism and the survival of the fittest as the principles which should guide social policy.[53] H.G. Wells' Fabian-turned-Tory hero in The New Machiavelli endorses the demand for State endowment of motherhood as a means to "biologize Imperialism."[54] When Allen attacks in his novel "that blatant and decadent sect of 'advanced women' who talk as though motherhood were a disgrace and a burden" (p. 145), his rhetoric is indistinguishable from that of the conservative anti-feminists. The promotion of motherhood combined with an attack on the institution of marriage was, however, a strain of middle-class feminist thought represented in Ellen Key's influential book, The Woman Movement, published in England in 1912 with an introduction by Havelock Ellis. She proposed to those women who declared themselves unwilling to be "slaves of the instinct for the propagation of the race" that they remember their duty to society and consider "bachelor motherhood" as an alternative.[55] It was against such views that Mona Caird contended in a

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[53] Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden from History (London: Pluto, 1973), p. 106.

[54] The New Machiavelli (London: John Lane, 1911), p. 414. And again in the Beveridge Report of 1942: "Taken as a whole the Plan for Social Security puts a premium on marriage. . . . In the next thirty years housewives as Mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British Race and of British Ideals in the world"; quoted by Elizabeth Wilson, Women and the Welfare State (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 151-52.

[55] The Woman Movement (New York and London: Putnam's, 1912), pp. 81-4.

series of journal articles collected in 1897 under the title The Morality of Marriage. Hers is the classic liberal case for individual rights, personal fulfilment, and a pluralist society and, like J.S. Mill before her, she spoke for women, not Woman. She advocated birth control, not for eugenic reasons but as a woman's right to control her own fertility, and State provision of specialist child-care by those who had both the training and the inclination for this work.[56] In all her arguments she insisted that womanhood is not, and should not be, defined wholly by motherhood.

Grant Allen presents the opposite view. Unmarried women are seen as being deprived of motherhood but erotic fulfilment, it is implied, is unnecessary: "To be celibate is a very great misfortune even for a woman," says Herminia; "for a man it is impossible -- it is cruel, it is wicked" (p. 181). Thus the sexual instinct in women is regarded as procreative. In freely choosing her man Herminia is, more importantly, choosing a father for her child: the notion of a selective drive to reproduce has been grafted onto the Victorian conviction that female sexuality was a matter of maternal rather than erotic passion. "Every good woman is by nature a mother," says Allen, and indeed motherhood proves to be Herminia's highest fulfilment, her "salvation" (p. 145).

The New Woman is presented as a new ideal of femininity, combining the best features of the Victorian ideal ("by nature a mother") with a new moral rigour. "Principle was still deeper and more imperious with her than passion," remarks Allen of his heroine (p. 54); but although thus "active and aggressive", Herminia retains the "passive and receptive" qualities of the Real Woman in the sexual relationship. When she yields

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[56]The Morality of Marriage (London: George Redway, 1897), pp. 132-39, p. 173.

to her lover's "masculine" judgement, her creator explains:

> It must always be so. The man must needs retain for many years to come the personal hegemony he has usurped over the woman; and the woman who once accepts him as lover or as husband must give way in the end, even in matters of principle, to his virile self-assertion. She would be less a woman, and he less a man, were any other result possible. Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis -- the male, active and aggressive; the female, sedentary, passive and receptive. (p. 83)

The phrase "the idea of sex" is instructive, for it suggests that Allen does not claim to be discussing biological truths but psychological ones. "Masculine" and "feminine" are ideas which, over "many years," might be expected to change but which, he asserts in the same breath, are "always" there, a "prime antithesis." Such intellectual confusion about the origin and nature of sex-roles might be explained as expressions of a deep anxiety about the future of heterosexual relations; for if women were becoming more independent, even though attracted to men for the satisfaction of their maternal instinct, how was male precedence in the sexual relationship to be maintained? D.H. Lawrence's answer was to argue that the individual male had to prove himself worthy of his inherited dominant status. Allen, too, hangs on to the inheritance, the "usurped hegemony," even although he argues elsewhere in the novel that it has definite historical origins in the patriarchal system of enforced monogamy, an argument which should imply its gradual disappearance under the new sexual dispensation which the "New Spirit" was heralding.

The idea that there was an historical relation between patriarchy and monogamy raised further questions about permanence and ownership in marriage. Was wedlock to be abolished because it reinforced patriarchal power or because it enforced monogamy on "free," spontaneous love? Allen has Herminia voice the feminist protest that marriage is "an assertion of man's supremacy over woman" and a denial of her personal freedom (pp. 40-1), a protest which gained force and point from current

public debate over the issues of conjugal rights and equal grounds of divorce for wives and husbands. Contemporary divorce law enshrined the double standard in that adultery alone was sufficient cause for a man to divorce his wife, while a woman had to prove other grounds in addition to adultery, such as cruelty or desertion, in order to divorce her husband. Sexual "ownership" rights were not reciprocal, and although the Jackson case of 1891 established that the wife was no longer the property of her husband and he was not permitted to use physical force to keep her in his house, the law could do nothing to protect her from such violence while she remained under his roof.[57] There was a muffled protest against the notion that conjugal rights implied an obligation on the wife to consent to sexual intercourse at any time behind such statements by feminist writers as George Egerton's: "Marriage becomes for many women a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation."[58] It was no doubt the convention of literary reticence that prevented writers like Allen and Hardy from referring explicitly to such matters. Hardy admitted in a letter that Sue Bridehead appears to be more dilatory than he meant her to be because he could not specify her horror at being obliged to respond sexually whenever her husband wished.[59]

This might suggest that Hardy intended a specifically sexual threat to underlie Sue's statement that "it is foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person's

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[57] Court of Appeal judgement quoted by Rover, p. 25. Mrs Linton refers explicitly to this case as a dangerous precedent in In Haste and At Leisure.

[58] Discords (London: John Lane, 1895), p. 155.

[59] The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, ed. Florence Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 272.

lover."[60] Taken at face value, however, the statement merely justifies Hardy's claim that in Jude the Obscure "the marriage laws [are] used in great part as the tragic machinery of the tale" and that his novel did not address itself directly to the question of women's freedom.[61] On a practical level, his continuing preoccupation with mis-matched marriages seems to point simply to the necessity for divorce and remarriage -- what we now refer to as "serial monogamy" -- to become socially acceptable. Yet there is some suggestion in Grant Allen's novel that monogamy itself is being questioned, along with male supremacy. Herminia points out that "you can contract to do or not to do, easily enough: but contract to feel or not to feel -- what transparent absurdity!" (p. 41). However the untimely death of her lover relieves Allen of the obligation to show their free union being tested by experience, and Herminia lives the life of an upper-class Esther Waters rather than that of a sexually active New Woman experimenting with alternatives to marriage.

Even Allen did not dare to propose sexual libertarianism as an alternative to monogamous marriage. On the contrary, those rebellious Victorians who did live in free unions, like Eleanor Marx, believed that once love was freed from the constraints of marriage -- from economic necessity and legal obligation -- enlightened men and women would inevitably form life-long monogamous unions.[62] Sexual love, they held,

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[60] Jude the Obscure (1896; rpt. London: Macmillan-New Wessex, 1974), p. 278. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[61] "My opinion at that time, if I remember rightly, was what it is now, that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties -- being then essentially and morally no marriage," continued Hardy (Postscript, p. 25).

[62] Edward Carpenter believed that the desire for such a union was "the most deeply-rooted" of all: Love's Coming-of-Age (London: Allen and Unwin, 1923), p. 116. All further references to this work appear in the text.

would not disappear, as the conservatives warned, but would evolve into a more spiritual affinity, transcending mere sexual attraction and its attendant brutality, infidelity and jealousy. Legal constraints on love would be superfluous under this new sexual dispensation.

Shelley is often the reference-point for such ideas in the late nineteenth-century. On a popular level, he was seen as the exemplary rebel against sexual conventions: Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling quote his Notes to Queen Mab on the "superstition" of chastity.[63] Herminia refers to Shelley as the pioneer of free unions -- a tradition which "forced a high heroic independence on women," wrote H.G. Wells in criticism of The Woman Who Did.[64] The poet is of course Sue Bridehead's guiding star, and Hardy summons up the deeper resonances of his ideal of love by comparing the "extraordinary affinity, or sympathy" between Sue and Jude to the love of Laon and Cythna, the martyred liberators in The Revolt of Islam (but he preserves an ironic distance from the Shelleyan ideal by having Phillotson, Sue's jealous husband, draw the comparison) (p. 252).

Another framework of ideas which both Hardy and Allen use as part of the "tragic machinery" of their tales of modern love is the evolutionist tendency which became evident in speculative thought and public debate during the nineties. This tendency is reflected in casual comments in Jude, such as Phillotson's referring to the theory of matriarchy as a justification for the new legislation making women the legal guardians of their children (p. 253). Jude's characteristic naivety is illustrated at one point by his claim to see no reason why biological parents should possess their own children (p. 293). In contrast to his father's optimism about future human evolution, Little Father Time's significance and function

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[63] "The Woman Question," p. 86.

[64] An Experiment in Autobiography (London: Gollancz and Cresset Press, 1934), pp. 549-50.

in the story is all too clear. Jude's complaint that "our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us" (p. 419) might also have been made by Herminia, for Allen explains her tragic defeat as a result of her accelerated evolution. She is one of the "higher types," and the daughter who rejects her clearly did not imbibe her conventional views from her mother; rather, she "redeveloped them from within by a pure effort of atavism. She had reverted to lower types. She had thrown back to the Philistine" (p. 192). But while Allen's heroine appears to have been vanquished by biology, Hardy's modern lovers are defeated by the conflict between their radical idealism and the resistant "cruel law of nature and society," a resistance which, Jude mourns, "brought reaction in her, and recklessness and ruin on me!" (pp. 419-20). Hardy perceived the contradictory possibilities for progressive and reactionary interpretations of Darwinian theory. Both tendencies are evident in contemporary applications of the theory of evolution to issues raised by the movement for women's emancipation.

In the late nineteenth century, human reproduction became a central area of investigation for the emerging disciplines of psychology and social anthropology. The issues ranged from the eugenics of population control, through "enlightened" motherhood and child-care, to Edward Carpenter's prophecy of "Love's Coming-of-Age." Evolutionist assumptions behind the thinking of radical feminists and Utopian socialists around the turn of the century led them to regard present social injustices as relics of past barbarism, inevitably to be remedied by enlightened intelligence transforming the whole capitalist system. In particular, relations between the sexes would improve as a result of a higher evolution of the human psyche that would accompany a socialist transformation of the relations of work and culture. Defenders of the _status quo_ turned the evolutionary telescope around the other way. The present height of civilization was marked by the triumph of the monogamous patriarchal family and "the

improvement of women's status implied by limitation of their labours to the lighter kinds," Herbert Spencer had argued.[65] In this view, the emergence of women from domestic life urged on by the feminist movement was a distinctly retrograde step. The ideal balance of powers between the sexes had already been reached: the alleged higher status of women within the family was to the benefit of children, of the Race, but because of the demands of maternity women were less highly evolved than men and had therefore to look to their husbands to promote the intellectual and moral advance of society.

The conservative theory of sexual evolution was modified by the work of the biologists, Geddes and Thomson, which provided a rationalization for the ideology of male intellectuality and female intuition, attributing equal value to these complementary qualities. It was argued that, with the decline in fertility associated with advancing evolution, female energies previously allocated to reproduction would be placed at the disposal of society, which would gain from the predominance of "feminine" altruistic feelings over more primitive "masculine" egoism (developed in the struggle for survival in individual organisms). But, Geddes warned, the development of a more cooperative society would be endangered if women abandoned passivity for masculine activism: there was to be equivalence, but not equality, between the sexes.[66] However, for the sake of greater individual development in women and better care of

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[65] Quoted from Principles of Sociology by Elizabeth Fee, "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology," in Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women, ed. Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 100.

[66] Jill Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution," in Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 144-47.

children, Geddes advocated birth control, although he feared that its universal adoption would undermine morality. Instead of the use of contraceptive devices, therefore, he advocated "a new psychic development which would bring about a temperance in intercourse for married couples as controlling as the obligation to pre-marital chastity."[67] It was, no doubt, with this prospect in mind that he concluded his discussion of the poets' conceptions of Utopian love, in a pamphlet for the reactionary National Council of Public Morals, with the following forecast:

> Admitting the idea of evolution, we are . . . logically compelled to the assurance, that those rare fruits of an apparently more than earthly paradise of love, which only the forerunners of the race have been privileged to gather . . . are yet the realities of a daily life towards which we . . . may journey.[68]

At this point there is a curious overlap between the reactionary and the radical-romantic view of love and marriage. In Love's Coming-of-Age Carpenter describes the evolution on the individual level of "the pure human relation" out of sexual passion, "not the extinguishment of desire, but the attainment of the real kernel of it, its dedication to the well-being of another"(p. 19). So, too, in society

> as the sentiment of common life . . . grows, and the capacity for true companionship increases with the decrease of self-regarding anxiety, the importance of the mere sex act will dwindle till it comes to be regarded as only one very specialized factor in the full total of human love. . . . But however things may change with the further evolution of man, . . . first of all the sex relation must be divested of the sentiment of uncleanness which surrounds it, and rehabilitated again with a sense of almost religious consecration. . . . Sex is the allegory of Love in the physical world. (p. 27)

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[67] Conway, p. 148.

[68] Quoted by Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 157.

Carpenter's emphasis on the naturalness and beauty of sex, of course, puts him in the opposing camp to the defenders of public morals, but his image of the future of love is similar to theirs, as is his expression of distaste for artificial methods of contraception. His reasons for this, however, are radically different ("artificial checks to population" are uncertain, dangerous, "fatal to real feeling," and "the man's satisfaction is largely at the cost of the woman," p. 203), and so is his suggested alternative, a method of prolonged intercourse without orgasm, the result of which is "a more complete soul-union, a strange and intoxicating exchange of life, and transmutation of elements" (p. 204).

Another important aspect of his curious mixture of mysticism and practicality was Carpenter's insistence on the natural range and diversity of love, and of human types, including homosexuals. In this respect, his work popularized the research in sexual psychology done by his friend, Havelock Ellis. When Ellis turned to theorizing about sex roles, however, his work was just as unscientific as Carpenter's, although it retained the authoritative tone of academic research.[69] "Intellectually, women tend to the personal and concrete, men to the general and abstract," Ellis maintained, and this was due to difference in brain size. His biological approach to sex differences led him to conclude that because of the periodic reproductive cycle women are more "affectable" than men, the "lower nerve centres" preponderating:

> Man represents the radical or experimental element of the life of the race. Woman represents the conservative element. She remains nearer to the child, but for that very reason is in some respects more advanced than man, who, as he grows older, is 'farther off from heaven than when he was a boy.'[70]

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[69] Carpenter was one of the few men who could write about women and sexuality without "an assumption of masculine authority and right to lay down the law as to what women may or may not do," wrote Lily Bell in The Labour Leader, 27 June 1896; quoted by Rowbotham, Hidden From History, p. 103.

[70] From "Man and Woman," quoted in Love's Coming-of-Age, pp. 212-13.

Man and woman are two complementary opposites, forming together a Platonic unity, as it were. Ellis's insistence that humanity could not exist, far less advance, without the equilibrium of these two opposing forces was, as Viola Klein points out, a refutation of male supremacist arguments,[71] but in essence it was no different from the conservative idealism of Geddes and Thomson, which romanticized women's confinement to private life.

The conservative uses to which the "equal but separate" ideology could be put were apparently unforeseen by these New Moralists or by feminists who shared their ideals.[72] Ellen Key claimed that women were subjected by "severe Nature" to a permanent conflict of duties to home and to society; feminists who thought that equal rights must also mean equal functions were dangerously wrong in demanding that "the personal life must be placed above the instinct life" (ie. motherhood and domesticity[73]). But she suggested that the nineteenth-century women's movement was motivated ultimately by the new ideal of love, and that economic causes were more superficial. Feminists like Olive Schreiner and, in America, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who analysed women's oppression in economic terms, tended to gloss over questions of sexuality and reproduction. While far from eager to accept the idea that the maternal instinct was the essence of womanhood, both implied that voluntary motherhood was to be a matter of abstinence, or the refinement of love. Emma Goldman, whose essays on the evils of marriage and prostitution describe the ideals of free love and

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[71] The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1946), p. 45.

[72] W.L. O'Neill, The Woman Movement (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), pp. 95-6, points out that they could not have foreseen the spread of psycho-analytic theory in vulgarized forms which defined femininity solely in terms of sexual/maternal fulfilment and which served to reinforce the segregation of women from public life.

[73] Ellen Key, The Woman Movement, pp. 81-4.

freely-chosen motherhood in similarly vague and exalted terms, was more radical in practice: in 1916 she was imprisoned for giving out information on contraceptives or, as a contemporary magazine put it, "for advocating that women need not always keep their mouths shut and their wombs open."[74] But in her public speeches and essays, although the condemnation of marriage as an institution oppressive to women is far sharper than the criticisms made by Carpenter and other English New Moralists, she shares their conception of Free Love as the ultimate means of human liberation, and not simply as a reaction against legal marriage. Love is "the freest, the most powerful moulder of human destiny;" . . . "if the world is ever to give birth to true companionship and oneness, not marriage, but love will be the parent."[75]

The New Moralists' challenge to the Victorian ideology of sex provoked strong reactions, but it was not as radical as it seemed. Although they attacked prudery, prurience and hypocrisy, they did not question the sexist assumption that women were "naturally" different emotionally and intellectually from men because of their biologically specialized function, maternity.[76] Because of this, the "myth" of the New Woman, in their hands, incorporated elements of the Victorian stereotype of womanhood, and their new ideal of love was excessively spiritualized (one sees more precisely what kind of "sex in the head" D.H. Lawrence was reacting against in his early work). When we turn to the "fiction of

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[74] Quoted in Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 308.

[75] "Marriage and Love" (abridged) in Schneir, p. 324.

[76] Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 188, et passim.

sex and the new woman" written by female novelists attempting to establish an explicitly feminist critique of Victorian patriarchy, we find that their relationship to these changes in ideology determines to a great extent the kind of fiction they wrote, and the depth at which they attempted to explore what one of their number called the literary *terra incognita* of female psychology.[77]

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[77] George Egerton, "A Keynote to *Keynotes*," quoted by Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1977), p. 211.

# CHAPTER TWO

# OLIVE SCHREINER AND FEMINIST FICTION

## "Militant Heroism"

The great women writers of the nineteenth century were almost universally opposed to female suffrage, although questions about women's nature and role were central to their novels. Rosalind Miles writes:

> Their work plainly shows the alternating competition with and submission to men, the heart-searchings about marriage as a valid form of union between the sexes, the desperate hunger for education, for function, and the feeling that they should reach and assist other women. . . . But again, like Charlotte /Bronte/, they were feminine but not feminists. No woman writer of any name or distinction threw her weight behind the suffrage struggle. . . .[1]

There were, however, a number of late-Victorian women writers whose works, scarcely remembered today, were widely read and discussed as feminist contributions to the debate on the Woman Question. Some of them, notably Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird and Sarah Grand, actively supported the suffrage struggle, even although they did not make this the subject of their fiction.[2] Their heroines were of the New Woman type, articulate rebels isolated from the Women's Movement. They were "exemplary cases," as Alexandra Kollantai put it, the protagonists of "pioneering" novels that tried to solve contemporary problems.[3] Such novels provided an arena for airing feminist criticisms of patriarchal sexual and moral standards which would reach a wider reading public than journal articles and which, since the novelists were not obliged to coordinate their work

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[1] The Fiction of Sex (London: Vision, 1974), p. 63.

[2] It was not until the women's suffrage movement reached its militant phase that it became a topic for novelists; see Chapter Four of the present work, "Students and Suffragettes."

[3] "The New Woman" (1920), rpt. in The Autobiography of a Sexually-Emancipated Woman, trans. Salvator Attanasio, ed. Iring Fetscher (London: Orbach and Chambers, 1972), p. 53.

with the organised Women's Movement, could afford to explore more radical ideas about female psychology and sexuality than the "public feminists" would consider.

The feminist writers boldly raised such issues as illegitimacy, prostitution and venereal disease, and had their heroines speculate freely about the crucial questions concerning sex, love and motherhood. If love was to be the sole basis of marriage, how was it to be distinguished from sexual passion? Was marriage, rather, for motherhood? But perhaps motherhood was the real end of women's sexuality? Was passion, then, only a lure to trap women into the service of the species? Could women withstand the maternal instinct? If it had become the nexus of their oppression, perhaps they should learn to? But if women were condemned to be the puppets of the race-instinct, their rebellion could only lead to misery. Perhaps women who rebelled were the advance guard of new human types? Perhaps love would evolve beyond physical passion? These questions were aired by characters living in fairly conventional middle-class circumstances, as a general rule, and so they gained urgency and point.

The heroines of New Woman novels by Grant Allen, Dr Barry and F. Frankfurt Moore, amount to little more, Lloyd Fernando has commented, "than the sum of a number of opinions on the injustices women suffered in society or on the attractiveness of unions sanctioned by love rather than social forms."[4] On the other hand the women novelists' interest in the experience of those social injustices, rather than in the future of free unions, is a source of strength in their work, and it is unfortunate that Fernando's thesis leads him to neglect these novels in his study of the period. He argues that it was emancipationist ideals, rather than the oppressiveness of conventional femininity, which caused the suffering

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[4] "New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 132-33.

of New Women in life and in fiction, and so looks among popular novels for those promoting a self-consciously radical ideology. From this perspective, Jude the Obscure is regarded as "a frank reflection of unacknowledged neuroses caused by new life styles" which "made evident the serious divisive implications" of the Women's Movement,[5] a view which ignores the neuroses suffered by Sarah Grand's heroines, for instance, as they struggle to reconcile the ideal of feminine purity with the sordid realities of sexual politics in a middle-class Victorian milieu. It seems more reasonable to look for Hardy's precedents for Sue Bridehead, his "emancipated bundle of nerves,"[6] among the writers like Schreiner and Caird, who also portrayed the conflict between conditioned femininity and the new self-assertiveness as a drama taking place within their heroines' consciousness: their novels were attempts at psychological studies, not mere vehicles of opinion.

The first and most influential of the feminist New Woman novels was The Story of an African Farm, published in London in 1883 under the pseudonym of "Ralph Iron" by an unknown young woman from South Africa, Olive Schreiner. As Edith Lees recalls it, this was one of the "two significant and apparently insignificant" events which marked a turning point in the Women's Movement in Britain:

> One was the publication of . . . The Story of an African Farm, and the other was the performance of Ibsen's Doll's House . . . . [The novel] is the inner cry which has made militancy into a heroism, however mistaken or absurd in detail. It was a voice from the depths . . . that has penetrated the intellectuality of men and forced them into facing the causes which have produced the parasite and the doll in modern civilization.[7]

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[5]Fernando, p. 25.

[6]As described by a German critic quoted by Hardy in his Postscript, Jude the Obscure (1896; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 26.

[7]Quoted by Vera Buchanan-Gould, Not Without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 221.

By that date, it is true, the Woman Question was reaching into a wider spectrum of social and cultural issues than the pioneer suffragists had anticipated. The recent success of the women's campaign against the legitimation of the sexual double standard by the Contagious Diseases Acts, the efforts of freethinkers like Annie Besant to convey birth-control information to the poor, and an increasing volume of journal articles on the morality of marriage, all seemed as much a flying in the face of nature as Nora's slamming the door on her husband and children in A Doll's House. It was indeed a radical departure for ladies to speak publicly on matters of sexual morality. How much more shocking, then, to have an attack on the patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family associated with the hitherto cautious feminist movement. In her novel, Schreiner points explicitly to the parallel between marriage and prostitution: "A woman who has sold herself, ever for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way."[8] Linked with this is a protest against total celibacy being the only alternative to marriage for "respectable" women, against the prospect of "an old age without honour, without the reward of useful labour, without love"; she wonders how many men "would give up everything that is dear in life for the sake of maintaining a high ideal purity" (p. 194). Her heroine, Lyndall, chooses to give birth to her illegitimate child and die a social outcast rather than submit to the conditions which make of women "the parasite and the doll." Her "militant heroism" consisted in a deliberate and principled transgression of the patriarchal code of feminine behaviour.

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[8]The Story of an African Farm (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 190. All further references to this work appear in the text.

During the eighties and nineties in England the Women's Movement underwent a significant change in character. Women began to outnumber men as writers and speakers on what was now popularly known as the Woman Question, and to group together independently of existing political parties, a tendency towards autonomy which reached its most militant expression in the Women's Social and Political Union, founded by Mrs Pankhurst in 1903. In this interregnum between the earlier liberal feminist movement under the auspices of J.S. Mill and the later Suffragettes, there was a ferment of interaction between feminism and other forms of radical protest -- agnostic, socialist and Utopian -- against the dominant Victorian ideology and its institutions. The interaction was both intellectual and personal, particularly because the radicals' approach to the dilemmas of individual freedom and social responsibility, spirituality and science, was one which demanded the integration of political beliefs and personal consciousness.[9] Nearly all the best-known members of this loose radical grouping, which included members of the Social-Democratic Foundation, the Socialist League, the Fabians, the Independent Labour Party and the Fellowship of the New Life, formed friendships with each other during that time. They included Carpenter, Ellis, Edith Lees, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, Karl Pearson, G.B. Shaw, Annie Besant, and Olive Schreiner herself. Influences from these groups and their distinctive mixture of Utopian and "scientific" socialism can be discerned in Schreiner's later work, particularly _Woman and Labour_ (1911). What her first book offered them when it appeared in 1883 was a powerful and poignant vision of children, women and men oppressed by poverty and powerlessness, by a religious belief and a sexual morality that denied them individual integrity and fulfilment.

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[9] Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, _Socialism and the New Life_ (London: Pluto, 1977), pp. 9-24.

Set apart by her life style -- a colonial, an agnostic, a socialist and a well-known "advanced woman" -- Schreiner is also distinguished from the English feminist writers by her political perspective, which recognised the oppression of women as part of a total social, religious and economic order. Possessed of a critical intelligence which could discern the fostering of human cruelty in both the material conditions of life and in conventional morality, she was bound to present a feminist position more radical in its analysis of oppression and more openly rebellious in its implications than could easily be submerged in the mainstream of Victorian literary culture or dismissed as mere sexual sensationalism. Growing up in a rural environment isolated not only from the metropolitan society but even from the urban centres of the South African colony, she had educated herself from the age of twelve onwards by reading such philosophers as Spencer, Darwin, Emerson, Ruskin and Mill. _The Story of an African Farm_ shows that she had tested their ideas against her own experience of life.

Her account of the petty tyrannies practised in everyday life on the Karroo farm between parent and child, employer and employee, illustrates Mill's theory of the rule of force underlying the feudal relationships which preceded the present age of social contracts among equals,[10] but she voices serious doubts about the inevitability of social progress. In "The Subjection of Women," Mill had predicted that when men could be persuaded to grant women legal and social equality with themselves, then the "feudal" personal relationships pertaining between the sexes could slowly be altered. But Schreiner's heroine, Lyndall, does not believe

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[10]Donald Stone refers to the farm as "a realistic symbol of modern society in transition": _Novelists in a Changing World_ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 52.

that men can be so persuaded. They do not care about the position of women "unless they are in need of a subject upon which to show their wit," she maintains (p. 187); or else, if they are artists or scientists, they are so concerned with the pursuit of truth and beauty that they cannot see the human misery all around them. Thus she introduces a discussion of the position of women ("the only thing about which I think much or feel much," p. 187) with her childhood companion, Waldo, who is, like his namesake, one of the unworldly ones. He listens in amazement to her point-by-point demolition of anti-feminist arguments, but when it is over Lyndall herself falls silent: "Perhaps she thought of the narrowness of the limits within which a human soul may speak and be understood by its nearest of mental kin, of how soon it reaches that solitary land of the individual experience. . ."(p. 196). It was perhaps her own isolation that determined the harshness of Schreiner's vision and reinforced her early pessimism about social reform; certainly it is Lyndall's moral and emotional isolation that makes her "militant heroism" so poignant.

Among her arguments to Waldo are traces of two major ideas which Schreiner and her radical associates were later to develop in relation to the Woman Question and its possible solutions. One concerns human evolution, the other productive labour and its human value. In answer to the crude evolutionist argument that the education of women would lead to a debilitating "excess of intellect" in the human race, and the death of sexual attraction, she asserts that the "animal appetites" do not disappear with intellectual development; rather, they become "refined, discriminative, but immeasurably intensified" (p. 194). This counter-argument was employed also by Engels against the accusation that communism would mean the communal ownership of women, and the idea of love's evolution was popularized in Edward Carpenter's books, especially _Love's Coming-of-Age_ (1896). In Lyndall's speech it is closely connected with

her argument in favour of women's "independent labour," which contains the germ of Schreiner's later influential essay, Women and Labour:

> 'By every inch we grow in intellectual height our love strikes down its roots deeper, and spreads out its arms wider. It is for love's sake yet more than for any other that we look for that new time. . . . Then when that time comes,' she said slowly, 'when love is no more bought or sold, when it is not a means of making bread, when each woman's life is filled with earnest, independent labour, then love will come to her, a strange sudden sweetness breaking in upon her earnest work; not sought for, but found.' (p. 195)

Lyndall argues that women should be given a part in "the world's work" not so much to gain economic independence (important though that is) but for the constructive deployment of their considerable energies which, otherwise, are expended in exploiting men's affections:

> 'You are our goods, our merchandise, our material for operating on; we buy you, we sell you, we make fools of you, we act the wily old Jew with you, we keep six of you crawling to our little feet, and praying only for a touch of our little hand; and they say truly, there was never an ache or a pain or a broken heart but a woman was at the bottom of it. We are not to study law, nor science, nor art; so we study you. . . . There was never a man who said one word for woman but he said two for man, and three for the whole human race.' (p. 192)

Thus she employs threat rather than appeal in the service of her protest against marriage being the only profession open to women, a tactic more reminiscent of Mary Wollstonecraft than any of her more respectable feminist contemporaries. The emphasis on woman's power, which "will act, if not openly for good, then covertly for evil" (p. 191), can be found in Mill's essay on women, but in a much milder form. Mill suggests that the training of women's affections wholly towards the family inhibits the development of their sense of social responsibility: they follow family self-interest instead of principle.[11] Schreiner stresses not only the

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[11] John Stuart Mill, On the Subjection of Women (London: Everyman-Dent, 1929), pp. 305-306. All further references to this work appear in the text.

danger to the quality of social morality but the damage done to the individual's integrity. Women are educated in duplicity, she says:

> 'It is not what is done to us, but what is made of us . . . that wrongs us. . . . We all enter the world little plastic beings, with so much natural force, perhaps, but for the rest -- blank; and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says -- Work! and to us it says -- Seem! To you it says -- As you approximate to man's highest ideal of God, as your arm is strong and your knowledge great, and the power to labour is with you, so you shall gain all that human heart desires. To us it says -- Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labour. You shall gain what men gain, but by other means. And so the world makes men and women.' (p. 188)

It is not just the vicariousness of women's satisfactions that she is objecting to, but that they are gained only by the exploitation of sexuality ("by other means") -- and sexual love, she implies, is too important to be thus degraded.

Mill's analysis of the process by which women are subjected is limited by his failure to take account of what Schreiner refers to as their "power" or "energies." Perceptive and large-minded as it is, his account of women's mental subjugation to their husbands depends on the ideological model of femininity, which allows women no active sexuality (for it does, after all, answer point for point Ruskin's idealization of the Lady in "Of Queens' Gardens").[12] The image of women which emerges in his essay is that of a whole sex victimized by a conspiracy among individual men to bind women to them by their need for male approval:

> All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. . . . When we put together three things -- first, the natural attraction between the opposite sexes; secondly, the wife's entire dependence on the husband. . .; and lastly, that the principal object of human pursuit, consideration, and all objects of social ambition, can in general be sought or obtained by her only through him,

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[12] Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (1969; rpt. London: Abacus-Sphere, 1972), p. 91.

> it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character. (pp. 232-33)

Sexual attraction, then, is the main means by which men subject women to their power, demanding submissiveness and self-abnegation as essential components of that attraction. Schreiner presents a somewhat more robust image of women's sexuality -- and a harsher portrayal of their destructive power. Unlike her mentor, Mill, she does not deem Ruskinian arguments about women's special abilities and moral superiority worthy of rational consideration.

A grotesque caricature of the powerful woman in African Farm is Tant' Sannie, the Boer woman, who marries and buries a succession of husbands -- and dreams of killing them:

> 'The dear Lord doesn't send dreams for nothing. Didn't I tell you this morning that I dreamed of a great beast like a sheep, with red eyes, and I killed it? Wasn't the white wool his hair, and the red eyes his weak eyes, and my killing him meant marriage?' (p. 201)

She does in fact grow fat on the profits of these ventures, acquiring wealth and underlings over whom she can exercise her power. Lyndall herself acts the part of the heartless, predatory woman: she is tempted to exploit one man's adoration of her so that she can safely marry when she is pregnant and will not submit to the other, her lover. But her reasons illustrate the limitations of this power, that is, a woman can only exploit it if she denies her own spontaneity: she cannot afford to act on her sexual desires unless it will lead to marriage, when she must be prepared to give up what little sovereignty she possesses. Lyndall tells her lover she will not marry him because passion is a trap:

> 'Because if I had been married to you for a year, I should have come to my senses, and seen that your hands and your voice are like the hands and the voice of any other man. I cannot quite see that now. But it is all madness. You call into activity one part of my nature; there is a higher part that you know nothing of, that you never touch. If I married you, afterwards it would arise and assert itself, and I should hate you always, as I do now sometimes.' (p. 237)

She is saying, as few earlier literary heroines had said, that a woman's passion, like a man's, can exist quite independently of commitment: she loved him, she says, "because I like to experience, I like to try" (p. 238). But she does not trust him enough to marry him, because that would be to place herself in his power: she has neither wealth nor position, and would lose the right of meeting him on equal terms. She will not marry the man whose sexual power over her she now fears, but she will consider marrying the one she despises -- and who is betrothed to her gentle cousin, Em -- for "there is only one point on which I have a conscience," that is, the legitimacy and welfare of her child (p. 236).

Like most rebellious heroines, Lyndall declares herself to be immoral, or at least without conscience in the conventional sense. In fact "conscience," which directed her to cause Em pain and humiliate Gregory for the sake of respectability, is overcome by her own moral principles: she agrees to go away with her lover, but sends him off before the child is born. It dies and so does she, unrepentant but, ironically, subjected to the rule which she herself has defined, of the woman's inevitable defeat:

> 'A little bitterness, a little longing when we are young, a little futile searching for work, a little passionate striving for room for the exercise of our powers, -- and then we go with the drove. A woman must march with her regiment. In the end she must be trodden down or go with it; and if she is wise she goes.' (p. 189)

She has to fight hardest against pressures to conform to the moral ideal of the "good woman." But for the character type of the "true woman" she has nothing but contempt, and Schreiner drives this point home by making the only character who fits that type -- foolish, duplicitous and tyrannical -- a man, Gregory Rose. Lyndall comments that he seems to have been "born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born to it," and maliciously imagines him happily sewing frills in the parlour, "with a rough man making love to him." She warns Waldo to leave

the farm when Gregory takes over from Tant' Sannie, for "the rule of a woman is tyranny; but the rule of a man-woman grinds fine" (p. 197). Yet Gregory is transformed into something admirable when, following Lyndall to the Transvaal and finding her alone and ill, her child dead, he disguises himself as a woman and nurses her until her death, never revealing his true identity. In this extraordinary role-reversal he is the perfect nurse, gentle and attentive but unobtrusive, playing out his desire to serve his idol with a "womanly" self-abnegating love.

Mill's account of the position of women cannot explain the existence of rebellious women, for it does not acknowledge the incompleteness of and the contradictions inherent in the process of their character-formation into submission. Schreiner's description of how women are taught to "gain what men gain, but by other means" than their own efforts, is both subtler psychologically than Mill's, and more critical of women's complicity in their own suppression. In the following passage she has Lyndall describe an instance in the process of what we now call sex-role conditioning, in a way which can best be conceptualized in the terminology of repression and sublimation. The little girl's physical energy is repressed and takes the sublimated form of narcissistic self-love as a compensation for her loss of physical freedom and effectiveness:

> 'We sit with our little feet drawn up under us in the window, and look out at the boys in their happy play. We want to go. Then a loving hand is laid on us: "Little one, you cannot go," they say; "your face will burn, and your nice white dress be spoiled." We feel it must be for our good, it is so lovingly said; but we cannot understand; and we kneel still with one little cheek wistfully pressed against the pane. Afterwards we go and thread blue beads, and make a string for our neck; and we go and stand before the glass. We see the complexion we were not to spoil, and the white frock, and we look into our own great eyes. Then the curse begins to act on us. It finishes its work when we are grown women, who no more look out wistfully at a more healthy life; we are contented. We fit our sphere as a Chinese woman's foot fits her shoe, exactly, as though God had made both -- and yet He knows nothing of either.' (p. 189)

Where Mill uses as an image of the artificiality of woman's "nature" the hot-house flower, "the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others" (p. 238), Schreiner sees a crippling of development:

> 'In some of us the shaping to our end has been quite completed. The parts we are not to use have been quite atrophied, and have even dropped off; but in others, and we are not less to be pitied, they have been weakened and left. We wear the bandages, but our limbs have not grown to them; we know that we are compressed, and chafe against them.' (p. 189)

She is not only concerned to refute the argument that women are "naturally" passive and content with the limitations placed upon them. The image of amputation is human, not vegetable, and suggests the violence that is done to women's natural capacity for free activity. It was Mill who said that woman's nature would not be known until women themselves could write honestly about it (p. 242), and so it is appropriate that Schreiner's should be seen as an implicit correction to his view of womanhood.

Because of its topicality, African Farm was claimed to have given rise to "the Women's Rights novel, the Religious Doubts novel, and the Sex novel."[13] Certainly, it was among the first novels to deal with these issues, but it is more powerful than any of the sensational problem-novels discussed earlier because Schreiner's penetrating analysis of the psychology of oppression is the common ground from which all these separable "problems" in the novel emerge. Upon this critical insight, too, depends the book's visionary power, which ensures its endurance as one of those rare works, classed by Doris Lessing along with Moby Dick, Jude the Obscure and Wuthering Heights, which is "on a frontier of the human mind." Lessing defends its multiplicity of concerns, "the novel being that hybrid, the mixture of journalism and the Zeitgeist and autobiography that comes out of a part of the human consciousness which

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[13]Forrest Read, quoted by Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Books (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 362.

is always trying to understand itself, to come into the light."[14] Nevertheless, critics have repeatedly objected to Lyndall's feminist manifesto as an excrescence on the novel,[15] despite the fact that it is not only a consistent expression of her character but also (most importantly) a commentary _on_ her character, a necessary guideline for readers responding to a new kind of fictional heroine.

It is because Schreiner shows the evidence of the crippling of her energies in the heroine's character that Lyndall becomes more than the pathetic victim of oppression. She is by no means a "good woman," but neither is she the stereotyped "bad 'un." Painfully aware of her faults, tormented by the thought of her coldness and egocentricity, she is nevertheless not made to repent of these as sins. The ultimate target of her self-criticisms is "what has been made of us," the social conditions both material and ideological that have forced her character into the mould of "the parasite and the doll;" but Lyndall believes firmly that she is responsible for her own actions and answerable only to herself, to her own sense of honour. An agnostic as well as a feminist rebel, this "militant heroine" is the active protagonist of her own fate. Her dilemma is outlined in the following outburst to the uncomprehending Waldo:

> 'They say, "God sends the little babies." Of all the dastardly revolting lies men tell to suit themselves, I hate that most. . . . When there has been no legal contract between the parents, who sends the little children then? The Devil, perhaps!' she laughed. . . .

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[14]"Afterword to _The Story of an African Farm_," rpt. in _A Small Personal Voice_, ed. Paul Schlueter (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 98-9.

[15]Dan Jacobson's Introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel is representative of this general trend.

> 'It must be very nice to believe in the Devil,' she said; 'I wish I did. . . . He is so useful to those people who do. They may be as selfish and sensual as they please, and, between God's will and the Devil's action, always have someone to throw their sin on. But we, wretched unbelievers, we bear our own burdens; we must say, "I myself did it, I. Not God, not Satan; I myself!" That is the sting that strikes deep.' (pp. 209-10)

She implicitly condemns herself here as "selfish and sensual" on account of the child she is carrying, in the voice of her conventional feminine conscience. It speaks again when she contrasts herself to Em, whose "little finger has more goodness in it than my whole body" (p. 231). She is torn between her actual and her ideal self, between the self-doubting creature she has been made into and the independent woman she aspires to be. Possessed of heroinic qualities[16] -- passion, intelligence, willpower and beauty -- she is compelled to use these very qualities against others and ultimately against herself.

The decision to run away with her lover causes her anguish, and she begs to be released from herself: "'I want to love! I want something great and pure to lift me to itself,'" but there is "no salvation; redemption is from within, and neither from God nor man" (p. 242). The same note, the desire for something "nobler, stronger" than herself to love, is sounded again just before her death, when she cries: "'I am a weak, selfish, erring woman. One day I shall find something to worship, and then I shall be --'" (p. 279). Significantly, she is suddenly too weary to write more. In these parallel scenes Lyndall's appeals for help to be redeemed through love strike a deliberately false note; but Schreiner also has trouble with the image signifying that "inner redemption" which is the true release from self-hatred. In both cases Lyndall stares at her

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[16] Ellen Moers has coined the term "heroinism" to describe what she calls "literary feminism," the woman writer's conscious intention "to create a heroic structure for the female voice in literature": Literary Women (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1977), pp. 186-87.

face in the mirror and touches her image, addressing it as a companion: "We shall never be quite alone. . . . We shall always be together, as we were when we were little. . . . We will never be quite alone till they part us" (p. 243). It is a curious gesture of self-love, and it seems to imply that the narcissism in which little girls are encouraged to find their sense of identity may be transformed into a source of strength, the authentic self-love that is necessary for independence.

The motif of the mirror-image is introduced in the passage quoted above where Lyndall describes the way women are "shaped" from childhood to fit into the feminine sphere, "our cursed end": "We see the complexion we were not to spoil, and the white frock, and we look into our own great eyes. Then the curse begins to act on us" (p. 189). The passage touches on both aspects of the female experience which, according to Simone de Beauvoir, lead to narcissism. One is the frustration of subjectivity: denied fulfilment in "masculine" activities, the girl is forced "to find her reality in the immanence of her person." The other is the encouragement she receives to see herself as the object of desire, "to identify herself with her whole body." Thus narcissism involves imagining oneself as a duality, subject and object; the <u>fixed</u> image in the mirror, the static object, is identified as the ego, "and the subject takes refuge from [her]self in it."[17] It is interesting that the negative implications of self-consolation in this account of narcissism, which reflect de Beauvoir's tendency to equate "authenticity" with "masculinity," are contradicted by the passage which she quotes, without comment, from Anna de Noailles' *Livre de ma vie*:

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[17] *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 641-42.

> I loved dolls, I imagined them as alive as I was. . . . This need to remain whole, to be twice myself, I felt keenly in early childhood. . . . Ah, how I wished . . . that I had beside me another little Anna to throw her arms around my neck, to console me, to understand me! . . . In later life I found her in my heart and I kept fast hold of her; the help she gave me was not in the form of consolation, as I had hoped, but in that of courage.[18]

Her feeling about her dolls is so similar to Lyndall's affection for her mirror-image that this passage could almost have been a commentary on the novel. In both cases "narcissism" becomes, for the adult woman, a way of gaining courage, a positive identification rather than a "refuge" from the self. Schreiner deepens its significance by presenting it in the context of her character's rejecting an anthropomorphic object of worship, God or man. The terrible isolation of the individual soul in a cosmos where God is dead is intensified for the woman who, in taking full responsibility for her own integrity, rejects the only kinds of love which men can offer to her.

Lyndall's isolation is matched by Waldo's. Both children are orphans, dependent on the favours of Tant' Sannie, the superstitious and cruel Boer woman who is in charge of the farm, and victims of the sadistic Bonaparte Blenkins, her temporary partner in crime. Each child rebels against this joint tyranny in a significant way. Waldo begins to free himself from the domination of fear when, as a small child, he whispers his hatred of a God that condemns human beings to death and damnation; instead of faith, he seeks to know the world around him by scientific reading and experiment. Lyndall does not fear divine retribution but human injustice: she sees that their suffering as children is the result of their powerlessness, and resolves that "when I am strong, I will hate everything that has power, and help everything that is weak" (p. 93).

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[18] de Beauvoir, p. 642.

For her, knowledge will not be revelation but an instrument for doing battle with an unjust world. Comparing herself with Waldo, she declines to go burrowing after "the final cause of things in general": "Life is too short to run after mights; we must have certainties" (p. 197).

As they grow up, both are defeated in their aspirations to freedom, disillusioned by their experience of the world beyond the farm; but where Lyndall is tormented by guilt and self-hatred in the exhausting struggle against all the barriers between herself and freedom, Waldo is not so susceptible. He appears to be impervious to the love or hatred directed towards him, entirely absorbed in his wood-carving and his communion with the natural world. Lyndall warns him against the kind of anaesthesia which follows from the perception that human beings are insignificant in a vast, impersonal universe without God:

> 'But we must not think so far; it is madness, it is a disease. We know that no man's work is great, and stands for ever. . . . And what, if we could help mankind, and leave the traces of our work upon it to the end? Mankind is only an ephemeral blossom on the tree of time. . . . We are sparks, we are shadows, we are pollen, which the next wind will carry away. We are dying already; it is all a dream.'
>
> 'I know that thought. When the fever of living is on us, when the desire to become, to know, to do, is driving us mad, we can use it as an anodyne, to still the fever and cool our beating pulses. But it is a poison, not a food. If we live on it it will turn our blood to ice; we might as well be dead. We must not, Waldo; I want your life to be beautiful, to end in something.' (p. 217)

Waldo's torment after hearing of Lyndall's death, when he realizes his love for her and wants the consolation of the "old faith" in immortality (p. 287), comes as something of a surprise, for he and she had seemed largely unconscious of one another, more like complementary parts of a single self than the "twin souls" of lovers.[19] He dies of his grief, but

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[19]This relationship of mystical union imagined in the context of a vast, impersonal universe is comparable to the ending of *Sons and Lovers*, and it has been argued that this and other aspects of D.H. Lawrence's early treatment of women and love can be traced back to *African Farm*, which he read in Croydon and recommended to Jessie Chambers: Christopher Heywood, "Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*: Prototype of Lawrence's Early Novels," *English Language Notes*, 14 (1976), 44-50.

it is not like ordinary mourning. They did not desire one another, but it seems as if Lyndall was the embodiment of <u>his</u> "desire to become, to know, to do." Without her, he sinks into the insensible calm of Nature:

> Only then, when there comes a pause, a blank in your life, when the old idol is broken, when the old hope is dead, when the old desire is crushed, then the Divine compensation of Nature is made manifest. She shows herself to you. So near she draws you, that the blood seems to flow from her to you, through a still uncut cord. . . .
>
> Well to die then; for, if you live, so surely as the years come, . . . so surely will passions arise. . . . Desire, ambition, and the fierce agonizing flood of love for the living -- they will spring again. Then Nature will draw down her veil: . . . you cannot bring back those peaceful days. Well to die then! (pp. 298-99)

Under this spell of peace Waldo dies. But he goes dreaming of an <u>earthly</u> future in which such a withdrawal as his would not be necessary, a "new time breaking" when "men shall not be driven to seek solitude, because of the crying-out of their hearts for love and sympathy" (p. 299). Thus the book ends on a paradox, his dying dream of the triumph of human desire counteracting the tragedy of isolated individual lives and deaths.

<u>The Feminists' New Women</u>

While all the New Women are self-conscious about asserting their individuality in opposition to prescribed roles and proscribed feelings, none is as thorough-going a rebel as Lyndall. The varying lengths to which feminist novelists were prepared to take their heroines in the direction of mental independence and sexual assertiveness reveal a spectrum of attitudes to women's emancipation that indicates a surprising elasticity of ideological accommodation to that prospect, rather than a unanimous rejection of the old values. Secondly, Schreiner's characterization of her heroine, awkward though it often is, is matched by none of the other writers. Their characters cannot easily explain themselves to themselves, or to their audience: they elaborate feminist ideas but are

rarely able to express directly the emotional conflicts attendant on their experiences. Authorial attitudes tend to fluctuate from the sentimental to the sardonic, and it is significant that in most of the novels considered here, authorial comment on the heroine is supplemented by the reflections of an older but supportive male character. This character in Mona Caird's The Daughters of Danaus is a professor of natural science, and in Sarah Grand's The Heavenly Twins and Emma Frances Brooke's A Superfluous Woman he is a medical practitioner, facts which indicate the class-composition of the audience these writers hoped to influence. What is most interesting is that these men make the most aggressively feminist statements about the present and the most radically idealistic proposals about the future of relations between the sexes.[20]

There is a wide range of ideas about what women were and could be in the feminist problem-novels, but all start from a conviction that the conventional Victorian upbringing of girls was not only unnecessarily restrictive but also positively harmful. There is a general condemnation of "the old-fashioned 'womanly women' who thought it their duty to submit to everything . . . including injustice,"[21] and of the training of girls to be "agreeable" above all, to "jump through hoops" like performing poodles.[22] The thwarting of their individuality and active moral sense is criticized most vehemently in A Superfluous Woman: the "flat catalogue of conventional virtues" imposed on women included some "deplorable elements, which result in unmitigated harm both racially and socially":

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[20]A similar figure appears as the doctor in Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899), a work which surpasses all the British novels on these themes.

[21]Sarah Grand, The Heavenly Twins (London: Heinemann, 1893), p. 591. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[22]Mona Caird, The Daughters of Danaus (London: Bliss, Sands and Foster, 1894), p. 23. All further references to this work appear in the text.

> At any rate, in varied individualities there must be difference all through, yet one type of character is handed to all, with the advice 'Please copy.' But no virtue is effective that is not living and spontaneous. And how can a set of fictitious rules give these women any guidance in self-management?[23]

Brooke insists that women should define their own values, and in particular cultivate honesty and honour, a concept radically redefined as integrity rather than sexual ignorance (p. 298). This view is shared by Ménie Muriel Dowie, whose heroine "took honesty and honour very seriously, well knowing them to be among the latest branches of study open to her sex."[24] Both these novelists show their heroines deeply confused by their first experience of sexual passion, whereas the more conservative feminists, Grand and "Iota" (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn), highlight the dangers of feminine "purity" by showing their heroines dismayed by the sordid facts of male sexuality, being innocent of passion themselves.

The common focus of these novels on marriage and its consequences serves to de-emphasize the romance of courtship. Unlike Jane Austen's heroines, the kind of moral education the New Women need cannot be acquired before marriage, under present circumstances. Going against a whole literary tradition, the feminist writers present marriage as a problem, not as an indication of moral maturity, nor as a symbol of the mystical union of the sexes. The male characters -- there are no heroes -- present a sorry spectacle of insensitivity and even brutality, the only sympathetic ones being the avuncular figures already mentioned. The implicit criticism of male attitudes is crushing, although the heroines conspicuously avoid direct attacks on individual men; but neither do they set out in search for a "Mr Right," as their twentieth-century descendants

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[23]Emma Frances Brooke, A Superfluous Woman (London: Heinemann, 1894), p. 17. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[24]Ménie Muriel Dowie, Gallia (London: Methuen, 1895), p. 104. All further references to this work appear in the text.

were to do. Marriage is regarded as a social institution, not as the ultimate human relationship. It is, indeed, incompatible with love, as Caird's heroine, Hadria, defines it: "a sympathy so perfect, and a reverence so complete, that the conditions of ordinary domestic existence would be impossible, unthinkable, in connection with it" (p. 72). Passion, on the other hand, is what leads women blindfold into the trap of marriage and maternity: the central question in Hadria's mind is whether women are thus imprisoned by the brutality of human institutions or of nature. Hadria is the most outspoken of all the New Women on this issue, but her distrust of passion is shared by the others. Alexandra Kollantai noted that "the new woman not only rejects the outer fetters, she protests 'against love's prison itself'":

> She is constantly fearful that the power of feeling might awaken the slumbering atavistic inclination in her to become the shadow of the husband, might tempt her to surrender her identity, and to abandon her work, her profession, her life-tasks.
>
> This is not a struggle for the 'right to love,' this is a protest against moral imprisonment, even of the outwardly freest feeling. This is the rebellion of the women of our age of transition who have not yet learned how to harmonize inner freedom and independence with the all-consuming passion of love.[25]

While feminists and sexual libertarians joined in condemning "moral imprisonment" as the cause of women's ignorance of sexuality, one writer whose work was classed with theirs as a threat to purity,[26] "Iota," regards the cause as biological, the result of the female's relatively slower development towards readiness for the function of procreation. The biological bent of her novel, A Yellow Aster, is indicated by the title. This flower is, we are reminded, a hybrid produced by scientific

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[25] "The New Woman," p. 89.

[26] A.R. Cunningham, "The 'New Woman' Fiction of the 1890's," Victorian Studies, 17 (1973), 180.

experiment. The heroine, the product of an intellectual and somewhat Bohemian family (her mother is a career woman, an archaeologist), decides to marry in the spirit of experimentation. Naively horrified by the realities of the married state and her obligation to "love, honour and obey," she comes close to ruining her life until, nursing her sick baby, she "lost herself in supreme self-forgetfulness, and then at last the latent truth of her nature broke through its bonds."[27] Realizing that she dearly loves her child and, consequently, her husband, the hybrid reverts to true type, the woman as mother and wife, and the finger of accusation is pointed at her "advanced" parents who allowed her to marry before she was ready.

The dangerous consequences of a lively but immature girl rushing into an early marriage are treated more light-heartedly and inventively as one of the themes in Grand's The Heavenly Twins. Angelica marries a man much older than herself (whom she calls "Daddy") because he will let her do as she likes. Bored and restless, she disguises herself as her twin brother, Diavolo, and forms a close friendship with another man. When the deception is discovered she defends her experiment energetically: "I have enjoyed the benefit of free intercourse with your masculine mind undiluted by your masculine prejudices with regard to my sex. . . . The fault is in your training" (p. 458). The man objects that she should not have been bored, for all women have a "grave responsibility," but Angelica disagrees: "The value attached to the influence of women is purely fictitious. . . . I should have been held to have done my duty if I had spent the rest of my life in dressing well, and saying the proper thing" (p. 454). Sarah Grand's solution to Angelica's dissatisfaction, however, is like George Eliot's for Dorothea: she eventually

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[76]"Iota" (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn), A Yellow Aster (London: Hutchinson, 1894), p. 289. The theme of learning to love after marriage was already well-established in the Victorian novel, as Jenni Calder points out: Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 57.

finds an object for her energies and an outlet for her womanly influence in writing her husband's parliamentary speeches for him.

This novel, which is something of a compendium of feminist themes, also offers an instructive contrast to Angelica's story. The issue of woman's place in private and public life is treated more sombrely in the figure of Evadne. Her name means "well-pleasing one" (after the woman who burned herself on her husband's funeral pyre, p. 603), and she is so torn between her desire to improve the world and her duty to obey her husband's ban on such good works that she suffers a nervous breakdown. Her mentor, Dr Galbraith, is of the opinion that only very exceptional women can manage to contribute in both spheres of life (p. 645), and indeed Grand had shown in an earlier novel, Ideala,[28] that this should be so. The heroine turns her back on a degenerate husband and finds fulfilment in helping her "fallen" sisters, but she cannot leave her miserable marriage for another man whom she loves. To do so would be a dereliction of her duty to set an example to the masses, advises the narrator of the novel, who is also her admirer and mentor.

Grand is extremely circumspect in her treatment of sexual matters. The genteel sensationalism of Angelica's experiment in cross-dressing is justified by the author's insistence that she is innocent of anything so "vulgar and violent as passion":

> That part of her nature had never been roused into active life, partly because it was not naturally strong, but also because the more refined and delicately sensuous appreciation of beauty in life, which is so much a characteristic of capable women nowadays, dominated such animalism as she was equal to, and made all coarser pleasures redundant. (p. 467)

The familiar idea of the refinement of passion and its sublimation into aesthetic, moral or intellectual activity is applied to women as well as

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[28] Sarah Grand, Ideala (London: Bentley, 1889).

men in the late-Victorian novel, which is an interesting refutation of the Victorian notion that women were asexual beings, subject only to the "passion" of motherhood. Indeed this notion, so often adduced from the statements of Victorian pundits such as William Acton, was more likely "an ideology seeking to be established than the prevalent view or practice of even middle-class women," according to one historian of the period.[29] Even a sexually-conservative novelist like Grand discreetly resists the idea that women were mere objects of a passion which men felt and they did not: Ideala, like the heroine of A Superfluous Woman, has sympathy for her fallen sisters, it is suggested, because she has experienced the same temptations -- the prostitutes are seen as victims of their own sexuality, not simply of male lust and economic exploitation. However Grand suggests that women's capacity for self-control is superior to men's, and both her high-minded heroines, Ideala and Evadne, retreat from marriage in all but name, without seeking fulfilment in other personal relationships.

Grand does not offer maternity to her heroines as woman's highest fulfilment, nor even as a compensatory passion in place of love. But the two New Woman novels which are frankest about women's capacity for sexual passion, Brooke's A Superfluous Woman and Dowie's Gallia, present love and motherhood as conflicting desires. Brooke blames society for imposing upon women the choice between socially-respectable motherhood and the "anarchic" dictates of natural passion. Jessamine's training as a "superfluous woman," an ornament to Society, has left her totally unprepared for the experience of passion, for love is prescribed as "a beautiful fidelity, affection, sentiment, but not a passion like a man's" (p. 18). When she falls in love with a simple Scottish crofter, Jessamine

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[29] Carl N. Degler, "What Ought To Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," American Historical Review, 79 (1974), 1471.

cannot imagine marriage succeeding as "the pair of human souls, chained together solely by passion, divided by everything that remained" (p. 214). Retreating to Society, she marries the eligible but decadent Lord Heriot, and is burdened with three idiot children of his degenerate line. Motherhood was "my strongest passion," she tells Dr Cornerstone (p. 256) before her early death, but the novel itself suggests that her fate was a kind of punishment for moral cowardice. The real culprit is a society which furnished women with such a useless moral sense that Jessamine thought her passion for the farmer must be wicked because it implied a rejection of the Society for which she had been bred. Brooke comments:

> In view of the temptation which met her there, and the fearsome attraction of it, the Heriot entanglement (with the Church and clergy behind, and the support of society) appeared almost as the path of virtue. (p. 136)

The eponymous heroine of Dowie's Gallia is also a victim of the disjunction between goodness and truth as standards applicable to the behaviour of women. While her friend, Margaret, who is both beautiful and conventionally good, a "soul woman" having nothing to do with education and the male world, arouses men's romantic devotion, Gallia's rebellious honesty loses her the love of the only man for whom she can feel real passion, the Byronic Lord Essex of Balliol. When she confesses her love for him, she is humiliated by his refusal to take her seriously, and he later accuses her of being "incapable of any ordinary feminine feeling" when she tells him that she has put "amorous love" behind her and wants a marriage of convenience so that she can fulfil her maternal instinct (pp. 215-16). Gallia is unaware that this confession inflames Essex's passion, but it is just as well, for their marriage would have been disastrous, genetically speaking. In the final pages, when she is safely betrothed to the man to whom "heredity" directed her, Essex reveals that he has an hereditary heart disease. Ultimately Gallia loses nothing by her honesty but the wrong mate, but the happy ending is not the result of

her own choices. Women cannot be free, for they are puppets of their inherited instincts, as she tells her husband-to-be by way of explaining why she desires but cannot love him (p. 312). Both conventional femininity and feminist claims to individual independence are undermined by Dowie's facile shift to a biological-determinist perspective in the second half of the novel, and the melodramatic comedy of the ending reverses the novel's earlier intimations of tragedy in Gallia's stout declaration that "there isn't anything women want except courage" (p. 95). It is interesting that Gallia is alone among these heroines in not having a male mentor, but then if woman is at the mercy of a pre-social maternal instinct there seems little point in her being concerned with moral questions of "honesty and honour" (p. 104).

Both Dowie and Brooke pose the question, "Which is best, love or motherhood?" (Gallia, p. 156). For confronting women with this impossible choice Dowie blames nature, Brooke society. But Caird's heroine, Hadria, never resolves this central question in The Daughters of Danaus. Isolated with her parents in Scotland, without that "single strong interest in life" that Grand's heroine had demanded,[30] and doubting that she, "a solitary girl, unsupported by knowledge of life or by fellow-believers, should have chanced upon the truth" about women's imprisonment in domesticity (pp. 141-42), Hadria succumbs to marriage against her better judgement. Her subsequent experience of conjugal and maternal life confirms her hatred of the institution: it seems to her the "climax of feminine abjectness" that women should be obliged to produce children for their husbands, and thus for patriarchal society and for the species (p. 172). She attacks the institution of motherhood, comparing it with

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[30] The Heavenly Twins, p. 454.

the "domesticated" English countryside where she is condemned to live out her sentence:

> 'Nature in her most maternal and uninspired mood -- Mother earth submissive to the dictatorship of man, permitting herself to be torn and wounded, and furrowed, and harrowed at his pleasure, yielding her substance and her life to sustain the produce of his choosing, her body and soul abandoned supine to his caprice.' (p. 173)

But Hadria seems to be living proof that this submission is not inevitable, since she is subject neither to the maternal instinct nor to sexual passion.

Hadria's active sexuality is never realized. It is "under the spell" of old Celtic music and dancing that she agrees to marry, and later, although she is attracted to a certain Professor Theobald, she rejects his advances, not because she disapproves of adultery but because he turns out to be the cad who seduced and abandoned the village schoolmistress, whose orphaned daughter Hadria is raising as her own. But there is not even any question of sexual attraction between Hadria and the man with whom she has a deep spiritual affinity, Professor Fortescue. They are both, in the parlance of the times, "advanced types." He perceives "the new instinct" in Hadria, a total absence of "feminine abjectness," and he seems to her to be utterly lacking in "all the old hereditary instincts of conquest and ownership" (pp. 200-201). Fortescue is an outright feminist and a believer in the New Spirit. He rejects the fatalism of Hadria's friend, Valeria, who believes that nature has cruelly imposed upon women the choice between imprisoning love and lonely independence, and he blames men for the oppression of women (p. 95), and for imitating "the brutalities of the animal creation" (p. 102). Their two attitudes are likened to the contrast between a medieval church and a Greek temple (p. 99), in an image which recalls Hardy's contrast between Jude's faith and Sue's will in _Jude the Obscure_.

In an attempt to prove the sovereignty of the will over circumstances, Hadria leaves her husband and children for the life of a musician in Paris, but her new life is cut short by the summons to return home to care for her invalid mother. This turn of events was anticipated at the beginning of the novel when Hadria pointed out, in an argument with her brothers about the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance, that strength of will would not avail against "prejudice and custom," for a girl "has to tear through so many living ties that restrain her freedom," ties which have "held many a woman helpless and suffering, like some wretched insect pinned alive to a board" (p. 15). But it is hard to believe that Hadria is so enmeshed by ties of family affection: Caird is not novelist enough to dramatize satisfactorily the emotional conflicts entailed in her rebellion. It remained to Hardy to realize what Caird schematizes, "the tragedy that threatens all spirits who are pointing towards the new order, while the old is still working out its exhausted impetus" (pp. 111-12).

The theme of woman's bond with nature through maternity is given a strange twist in the stories of George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne). In Symphonies[31] there are contrasting variations on the theme of woman's sexual awakening in two stories. The young girl in "At the Heart of the Apple" is awakened to desire by the sight of an infant, and is perfectly content to live alone with her child, the result of her seduction by a young man from the city. Living as she does in remotest Norway and almost completely ignorant of human society, she is the prototypical "natural" woman, to whom "affection" is a foreign concept. There are two types of females, she believes, the "mere mothers" and the "mere women" (p. 217). The second type is portrayed in a story called "Pan." The woman is

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[31] Symphonies (London: John Lane, 1897). All further references to this work appear in the text.

awakened to her own sexual nature by a wandering musician, but actually succumbs to the advances of a boorish fellow whom she then has to marry because she is pregnant; when the musician returns to the village on her wedding day, she is driven to end her misery in suicide. Clearly, she is not of the mother-type. The situations of women and men are contrasted in the image of flocks of pigeons being trapped in nets by the men of the village: she is tied to procreation, while his life is "made of creative moments" (pp. 246-47).

Egerton sees "affection" as the bond which traps woman into marriage and binds her natural power. In an earlier story from Keynotes,[32] "A Cross Line," the restless heroine mystifies her slave-like husband and enchants a potential lover, but she has eventually to submit to the fact that she is pregnant. She has dreamed of herself as a seductive witch, "untameable," "savage" womanhood, but realizes that women's affections are "chains" which they themselves forge "in a moment of softness":

> 'Perhaps many of our seeming contradictions are only the outward evidences of inward chafing. Bah! The qualities that go to make a Napoleon -- superstition, want of honour, disregard of opinion and the eternal I -- are oftener to be found in a woman than a man. Lucky for the world perhaps that all these attributes weigh as nothing in the balance with the need to love if she be a good woman, to be loved if she is of coarser fibre.' (p. 28)

Egerton professed to dislike and distrust women, but her main target was the ideal of feminine purity. She admired Strindberg and Nietzsche for their dissection of the "real" woman behind the ideal (p. 19), and her characterization of the female as "the ever-untamed, unchanging, . . . even if repression was altering her subtly"[33] seems to owe a great deal to the revived patriarchal myth of woman as Evil (or, at least, as the

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[32] Keynotes (London: John Lane, 1893). All further references to this work appear in the text.

[33] "A Keynote to Keynotes," quoted by Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 211.

Old Eve). However, her claim to be exploring the literary "terra incognita of [Woman] herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her"[34] is justified to the extent that she always stressed the sexual motivation of her female characters -- and was strongly condemned for her pains by the upholders of traditional morality. Even in her male guise she was considered "unwholesome," "hysterical" and "coarse," by the reader at Macmillan's.[35] Clearly, her work had touched some exposed nerves.

Mannered though they are, Egerton's stories stand the test of time better than those of Mrs W.K. Clifford, who attempted to present daringly rebellious women in a detached, humorous way. In Mere Stories[36] all her women are failed by the sexually timid, socially conservative men in their lives, a situation summed up in the title of one story, "The Woman and the Philistine." Refreshingly, none of the women is punished for her unorthodox sexual behaviour, but the situations Mrs Clifford exploits would have demanded a more serious, and inevitably more heavy-handed treatment in the extended form of the novel. Here she was able to be daring in short bursts, but her characterizations lack the psychological depth attempted by George Egerton and some of the feminist novelists.

Veering between spriteliness and sentimentality in their narrative tone, the female creators of the New Woman display a general unease about their relationship to their heroines, on the one hand, and to their audience, on the other. The desire to protest against the suppression of women, to raise questions about the relations between the sexes, even "to solve one

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[34] Showalter, p. 211.

[35] Kay Daniels, "Rejecting the New Woman," Refractory Girl: A Women's Studies Journal, No. 1 (Summer 1972-73), p. 7.

[36] Mere Stories (London: A. and C. Black, 1896).

of the pressing, complicated problems of our times,"[37] directed them to the form of the polemical problem-novel, or to the short story in dialogue form. The desire to write about their personal experience, to project themselves into their heroines, must also have been strong, but precedents for autobiographical fiction were negligible,[38] and the only woman's book of this kind, African Farm, written in isolation from current ideological debate, had a passionate naiveté and a degree of symbolic indirectness that none of these writers could have imitated.

Clearly, they were in need of new narrative forms, and of new techniques for exploring subjective experience of the kind which Dorothy Richardson, Henry Handel Richardson, and Virginia Woolf were later to develop. Without something like the "stream of consciousness" approach to characterization, it was difficult for the woman writer to portray herself "as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her," to get beyond the ideological stereotypes (as Egerton's example shows). Furthermore, their attempts to overcome feminine reticence in order to tell the truths which Woolf found so hard to tell, "about my own experiences as a body,"[39] resulted in their being categorized as sensational writers in a period of intense "sex-consciousness "(which Woolf referred to as one of the constraints on her own writing).[40] It was this response to her work, perhaps, which made it difficult for Egerton, for one, to "take myself seriously. I was intransigent, a bad seller of myself," she said later.[41] The literary

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[37] Kollantai, p. 53.

[38] The distinctively modern examples of this genre did not appear until after 1900: Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh (1903), Edmund Gosse, Father and Son (1907) and D.H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (1912).

[39] "Professions for Women," Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1966), 11, 287-88.

[40] A Room of One's Own (London: Hogarth, 1929), p. 149.

[41] Quoted by Showalter, p. 215.

experiments of these writers were undeveloped, their careers undistinguished. But it is not unreasonable to suggest that they led the way for such radical portrayals of women and love as are found in Hardy's last novel and Lawrence's early masterpieces.

Olive Schreiner: Art and Ideas

As her characters acquire their symbolic stature, Schreiner's exploration of love takes her far from the topical problems of women's freedom, the oppressiveness of marital and familial relations and the rejection of conventional religion. African Farm incorporates in its hybrid form the problem novel, the novel of ideas, non-naturalistic elements of Gothic and Dickensian intensity, and a psychological interest in dreams, visions and other non-rational modes of perception which lends it at times a strong flavour of modernity. It has been classified as part of the new realism of the late nineteenth century in England by Holbrook Jackson and later critics,[42] and certainly Schreiner's frankness about the force of women's sexual attractions and revulsions, and her detached presentation of the Victorian theme of cruelty to children, make this an appropriate judgement. Yet the novel is unified by a visionary intensity that brings it closer to the world of Hardy's imagination than to the realism of Moore and Gissing. When, in her Preface, Schreiner complains of having to "squeeze the colour from [her] brush, and dip it into the grey pigments around [her]," she seems to be aligning herself with the realist writers; but the definition of her method, "the method of the life we all lead," is certainly reminiscent of Hardy:

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[42] Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen-Nineties (London: Grant Richards, 1913), pp. 271-72; Stone, Novelists in a Changing World, p. 50.

> Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. (pp. 27-8).

The artistic representation of the unpredictable and the unfamiliar in life had, for Schreiner, a social purpose. "Art is the little crack in the iron wall of life which shuts one in awful isolation," she wrote, and through this fissure "the spirit can force itself out and show itself to its own like-minded fellow spirits . . . and say, 'You are not alone.'"[43] One critic, citing this passage as evidence of Schreiner's admiration for Emerson and his conception of the artist as a "liberating god," also points out their common lack of interest in story-telling, and concludes that Schreiner's real interest lay in sociological analysis rather than fiction.[44] But the art of fiction is not confined to story-telling by what Schreiner called in her Preface the "stage method," and _African Farm_ is most certainly a work of the imagination. It is neither a sociological analysis nor a moral treatise, although it has elements of both. Schreiner's desire to share her own experience with "like-minded fellow spirits" makes it something rather different from the nineteenth-century "novels with a purpose" with which it is grouped by Vineta Colby in her study of those women writers who she believes turned to fiction as a socially effective outlet because they were "forbidden the pulpit, the university lecture platform, the seat in parliament."[45]

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[43] _The Letters of Olive Schreiner_, ed. S.C. Cronwright Schreiner (London: Fisher Unwin, 1924), p. 323.

[44] Ursula Laredo, "Olive Schreiner," _Journal of Commonwealth Literature_, No. 8 (December 1969), pp. 117-19.

[45] _The Singular Anomaly_ (London: London University Press, 1970), p. 6.

Elaine Showalter is another critic who places African Farm in the moralist tradition of women's writing, in its late-century feminist phase: "The book is about man's moral redemption in a meaningless universe, through identification with female suffering." She concludes that Waldo as well as Gregory is redeemed by Lyndall's death: he "becomes an intellectual, and finds peace in transcendentalism."[46] Yet this reading ignores the fact of Waldo's own death and misses the prophetic point of his final vision; it fails to give due recognition to the rigorousness of Schreiner's agnosticism and the radical nature of her social analysis; human suffering is not regarded as immutable, but nor does a person like Waldo find peace through becoming "an intellectual." Showalter's critical approach enables her to point out the interesting structural similarity of character-types and events in this novel and The Mill on the Floss, but it leads her to neglect the wide difference between their socio-historical contexts and their authors' political views. Her statement that "in the hands of the feminists the conscientious tradition of Mrs Craik and George Eliot took on a messianic fervour"[47] has only limited application to Schreiner's work, for although she maintained, in accordance with her Emersonian view of the artist's role, that she wrote her second novel, From Man to Man, to give strength to other struggling women, Schreiner is by no means preaching the Victorian ethic of submission. As a political radical and a colonial, she inevitably broke away from the tradition of her predecessors in England, the "feminine novelists" (as Showalter calls them). She faced new intellectual and artistic problems.

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[46]Showalter, pp. 199, 201.

[47]Showalter, p. 183.

Showalter complains that Schreiner's novels are "depressing and claustrophobic," that Lyndall perishes "teaching the lesson" of redemption through suffering, and in From Man to Man, Bertie "meets a fate worse than death" and Rebekah "retreats, daydreams, and desultorily cultivates a fragmented and undisciplined art."[48] But in the fictional context these wholly probable events in their lives gain a significance more complex and interesting than these hackneyed phrases would indicate. The feminist critic looking for positive role models in women's fiction finds no satisfaction in the spectacle of female characters ineffectual and frustrated, dying, or suffering dishonour as patriarchal morality defines it. But, as Virginia Woolf so wisely pointed out in the novel "life conflicts with something that is not life," and while on the one hand we want the hero to live and triumph, on the other "the shape of the book requires" that he die.[49]

The shape of From Man to Man, as promised in Schreiner's summary of this unfinished novel, requires that Rebekah find her lost sister.[50] The "Prelude" announces the theme of twin souls on which African Farm had ended and the sisters, like Lyndall and Waldo, seem almost to be unaware of each other's separate existences: they do notthink of each other when apart, nor do they have much overt communication when together. As women in a patriarchal world, they are alienated from each other, physically and socially; but the shape of the novel insists on their bond, as if one were the mirror image of the other: the wife and the prostitute, both humiliated and defeated in their search for men's love. The double face of womanhood in patriarchal culture, the goodwife and the whore, is the central theme of Schreiner's feminism.

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[48] Showalter, pp. 201, 203.

[49] A Room of One's Own, p. 107.

[50] From Man to Man (London: Fisher Unwin, 1926), pp. 481-83, note by S.C. Cronwright Schreiner. All further references to this work appear in the text.

She gives new depth to the Victorian stereotype of the "fallen woman" by her poetic evocation of Bertie's childhood on the Karroo farm and, through Rebekah's reflections on her sister's child-like naiveté and need of love, she voices a strong criticism of that ideal of feminine innocence which Bertie embodies. Bertie is shown not so much to "fall" from respectability as to be pushed out of respectable society by its inhuman moral code (represented by John Ferdinand) and the vicious female gossips (Veronica and Mrs Drummond) who protect themselves in the name of that code. In the social context thus created, Schreiner's account of Bertie's imprisonment and panic is psychologically acute enough to make her sudden, unexplained flights comprehensible.

It was perhaps fortunate that she could not bring herself to finish the novel with the proposed scenes of Rebekah nursing Bertie on her syphilitic deathbed and renouncing her love for Mr Drummond. The portrayal of Rebekah in the final one-third of the book lacks the vitality Schreiner had previously gained in the delineation of her conflicting loyalties, when confronted with her husband's philandering, to the ideal of marriage as devoted service and to her own sense of honour. As a type of the Wronged Wife treated in other feminist novels, she is pitted against no monster of cruelty (like the husbands in Sarah Grand's novels) nor pillar of convention (like the husband in Mona Caird's _Daughters of Danaus_). Frank is a very ordinary man who cannot understand her ideal of loving companionship and who humiliates her by his public flirtations with other women. Rebekah subjects _herself_ to a great deal of criticism as she tries to explain the loss of his passion and affection, and in these scenes Schreiner reveals a penetrating insight into the female psychology of self-doubt. When the emotional bond of their marriage is finally broken, Rebekah lives mostly apart from Frank, toiling in the vineyard she has bought to support herself. She leaves the retreat of her little room and her "desultory and undisciplined art," to become a worker and dreamer

of the Waldo type. Speculative thought and visions of a future freed from the oppressions of race and religious prejudice occupy her energies but, like Waldo, she never quite becomes an individual presence again.

Rebekah is sustained, as the isolated individualist rebels of African Farm were not, by the belief that the suffering and defeat of her own small life would be redeemed by future developments; but these developments are left undefined in the allegory of imperialism which she devises to show to her children the operations of racism in South Africa. She has them imagine themselves members of a subject race oppressed by invaders claiming superior technology and culture:

> 'Some of us, perhaps not always the bravest or the most beautiful, but the wisest of us, said, "We will not fight their weapons, only to die! Neither will we fade away. This world also is our home. We also are men. We will not die. We will grasp the new life, and live!"
>
> 'And we did not despair; and we did not despise ourselves. We learnt all the terrible white-faced strangers had to teach, and we worked for them. We worked -- and we worked -- and we worked -- and we waited -- and we waited -- and we waited --.'
>
> 'And then, what then?' asked the boys together, seeing she said no more.
>
> She lay quiet for a moment. 'I do not know,' she said. 'The dream ends there.' (p. 423)

This "waiting," the counsel of quietism, implicitly rejects the revolutionary tendency of Schreiner's earlier work. The effort to live out her principles in her personal life had left her exhausted and disillusioned, as the published letters testify, and the gradualist concept of change suggested by Darwinian theories of social evolution obviously had great appeal for her. This analysis of the race problem stops at the point where questions about the alternatives of integration or self-determination demand to be asked. There is no concept of social power operating beyond the rule of force, and so no strategy for the attainment of a non-violent solution to the problem of oppression.

Instead, Schreiner presents an optimistic belief in the power of human creativity to direct social evolution towards freedom and justice. "All life is one," Rebekah tells her children, and human creativity produces truth just as natural creativity produces beauty (p. 433). She and her friend Drummond see art and science as the transforming forces in society. They agree that the apparent mystery of the artist's prophetic power would be explicable if humans understood something of the universal force which is the "moving power" of all forms of life (p. 471). But where Drummond expresses a sanguine trust in the life-force in his own "demon," directing him through life, Rebekah is troubled by the conflicting demands of creativity and duty to others. It is easy enough for him to be wise about the necessity of balance between the two in order to realise "the highest ideal," that of "a lovely life," when he has no-one dependent on him and not even Rebekah makes any demands on him. But, she replies:

> 'There are such absolutely conflicting ideals: the ideal of absolute submission and endurance of wrong towards oneself -- the ideal of noble resistance to all injustice and wrong, even when done to oneself -- the ideal of the absolute devotion to the smaller, always present, call of life -- and the ideal of a devotion to the larger aims sweeping all before it -- all are beautiful. The agony of life is not the choice between good and evil, but between two evils or two goods!' (p. 479)

It is a typically female conflict between private and public ideals, submission and aggression, nurturance and creativity, and there is irony in the fact that it is articulated in the last pages of the book which Schreiner worked on for forty years and could never bring herself to complete. Only when she side-stepped this dilemma, avoiding the fictional creation of individual lives and writing prophetic allegories and essays about the future of sex and race relations, was she able to overcome its paralysing effect on her own productivity.

Woman and Labour, after a long and dangerous travail, had its timely publication in England in 1911 at the height of the Suffragette militancy.[51] However, its fine passages of polemic against the patriarchal ideology that was marshalled as defence against women's emancipation have a strong flavour of the nineties. Those who claimed to fear for the welfare of "the race" are obviously meant to be reassured by the rather mechanical determinism of this much-quoted passage from the Introduction, on the historical emergence of the women's movement:

> . . . /T/he women of no race or class will ever rise in revolt or attempt to bring about a revolutionary readjustment of their relation to their society, however intense their suffering and however clear their perception of it, while the welfare and persistence of their society requires their submission: . . . wherever there is a general attempt on the part of the women of any society to readjust their position in it, a close analysis will always show that the changed or changing conditions of that society have made women's acquiescence no longer necessary or desirable. (p. 14)

This social-evolutionist position implies that the desires and actions of women as a group will always be in harmony with the present needs of their society, not only the needs of the economic system but also the values of political and personal life. It is a drastically over-simplified picture of the position of women in modern capitalist society, a position which is, to use the terminology of Althusser, "over-determined." Yet it was the only major work of feminist theory published during the period which bears comparison with the studies on women and economics by the American, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and so its theoretical and political implications might reasonably be expected to have had a significant effect on the women's movement in Britain. Militant in its protest against the suppression

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[51] Woman and Labour (London: Fisher Unwin, 1911). All further references to this work appear in the text.

of women, it advocates no strategy of political action. The book's slogan is "We claim, today, all labour for our province!" but Schreiner's arguments in support of this slogan imply that until women were allowed into the public workforce in large numbers, little could be done "today." It was a message of hope which at the same time counselled quietism -- ironically, the Suffragettes in Holloway Prison read her allegories to one another,[52] though she strongly disapproved of their violent tactics and had little faith in the strategy of "votes first." She seems to regard herself and other pioneer feminists as willing victims to the slow wheel of progress, sacrificing their personal fulfilment in "poverty, toil and sexual isolation . . . and the renunciation of motherhood" (p. 127). It is a view reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's advocating that women work patiently "in poverty and obscurity" for a future which would allow female creativity of the highest order.[53] Both writers, suppressing their own anger and fearful of aggressive political action by women, are at the same time staking a claim on the public, hitherto "male," world of labour and culture.

Some fifty years earlier George Eliot and Beatrice Webb, both brilliant and hard-working intellectuals, had joined with other eminent Victorian women to state publicly their fear that the emancipation of their sex into public life would weaken their purifying moral influence on society as a whole.[54] As Elaine Showalter has pointed out, the pre-Suffragette feminists took this theory of Influence as their creed and

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[52] Showalter, p. 198.

[53] _A Room of One's Own_, p. 172.

[54] Walter Houghton, _The Victorian Frame of Mind_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 352.

"transposed it into an activist key, making the ideal of true womanhood the basis of their politics of the female sub-culture". They saw their mission as the moral regeneration of the whole society, since they were "in the spiritual avant-garde," according to the evolutionary theory of female altruism.[55] But the transposition was not quite so straightforward, and nor does Olive Schreiner belong, as she implies, in the mainstream which elevated traditional feminine qualities and functions. The transposition changed the ideal, in that women were no longer satisfied with confinement to the realm of family life and whatever they were doing in the way of moral regeneration, it was no longer privatized.

If we take George Eliot's as the most intelligent and large-minded version of this theory of feminine influence and compare it with the ideology of Woman implicit in Schreiner's later work, it becomes evident that the theory of social evolution was not simply made to validate and activate the old ideal. Self-sacrifice and duty were no longer moral imperatives for the individual: in From Man to Man Schreiner emphasizes the circumstances which made it impossible for Rebekah and Bertie to have acted differently, and Women and Labour calls for material changes in the organization of social labour before changes of attitude on the individual level. For her, the suffering of the individual woman cannot be redeemed by her own actions, only by future events, and so the altruistically loving relationships between women and men envisaged by Eliot as a "mutual subjection of soul"[56] are impossible. Such a relationship is an ideal to be realized in the future, not to be vainly struggled for in daily life.

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[55] Showalter, pp. 184, 186.

[56] Letter to Emily Davies, quoted by Eileen Haley, "'Mutual Subjection of Soul': A Reading of the Novels of George Eliot," M.A. thesis Australian National University 1972, pp. 17-18.

Not the exemplary moral life of the individual man or woman but the explorations of artists and scientists would determine the quality of social life in the future. Schreiner's emphasis on the public and collective nature of knowledge, which alone was the means to human liberation, bridged the Victorian chasm between private morality and public necessity, or progress. This gave to her concept of individual self-development both a social cause and a social effect. She argued that women's entry into individuality in the public world would have beneficial effects not because women were inherently morally superior to men but because their "parasitic" confinement to the private sphere was harmful to them and to "the race." To those women quoted by Showalter who were affirming the value of traditional feminine qualities in a newly militant way, other feminists of the nineties like Schreiner and Mona Caird replied by pointing to the painful evidence of the crippling effects of women's oppression in the traditional roles and by stressing the urgent need for their self-development as individuals. Schreiner wrote in a letter to a woman friend in 1889:

> Our first duty is to develop ourselves. Then you are ready for any kind of work that comes. The woman who does this is doing more to do away with prostitution and the inequalities between man and woman, and to make possible a nobler race of human beings, than by all the talking and vituperation possible. It is not against man we have to fight but against _ourselves_ within ourselves. We have to rise. . . .[57]

If these feminists stressed the conditioned weaknesses of women and tended towards the melodramatic in their images of women's suffering, it was no doubt as a counter-balance to messianic claims for feminine moral superiority and ethical strenuousness. Mona Caird, the author of numerous

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[57] _Letters_, p. 151.

lucid and reasonable journal articles on the historical development of relations between the sexes (The Morality of Marriage, 1897), ended her novel, The Daughters of Danaus, with a particularly gruesome expression of despair at the slow progress of women's salvation, a vision of a "vast abyss" piled high with the bodies of women who have died "in order that the survivors might, at last, walk over in safety" (p. 451). The sombre tones of From Man to Man derive from Schreiner's intense identification with the defeated sisters, whom she loved, she said, as if they were actual women.[58] But in the polemics of Woman and Labour there is less emphasis on emotional suffering, for questions of sexual morality and personal relations take second place to her concern with women's economic and moral independence to be gained through their labour in the public workforce. She argues that historical changes have robbed women of their traditional domestic labour and relegated the majority to the status of "parasites" on social wealth. Lacking both social function and individual fulfilment, then, middle-class women degenerate and threaten the future development of the race.

Schreiner's notion of parasitism has affinities with Thorstein Veblen's (Theory of the Leisure Class, 1899), and she draws on anthropological and historical evidence of women's position in the past in the manner of Engels (The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, 1884) and Bebel (Woman Under Socialism, 1885). Her book is part of an historically significant line of opposition to crude social Darwinism. Furthermore, where her analysis of the present situation extends into predictions for the future, she aligns herself with the New Moralists.[59]

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[58] Letters, p. 157.

[59] The "sex romantics," as they are dubbed by Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 224.

Following Edward Carpenter, she anticipates the evolution of sexual love into aesthetic and spiritual functions "apart entirely from physical reproduction," arguing

> That noble as is the function of the physical reproduction of humanity by the union of man and woman, rightly viewed, that union has in it latent, other, and even higher forms, of creative energy and life-dispensing power, and that its history on earth has only begun. (p. 27)

Having taken the radical step of conceptualizing human sexuality as a phenomenon modified by historical change and potentially creative as well as procreative, Schreiner was not likely to join wholeheartedly in the sentimental-feminist chorus extolling motherhood as the function which "proved" female superiority. On this issue she stands apart (as, indeed, do the other feminist novelists) from the mainstream of feminist opinion, "the veneration of motherhood and maternal love, combined with repugnance for the actual processes of intercourse and childbirth."[60] Deeply impressed by the biological continuity between animal and human life, she sometimes wrote of sexual attraction as a trap enticing women into the slavery of marriage and the suffering of maternity;[61] but on the other hand she doubted the value of celibacy, stressed the need, especially for women, for sexual communication,[62] and was fascinated by her friend, Havelock Ellis's, studies in sex psychology, writing to him freely about her observations of her own menstrual and emotional cycles.[63] Her attitude towards sex, lyrical though its expression might often have been, was certainly not "Victorian."

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[60] Showalter, p. 191.

[61] _From Man to Man_, p. 86.

[62] _Woman and Labour_, p. 127.

[63] _Letters_, pp. 31-2.

The writings of the New Moralists show evidence of conflicts between the scientific and the mystical view of sexuality, and between attraction to the potential for sensual and emotional communication in sexual activity and revulsion against the sordid social realities of the double standard. These conflicts are resolved - or, rather, collapsed - in the Carpenterian notion of love's coming-of-age in a new dispensation of perfect mental and spiritual mutuality between men and women. Carpenter supports this post-Victorian ideal of sense- and soul-union with quotations from Edith Ellis (Lees) and Meredith:

> 'The Saviours of this, as of every corrupt and stupid generation, must feel the pulse of the adulterer as well as that of his victim, and stand clear-eyed and honest as pioneers of the new sexual renaissance, which will probably combine a healthy temperate animalism with Browning's vision of that rare mating when soul lies by soul.' -- Edith M. Ellis, 'A Noviciate for Marriage,' p. 4.
>
> 'She gave him comprehension of the meaning of love. . . . With her, wound in his idea of her, he perceived it to signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree stoutly planted in good gross earth; the senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned, and the spirits made one by the whole-natured conjunction. . . . [T]he speeding of us, compact of what we are, between the ascetic rocks and the sensual whirlpools, to the creation of certain nobler races, now very dimly imagined.' -- George Meredith's 'Diana of the Crossways,' ch. 37.[64]

Schreiner, writing in 1911, is rather more explicit about sex, and her distinctly modern understanding of sexuality is indicated in the following passage from Woman and Labour:

> Thus, social disco-ordination, and subjective conflict and suffering, pervade the life of our age, making themselves felt in every division of human life, religious, political, and domestic; and, if they are more noticeable, and make themselves more keenly felt in the region of sex than in any other, even the

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[64]Edward Carpenter, Love's Coming-of-Age (London: Allen and Unwin, 1923), pp. 220-21.

> religious, it is because when we enter the region of sex we touch, as it were, the spinal cord of human existence, its great nerve centre, where sensation is most acute, and pain and pleasure most keenly felt. It is not sex disco-ordination that is at the root of our social unrest; it is the universal disco-ordination which affects even the world of sex phenomena. (p. 271)

The conflicts attendant on these social, political and religious changes are most acutely registered, then, in sex, in the sensibilities of "advanced" individuals, and in the art portraying "that which lies at the core" of life in the present time:

> /T/he man or woman who attempts to adapt their life to the new material conditions and to harmony with the new knowledge, is almost bound at some time to rupture the continuity of their own psychological existence.
>
> It is these conditions which give rise to the fact so often noticed, that the art of our age tends persistently to deal with subtle social problems, religious, political, and sexual, to which the art of the past holds no parallel; and it is so inevitably, because the artist who would obey the artistic instinct to portray faithfully the world about him, must portray that which lies at the core of its life. (p. 270)

The "problem" novel, she concludes, is inevitable in this age, implying that it will of necessity present the subjective experience of those ruptures in the psychological continuity of individuals under the pressures of sexual and religious emancipation. Among the problem novels of the period which deal with the emancipation of women and the revolution in personal relations between the sexes, however, there are few writers who succeed in penetrating below the level of ideological debate on these issues. Schreiner's flawed but powerful achievement in African Farm is approached by few other works, and surpassed only by Hardy's Jude the Obscure, as an example of the literary transformation of woman "from an object of tragedy of the male soul into the subject of an independent tragedy."[65]

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[65] Kollantai, "The New Woman," p. 103.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FREEDOM AND LOVE IN JUDE THE OBSCURE AND SONS AND LOVERS.

"Jude the Obscene," the title of the *Pall Mall Gazette*'s review of Hardy's novel,[1] gives a succinct indication of the response it met when it was published in book form in 1896. In *Blackwood*'s Mrs Oliphant concluded her attack with the Swiftean accusation that the "assault against the stronghold of marriage" made in *Jude the Obscure* implied, as well as sexual irresponsibility, infanticide and cannibalism as solutions to the world's problems. Her most heartfelt protest, however, was against Hardy's having brought to the foreground

> one small . . . fact of life, which natural instinct has agreed, even among savages, to keep in the background, and which, among all peoples who have ceased to be savage, is veiled over by instinctive reticences and modesties of convention as well as by the everlasting truth of Love.[2]

A more sophisticated attack from R.Y. Tyrrell took issue not with the presence of sex in the novel but with its presentation. He expressed regret that an "odour of Zola" robbed the scene of Sue's undressing in Jude's room of the "allure" with which Hardy had invested a similar incident in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Tyrrell saw the novel as "an elaborate indictment of marriage as being necessarily the death of pure passion and even of healthy sexual desire," and accused Hardy of failing to deal "sincerely" with free love as a "practical institution." The only alternative to marriage in patriarchal society is the "theory of communism in women" but this alternative had been considered and rejected by the ancient Greeks, according to Tyrrell, because "such a revolution would undermine two of the most potent forces of civilization, the sense of

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1. *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R.G. Cox (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. xxiii.

2. "The Anti-Marriage League," *Blackwood's Magazine*, January 1896, p. 144.

proprietorship and the feeling of natural affection." In the same breath he referred, quite without embarrassment, to the "dignity of womanhood and motherhood" as the essential qualities lacking in Sue Bridehead. And while Sue was seen as "warped and neurotic," Jude was simply absurd: "the complete abolition of the marriage rite and the general diffusion of Oxford degrees of D.D. among the ignorant and dissolute proletariat would have left him still dissatisfied."[3]

Tyrrell was the first of a long line of literary diagnosticians to pass the verdict of "neurotic" on Sue Bridehead. He was answered at the time by Havelock Ellis, who argued that Jude and Sue showed a new "refinement of sexual sensibility" and defended the novel as a subtle study of the reality of marriage at a time when sexual relationships had become more complex than those of "the barnyard." Widow Edlin was right, he said, to fear matrimony's "seriousness," and the book would be a warning rather than an incitement to the Young Person (unquestionably female) whose moral sense was so zealously guarded by contemporary advocates of censorship.[4]

Against both these camps, the Saturday Review critic maintained that the sexual theme was secondary to that of a working man's desire for education: "only as a modifying cause does the man's sexuality come in, just as much as, and no more than, it comes into the life of any serious but healthy man." In this reading of the novel Sue is seen as "the feminine counterpart of Jude's intellectual side, clearer minded, unimpassioned, an exceptional but possible woman." But, this critic noted, "her cold-bloodedness seems . . . to have aroused the common reviewer to a pitch of malignant hatred."[5]

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[3] Fortnightly Review, NS 59 (1896), 857-64; rpt. in Cox, pp. 291-99.

[4] "Concerning Jude the Obscure," Savoy, October 1896, pp. 35-49; rpt. in Cox, pp. 300-15.

[5] Unsigned review, 8 February 1896, pp. 153-54; rpt. in Cox, pp. 279-83.

This response to Sue Bridehead has been a constant feature of Hardy criticism in succeeding decades, despite the fading of moral outrage against his criticisms of marriage and increased sympathy for the "shattered ideals of the two chief characters" which had been the aspect of greatest interest to Hardy himself.[6] If one analyzes the reasons for this negative response among critics of the eighteen-nineties one can see more clearly the reasons for its continuance into the twentieth century. An account of Sue Bridehead and the critics not only yields a sketch of changes in sexist ideology but also underlines the enigmatic power of Hardy's creation. My contention is that Sue Bridehead is the vital element in this novel's tragedy of failed love, a tragedy which could only have been projected through a complex and powerfully realized female figure such as this.

## Sue Bridehead and the Critics

Holbrook Jackson, in his book The Eighteen-Nineties, recalls that Jude the Obscure, The Woman Who Did and George Moore's Esther Waters were the most sensational novels of the period of the new realism, all of them concerning the Woman Question and therefore bound to be judged "immoral" if they were frank.[7] In addition to contentious subject-matter, Jude presented the challenge of Sue Bridehead's character: a radical but not a womanly woman like Herminia, an "advanced" woman who could not be regarded in any simple way as a passive victim, like the illiterate, salt-of-the-earth Esther Waters. As a type, of course, she did have some precedents among the heroines of the women writers of the period, and Hardy had no doubt learned from some of these about the

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[6] Thomas Hardy, Postscript to Jude the Obscure (1896; rpt. London: Macmillan-New Wessex, 1974), p. 24. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[7] The Eighteen-Nineties (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 262.

complexities of female psychology and sexuality.[8] She was not, as a German reviewer had suggested to Hardy (Postscript to Jude, p. 26), "the first delineation in fiction of . . . the woman of the feminist movement - the slight, pale 'bachelor' girl - the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing." But three things, taken together, distinguish her from her predecessors (and from most other female characters created by male novelists): she is a tragic heroine in her own right, no victim of other persons but a failure by her own standards; she is the first New Woman in fiction to be given an appropriate counterpart and lover, with the failure of their love ideal bringing about a double tragedy; and Hardy portrays her in such a way that she is as opaque to the reader as to Jude, and therefore infinitely fascinating and infuriating.

While George Egerton recognized in Sue "a marvellously true psychological study of a temperament less rare than the ordinary male supposes,"[9] Mrs. Oliphant questioned its realism. She insisted that Hardy's women be seen as his own inventions: since he had falsely glorified woman in the portrait of Tess, he was now trying to denigrate her in the characters of Sue and Arabella. "Sue is the woman we are required to accept as the type of high-toned purity," but her treatment of Jude, holding him "on the tiptoe of expectation with a pretended reserve . . . is almost more indecent" than Arabella's materialistic exploitation of him. Regarding Jude as the helpless victim of these two "remorseless ministers of destiny," Mrs. Oliphant deplores the revival in recent fiction of the traditional images of woman as the Temptress and the Seductress.[10] Obviously

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[8] He confessed in a letter that "Sue is a type of woman which has always had an attraction for me but the difficulty of drawing the type has always kept me from attempting it till now." See The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, ed. Florence Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 272.

[9] Letter to Hardy, 22 November 1895, quoted in Kay Daniels, "Rejecting the New Woman," Refractory Girl: A Women's Studies Journal, No. 1 (Summer 1972-73), p. 6.

[10] "The Anti-Marriage League," pp. 139-41.

her standard of comparison is the Ruskinian notion of woman, the maternal, asexual ideal. Nevertheless her criticism may be seen as a response to the emerging ideology of woman as a symbol of amoral Nature, whose ability to love is "independent of social regulation," as Havelock Ellis put it in his review of Jude. Whether woman is defined in patriarchal culture as moral but asexual, or sexual but amoral, she is still being conceptualized as less than fully human. The heroine of George Egerton's story, "A Cross Line," admires Strindberg and Nietzsche for realistically "dissecting" female nature instead of idealizing the model woman, but she has a fantasy of herself in a sensual dance where she "gives to the soul of each man what he craves, be it good or evil," knowing that this "untameable," "primitive" quality is "the keynote of woman's witchcraft and woman's strength."[11]

Lawrence certainly saw Sue Bridehead as a witch-figure, a Cassandra, a frightening "product of our civilization" destroyed by the conflict between her "atrophied" femaleness and the "male spirit" that she tried to embrace as her own. Interpreting Jude as the tragedy of the over-development of consciousness, the Male Mind, Lawrence found in the novel the elements of his own myth of the failed relations between men and women. He is nevertheless profoundly true to the text's emphasis on the mutual need and betrayal experienced by Jude and Sue, and to the powerful presence of Arabella standing against everything they aspire to. He argues that Sue is hardly a woman at all but a special kind of being for whom physical motherhood and sex were a violation and who betrayed herself when she finally submitted to physical marriage with Jude.[12] This judgement of Sue, though clearly sexist in its location of her "problem"

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[11] Keynotes (London: John Lane, 1895), p. 19.

[12] "A Study of Thomas Hardy" in Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), pp. 494-509.

in her "atrophied" femaleness, her denial of the physical being that ought to have dominated her character as a woman, is nevertheless more sympathetic than those of most later critics.

Lawrence had analysed the tragic dilemma of Sue and Jude as an historical phenomenon (in terms of his own meta-history of the human spirit), but recent critics following him have been inclined to regard it *sub specie aeternitatis*. Albert Guérard, for instance, finds that Hardy's novel illustrates the universal fact that marriages are wrecked not by convention or ambition but

> by sheer human perversity, stubborn and incalculable - by woman's failure to persist in any course she has chosen and by her systematic preference of the most unworthy candidate, by man's obstinate allegiance to his dream of feminine perfection. Man projects his ego into space, that is, into timeless ideal illusion; woman maintains her ego in society and time. Each alike refuses to acknowledge that love has a sexual origin.[13]

Although Guérard is adamant that Hardy's theorizing should not be taken seriously as commentary on his fictional world, he finds that Hardy's view of "woman's incorrigible nature" is an exception: "this once at least he was not crippled by his preconceptions." His women are characterized, with objective accuracy according to the critic, as vain, fickle, indifferent to injustice, unable to make an "unsexed judgement" and subject to "curious masochistic impulses" (pp. 129-30). Recognizable as a popularized version of Freud's theory of the effects of Oedipus Complex resolution in women, this view is preferred, without explanation, to what Guérard calls the "academic" view of Hardy's heroines as "victims of 'psychic unemployment,' or even as examples of 'conspicuous waste'" (p. 135). To take such a view would involve a recognition of the crippling restrictions placed on women in Victorian society; but Guérard

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[13] *Thomas Hardy* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 28. Further references to this work appear in the text of the following paragraph.

again forgets his own critical principles when he accounts for Jude's "sexlessness or unaggressiveness" (a revealing conjunction of terms) as typically Victorian (p. 114). The sexual double standard employed by this critic is nowhere plainer than in his statement of the issues raised in the novel, including "the psychological problems of Jude's sexuality and his urge to self-destruction, and Sue's epicene temperament and her moral masochism" (p. 32). "Self-destruction" in the male of the species becomes "masochism" in the female, a neurosis with its origins "somewhere in her childhood" (p. 112), that is, lying entirely within her personal history (which Hardy has inconveniently left out of the novel), not in the social conditions of her life as a woman.

Irving Howe, following Guérard's neo-Freudian approach to Hardy's characters, does recognize in Sue a product of female emancipation, a "bewildered" and terrifyingly "interesting" modern girl:

> She is promethean in mind but masochist in character. . . . She is all intellectual seriousness, but without the security of will which enables one to live out the consequences of an idea to their limit. She is all feminine charm, but without body, without flesh or smell, without femaleness. Lacking focussed sexuality, she casts a vaguely sexual aura over everything she touches. . . . Sue cannot leave anything alone, neither her men nor herself: she needs always to be tampering and testing, communicating and quivering.[14]

The Lawrentian-toned hostility that emerges in the final sentence of this passage is a bald example of what one can only call the sexual response evoked in readers by the character: "We grasp directly why . . . Jude finds himself unable to resist Sue," Howe continues. This strange phenomenon is the direct result of Hardy's method of presenting Sue, for the greater part of the novel, through *Jude's* consciousness. She is the object on which he projects the desires and fears arising from his venture

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[14] *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 142-43.

into consciousness, and this includes his own confusion about the relationship of sexuality and affection or, to use Hardy's terms, the flesh and the spirit. The neo-Freudian critics attempt to analyze the psychological problems of the characters without recognizing the subtle psychology of Hardy's method of characterization, or its thematic point.

In criticism that does recognize the historical context of ideas in Jude the Obscure misogyny is accompanied by a conservative social ideology. Robert Heilman's meticulously documented account of the contradictions embodied in the portrait of Sue concludes with the contention that her "deficiency in sex . . . is a logical correlative of her enthroning of critical intellect," which creates the modern problem of alienation from "the nonrational foundations of life and security," (that is, "the community as it is expressed in traditional beliefs") and from "the physical reality of sex."[15] The moral is clear: radical ideas about human liberation ("arid rationality") are dangerous because they cause their proponents to suffer and to impose suffering on others - they destroy "human well-being." Historical perspective is supplied in this kind of criticism in the ideological form of a history of ideas divorced from their social context. It is certainly a more accurate reading of the novel to see Sue as a representation of the "critical intellect" than to regard her as representative Woman, irrational and unregenerate, as Guérard does; but the argument that rationalism causes sexual alienation cannot be defended on historical grounds, for it demands a theory of individual psychic development. Psychoanalytic theory, however, with its emphasis on the primacy of sexuality and the acquisition of culturally-defined sexual norms and taboos in the unconscious would make nonsense of Heilman's claim that it is the critical intellect which causes sexual and emotional alienation.

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[15] "Hardy's Sue Bridehead," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 20 (1966), 319.

Heilman's theory is applied in a more specific way to the novel in Lloyd Fernando's essay, "The Radical Ideology of the 'New Woman'." He concludes that

> the key to understanding both [Sue's] neurosis and sexual maladjustment lies in her radical emancipationist idealism. . . . Women's demands for independence ultimately involved a major revision of the concept of family, a process which would inevitably impose the maximum emotional and psychological strain upon both men and women. Eventually, women would exert a sexual tyranny equally detrimental to themselves and to men.[16]

The "sexual tyranny of women" is an old chestnut, but here the critic echoes its twentieth-century version, the theory propounded in Philip Wylie's opus of 1942, <u>A Generation of Vipers</u>, that the "moms" of America had taken over the country, spiritually castrating their menfolk, domesticating their ambitions, exploiting man's "dream of feminine perfection." The inventor of "momism" winds up with a tirade:

> I give you the harpies, the witches and the fates. I give you the woman in pants, and the new religion; she popery. I give you Pandora. I give you Proserpine, the queen of Hell. The five- and ten-cent store Lilith, the mother of Cain, the black widow who is poisonous and eats her man. . . .

H.R. Hays, quoting this list of stereotypes of feminine evil, comments that it is "testimony to the strength of the misogynist tradition."[17] One might make the same point about the appearance of such stereotypes in the critical literature on <u>Jude the Obscure</u>.

The novel itself encourages application of the double image of woman as angel and devil by its consistent use of epithets like "coarse" and "fleshly" for Arabella, "sensitive" and "ethereal" for Sue. It is of course Jude himself who sees them in this way, and on the symbolic

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[16] <u>Southern Review</u>, 2 (1967), 219.

[17] <u>The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil</u> (New York: Pocket Books, 1966), p. 258.

level they do come to represent different sides of his nature, which Hardy conceived of as the battleground of "a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit" (Preface to the first edition). But the novel achieves a transcendence of this allegorical patterning because both the female characters are so fully realized in the narrative. Sue and Arabella, both strong, aggressive women, exist as autonomous figures in the novel as well as projections of Jude's split nature. In her feminist account of the novel, Elizabeth Hardwick argues that although Arabella represents "the classical entrapment by sex" it is clear that "her compulsions arise from the survival struggle and not from obsessional passion"; she can be seen to have been brutalized as much by circumstances as by some innate quality of coarseness. Sue, she argues, must be seen as an original in the history of the novel: driven by her "passion for authenticity" beyond all duties and submissions, she is almost "a new kind of human being, struggling to take form in history."[18]

It is almost impossible, however, to maintain such a long perspective on the characters while actually reading the novel. Jude's consciousness dominates the narrative, and the degree of dramatic participation thus required of the reader ensures that we also share to some extent his experience of being in love with Sue, an experience far more involving than that of merely understanding her as an historical or even as a symbolic figure. Except for the brief period of their union (brief, that is, in the narrative time-scheme), the unattainable Sue appears to Jude, and to the reader, to be baffling and enigmatic - infinitely desirable in her strength, and later unbearably alienated in her tragic demise into madness. Hardy's creation of Sue Bridehead is the cornerstone of the novel's dramatic and conceptual structure: she is the expression of the Romantic spirit of rebellion, the object of fascination and desire - and finally the immediate object of tragic pity and terror.

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18 "Sue and Arabella," New York Review of Books, 14 November 1974, p. 24.

## The Failure of Love

That the fascination of falling in love is the dominant theme of Hardy's fiction is the argument of J. Hillis Miller's important study, Distance and Desire. He points out that Hardy's heroes, like those of so many other nineteenth-century novels, acutely conscious of their separation from the lives of others, experience religious desires for union and harmony in a world which offers no satisfaction for such desires:

> This search must take place within the given human world as Hardy sees it, but it is a search which reaches beyond what is given toward something more, toward some limitless joy. In a world without deity they turn toward the only thing which seems a possible substitute for it, someone who exists within the everyday social world, but who radiates a seemingly divine light upon it.[19]

Hardy's particular stance in this now-familiar position is expressed in the view that "Love lives on propinquity, but dies of contact."[20] As for his lovers, "the more they are thwarted from consummating their love, the more violent their desire."[21] In Jude the Obscure this psychological compulsion to stay apart is vital to the relation between the two lovers, and this relation is the central focus of the novel. Hardy's "tragedy of unfulfilled aims" involves, beyond Jude's frustrated desire for learning, the defeat of his and Sue's mutual passion, a defeat which entails a profound criticism of the Romantic ideal of love as total union.

To propose that the love relationship is central to this novel is not to deny its other levels of structure and meaning. The story of Jude's frustrated attempts to acquire education and a place in the citadel of culture, Christminster, is an historically significant fable

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[19] Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 114.

[20] Hardy, Life, p. 220.

[21] Miller, p. 146.

of the alienated individual in a class society, with mythic overtones of the son's search for the lost father-authority figure. Also the classic triangle in which Jude is defined by his successive relations with Arabella and Sue emerges clearly as a pattern of the "war waged between flesh and spirit." Again, this triangular relationship is part of a larger pattern, the quadrille of marriages forming, breaking up and re-forming, which expresses both the actual power of social convention and the hold that it has on the mind, in the form of internalized coercion. The plot is indeed "geometrically constructed," as Hardy claimed.[22] Around the line of connexion between Jude and Sue is described the momentarily perfect circle of their consummated love. This connexion becomes the central line of the novel as his relation with Sue overshadows Jude's earlier ambitions and becomes the major "educative" experience of his life.[22a]

"Education" is an inadequate description of what they both want. In terms of the given human world their aspirations are for learning and, through that, for some participation in the wider life beyond rural Wessex. Like their parents before them, they demand that personal relationships be "vitty" (p. 301), be freely chosen in accordance with their own sense of what is fitting. On both counts they are forced to be social rebels, but they are rebels of the most vulnerable kind, naively unaware of the power inherent in the given class system and conventional sexual morality. Both are poor and solitary, and their aspirations for something better are equally idealistic, both in the sense that they are impractical and in the sense that they refer to some absolute state of harmonious perfection. For Jude, this is expressed in Christminster, the city of light, whose bells call to him as a boy, "We are happy here"

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[22] Hardy, Life, p. 271.

[22a] See Patricia Ingham, "The Evolution of Jude the Obscure," Review of English Studies, NS 27 (1976), 169.

(p. 43). For Sue, the plaster statuettes of Venus and Apollo appear to stand for that spirit of "Greek joyousness" that she feels is expressed in their consummated love (p. 316). There is indeed an "extraordinary affinity" between them, as Sue's husband, Phillotson, recognizes (p. 252).

Jude's youthful attempt at self-education is implicitly a rebellion against his class position, as his aunt and other villagers are quick to warn him. It constitutes a refusal to let "the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him," in the words of John Stuart Mill which Sue quotes to Phillotson when she demands her freedom of him (p. 244). She has made the same refusal but, being a woman, she is doubly disadvantaged and has early been forced to make her rebellion conscious and explicit. As she tells Jude, her affair with the young undergraduate has made her a social outcast, rejected by her father and family. When they first meet, Jude is still timidly hoping to make himself worthy of acceptance by the Christminster elect, but Sue has been through that particular fantasy already. It is ironically appropriate that she has been obliged to get her "education" through the patronage of a man, who not surprisingly wanted to become her sexual patron as well - there would have been no place for a young woman in the halls of Christminster, no matter what her origins. Sue and Jude have in common what he calls the "modern spirit of restlessness" that moves the rhythm of this whole tale, in which people wander to and fro from town to town without roots in any community. But Sue's restlessness is more urgent than Jude's, and she is clearer about what she rejects in conventional society and its ideas. On the conscious level, at least, she is the complete iconoclast, mocking the church fathers both ancient and modern, worshipping at the altar of Apollo and Venus, Voltaire and Mill, Shelley and Swinburne. She is the Romantic spirit whose critical mind pulls down the cumbersome structure of Jude's traditional beliefs at the same time as her peculiar attractiveness fills his emotional life.

Hardy foretells the whole story of their relationship when he shows how Jude, after only the most superficial contact with his cousin at Christminster, is forced to admit that she feels nothing special towards him and simultaneously realizes that the university has no place for him either. Sue's influence, even at this unconscious level, is revealed as the catalyst of Jude's growing awareness of the real nature of the social world. Hardy indicates, without explicit narrative comment, that Jude is gradually forced to leave off his wishful thinking about Sue and to recognize her separateness. At first he wants her to love him and, as she does not, her behaviour appears to him to be "inconsistent," "tantalizing," even "perverse;" but after her marriage to Phillotson, when she is finally unattainable, she becomes in his imagination "ethereal," "uncarnate," his "disinterested comrade." Although the reader only sees Sue through Jude's confused perception, her words and actions subtly reveal her growing awareness of her own need of him, so that one grasps the irony beneath the apparent callousness of her making Jude go through the wedding rehearsal with her. Only he can properly "give her away" to Phillotson, for in some essential way she "belongs" to him: they have only each other in the world.

The scene in the schoolroom at Shaston, when Sue plays for Jude the hymn that has been obsessing him as a symbol of the spiritual harmony his life so desperately lacks, marks the transition in their relationship from the precarious affinity of two social rebels to the potential harmony of twin souls - the musical symbol is appropriately Platonic. But, true to Hardy's mode of psychological realism, their moment of complete reciprocity comes and goes. The dialogue reveals how, in Lawrence's famous metaphor, the sympathy between them flows and recoils:

> She played on, and suddenly turned round; and by an unpremeditated instinct each clasped the other's hand again.
> She uttered a forced little laugh as she relinquished his quickly. 'How funny!' she said. 'I wonder what we both did that for?'
> 'I suppose because we are both alike, as I said before.'
> 'Not in our thoughts! Perhaps a little in our feelings.'
> 'And they rule thoughts. . . . Isn't it enough to make one blaspheme that the composer of that hymn is one of the most commonplace men I ever met!'
> 'What - you know him?'
> 'I went to see him.'
> 'O you goose - to do just what I should have done! Why did you?'
> 'Because we are not alike,' he said drily. (p. 223)

In the scene at the Great Wessex Agricultural Show the completeness of their union is briefly celebrated. Hardy again draws attention to its Platonic nature when describing them together: "That complete and mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost the two parts of a single whole" (p. 311). But even here as we watch them, through Arabella's envious eyes, wandering blissfully together oblivious of the whole world and admiring, along with the roses, their own perfection, their "return to Greek joyousness," Sue recognizes that there is "one immediate shadow, however - only one." This is Little Father Time, Jude's child, who cannot help reminding them of the transience of earthly beauty. "I should like the flowers very much," he pipes up, "if I didn't keep on thinking they'd all be withered in a few days" (p. 316).

Hardy's intrusion is predictably heavy-handed there - perfection is not congenial to his imagination. The great strength of the novel is in his treatment of conflict, of the crossed wires and out-of-tune vibrations of the psyche. The power of Jude's and Sue's love can be indicated only by the degree of suffering they go through in establishing it and then losing it; their marriage of true minds is only a momentary triumph in the novel's time-scheme. Separated from each other after the catastrophe of the children's death they are only incomplete halves of the Platonic whole, and their individual destruction is inevitable.

Each of them breaks down alone, and with terrible appropriateness - "reaction" in Sue and "recklessness and ruin" in Jude, as he sees it (p. 420). But what Jude cannot see is the iron logic of Sue's self-punishment: she is as baffling to him now as she was when they first met. Blinded by his sense of loss, he sees her breakdown as a betrayal of their love and their ideal of truth: "bitter affliction came to us . . . and she veered round to darkness. Strange difference of sex, that time and circumstance, which enlarge the views of most men, narrow the views of women almost invariably" (p. 419). But Hardy's portrayal of her madness is wonderfully sensitive. The forms that her self-hatred takes show the repressed returning with a vengeance, the return of repressed social prescriptions that have been internalized but consciously denied, especially the taboos against female sexual expression and self-assertion. She castigates herself for transgressing the moral law of the sanctity of marriage, she accuses herself of spiritual pride and sensual self-gratification. In returning to submit herself totally to Phillotson she becomes a grotesque caricature of the true womanliness prescribed by patriarchal convention.

While Sue's self-destruction is consciously chosen, Jude appears to have become Arabella's victim again - an unconscious choice, like all the other choices by which he has guided the direction of his own destiny. His initial attraction to Sue may be seen as an unconscious recognition of what he needed, a strong critical intelligence to give form and direction to his developing consciousness. In Sue's case, however, recognition of her need for Jude had to be a conscious one. She had to decide to love him: "It did just <u>occur</u> to me to regard you [as a lover], but I hadn't begun to," she tells him after her flight from the teacher training college to the sanctuary of his room (p. 178). In the break-down of their relationship it is again Sue's action which is decisive when she turns against their ideal of free love, but it is again Jude

who initiates the process. His decision to return to Christminster revives a need outside their relationship, his intellectual ambition to become a great teacher. This suggests an implicit denial of the self-sufficiency of their love. Sue, in her madness, only forces the undermining of their fragile ideal to its inevitable end.

The Significance of the Tragedy

The Romantic ideal of love as the union of free souls falls victim not just to social laws but to "nature's law" as well. The catastrophe that separates the lovers, Father Time's hanging of himself and Sue's two children, crudely makes the point that her fertility is a manifestation of Nature's law asserting itself in contradiction to her desire for freedom and control over her own destiny. "Why do people have children if they make so much trouble?" the dreadful little gnome enquires. "Because it is the law of nature," Sue answers, to which he responds: "I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly" (p. 353). Father Time's espousal of infanticide in both theory and practice as the answer to this law of nature is horrifying enough to send tougher natures than Sue's scurrying back to submission. But it is significant that he is attributed with the "new spirit": "the doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us . . . the outcome of the new views of life" (p. 356). In that case, Sue herself has given birth, spiritually, to this monster-child, for if anyone expresses these "new views of life" in every fibre of her being it is Sue. Clumsy as this aspect of the plot is, it is consistent with the tragic drift of the whole tale, where the failure of the lovers to maintain their vision of human perfectibility suggests that Hardy believed it to be unrealizable. His few explicit comments on their failure show him to have entertained the idea that its inevitability was not historically

determined (in contradiction to Jude's claim that "our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us," p. 419) but the outcome of the unchanging nature of things. Such a fatalism is certainly implied by the following comment on Sue's colleagues at the teacher training institute:

> They all lay in their cubicles, their tender feminine faces upturned . . .,every face bearing the legend 'The Weaker' upon it, as the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, by which no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. (p. 161)

The narrator goes on to enumerate "the storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement." Is this to be taken as Hardy's answer to the feminists?

It is no simple case of biology as destiny, of raw Nature in conflict with human aspirations, however. It is Nature in league with social laws and customs, as Hardy suggests in his Postscript: "The marriage laws [are] used in great part as the tragic machinery of the tale, and its general drift on the domestic side [tends] to show that, in Diderot's words, the civil law should be only the enunciation of the law of nature. . . ." Together these two powers, expressed in sexual desire and the marriage institution, provide for the novel the strongest example of material reality coercing human ideals - an alternative formulation of that "deadly war waged between flesh and spirit." The notion that Hardy once expressed in biological terms that "the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment,"[23] is spelled out in its fullest complexity in Jude the Obscure.

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[23] Hardy, Life, p. 218.

Arabella symbolizes the flesh, or materiality, in both natural and social law. She is "the complete and substantial female animal - no more, no less" (p. 59), representing the power of sexuality and defending its social form, the marriage contract, which ratifies and contains that power. She exploits marriage law and custom with superb cynicism, tricking Jude into marriage on both occasions. Marriage is shown up as the institution which provides the greatest opportunities for the coercion and oppression of one human being by another. Phillotson's decision to take Sue back is motivated by selfishness and effected by exploiting her crazed feelings of guilt. But unlike Arabella, who quite deliberately exploits Jude's weaknesses, Phillotson deceives himself about what he is doing. Even his friend Gillingham, that staunch champion of patriarchal morality, wonders whether the schoolmaster was being more "orthodoxly cruel" to Sue than he had been "perversely kind" in the past by divorcing her when she requested it (p. 386).

In contrast to these two legal spouses, Jude and Sue are indeed innocents, babes in the wood. They are more spontaneous, less consciously calculating in their relation with each other, although still not entirely free of this mode of behaviour - it can be seen in the way they both exploit each other's jealousy in order to assert themselves. They invariably fall victim to the worldly ones like Arabella; they are unfit to survive in a world where the "cruel law of nature and society" reigns supreme. This joint law is particularly harsh on women. Arabella celebrates its moral code with malicious triumph when she advises Phillotson that he should not have let Sue get away with her uppity ideas:

> 'She'd have come round in time. We all do! Custom does it! it's all the same in the end. . . . I shouldn't have let her go! I should have kept her chained on - her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women. Besides, you've got the laws on your side. Moses knew. . . . "Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity." Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi'it - Haw haw! . . .' (p. 338)

Arabella's moral coarseness is totally convincing. And in relation to Sue, this statement is indeed prophetic: "the woman bears her iniquity," and she is her own judge and executioner as well.

The sympathy with which Hardy presents Sue Bridehead is a measure of his response to the emancipation of women. It is a phenomenon that stirs his imagination to profound insights into the position of women in society, but his pessimism about the possibility of radical social change makes it inevitable that he present her fate as a tragic one. His novel offers ample evidence of historical and circumstantial reasons for her failure to live and love according to her ideals, but the essential conflict it registers is that within Hardy himself, between his human sympathies and an anti-humanist philosophy which denies the historical process, regarding nature and society together as timeless and unaffected by human intervention.

Lawrence and Hardy

Hardy had concluded that a love marriage between two free people was impossible because each of those persons was so deeply oppressed by social convention acting in conspiracy with the atavistic laws of nature. There are two conflicting concerns in *Jude the Obscure*: the vindication of the individual and the vindication of love as a union of souls. Both are distinctively modern tendencies, small currents working against the mainstream of nature and society, as he sees it. The vindication of the individual has long been recognised by critics, but Hardy's concern with the vindication of love has been overlooked, possibly because of his emphasis on the impossibility of such love being maintained by individuals so severely maimed by their social conditioning and so restricted by social reality. Hardy's first premiss is the conflict between the individual and society, and until the individual can triumph, the sort of love envisaged in *Jude* will be impossible. In the context of human

evolution which he presents, the separate tragedies of Jude and Sue and the defeat of their love happen because they are ahead of their times, premature spring shoots in this winter of human discontent. Nevertheless, critics can be excused for never having seen further than the individual quest for selfhood, for that is where the novel's energy is. The new love-ideal is of more theoretical interest to him -- the mode of personal relationship for a radically changed society. As it is, the sexual relationship disrupts the progress of the individual towards selfhood, and yet provides no safe retreat, no buffer against social pressures.

With Lawrence we find the same two basic tendencies towards individuality and towards a better kind of love relationship between man and woman; but we find significantly different emphases. Through Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow and Women in Love the logic of his position emerges clearly: the individual struggles to be free of the constrictions of childhood - poverty, powerlessness, "commonness." This pattern is highlighted more clearly in the second novel, where the rural community is more attractive than the working class environment of Sons and Lovers but is still ruled by the circle of repetition, a way of life cut off from the sources of power in the public world of industry and culture. For Ursula, the physical satisfactions and religious significances that sustained her parents and grandparents are not enough; the way to the "wider world" is through education and employment, and there she seeks a kind of continuous self-transcendence: she sees herself as a "traveller on the face of the earth." The rejection of conventional sexual morality is not featured as a problem, as it is in Hardy. Rather, the whole traditional way of life, the domestic, private sphere, must be left behind. But, like Jude, Ursula is disillusioned as she perceives that this "wider world" is hopelessly corrupt: work is brutalizing, study is deadening. The major conflict between her Self and the outside world is symbolized in the sexual struggle with Skrebensky, the mechanical man

of the system. It is a constructive conflict, for her real, vital self is not threatened: it is only the attraction of the decadent values of society that impinges and must be fought off. In a sense the battle rages within herself. She is left triumphant but exhausted, waiting for the real love relationship that is necessary to centre her life for her further self-development (this is supposed to happen to her in Women in Love). The love ideal is only a vision in The Rainbow.

Ursula's problem, which becomes Birkin's in Women in Love, is not that she is ahead of her time, but that she is right outside of it. Lawrence's historical model is one of crisis, not evolution. Unlike Hardy, he sees the only progressive, creative impulses as coming from non-human nature. The human world is in crisis: the past is irrelevant, the present hopelessly corrupt, the future inconceivable. The lovers are forced into exile in order to make contact, through their own vital connexion with each other, with the "creative mystery." The urgent sense of crisis in Lawrence's writing is at the core of his difference from Hardy, the difference between an apocalyptic vision and a tragic human one. Lawrence's apocalyptic vision of death and rebirth fuses together the personal and the social crises and asserts that the rebirth of individuals in "ultimate marriage" is the rebirth of the human community. In this way the love relationship is seen as the way to salvation, a religious experience of ontological confirmation in relationship, as Lawrence makes very clear in this exchange in Women in Love:

> Birkin pondered as if he would crack something.
> 'I know,' he said, 'it just doesn't centre. The old ideals are dead as nails - nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman - sort of ultimate marriage - and there isn't anything else.'
> 'And you mean if there isn't the woman, there's nothing?' said Gerald.
> 'Pretty well that - seeing there's no God.' [24]

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[24] Women in Love (London: Heinemann, 1921), p. 59.

The issues raised here - whether the marriage is indeed mutual or a god/worshipper relationship, the irony of Birkin's saying this to Gerald, whose love is also necessary to him, as he later comes to realize - must wait to be explored later. For the moment I want only to draw attention to the difference in philosophical frameworks between Hardy and Lawrence, while remembering their common concern with the related questions of individual fulfilment and the reinvention of love and marriage.

Hardy and Lawrence both confront the problem of the individual who follows Mill's recommendation not to let "the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him."[25] In their own lives, this was a matter of social mobility into the middle class intelligentsia, and the difficulty and struggle of this movement is strongly recalled in the novels chosen for study on the basis of their concern with the re-formation and re-evaluation of the relations between the sexes. The latter concern was certainly an historical phenomenon, but why is it that we find the most vividly-realized figures of the New Woman and the most radical exploration of love and marriage in the very novels that employ the Bildungsroman form and appear to come closest to the writer's own experience of growing up and out of the cultural milieu of his birth? The two processes of change appear to be connected. There was a significantly large number of intellectuals, many of them women, emerging from the working class and the petite bourgeoisie at that time.[26] Becoming disillusioned with the social realities of the world of art and ideas maintained by late-Victorian capitalism, they found themselves

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[25] J.S. Mill, On Liberty, as quoted by Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure, p. 244.

[26] A result of the Education Act of 1870 and the provision of teacher-training colleges at the universities after 1890; but in 1897 there were only 20,000 girls receiving recognised secondary education, according to Josephine Kamm, Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 233.

alienated not only from the economic interests but also from the whole mode of life of both bourgeoisie and proletariat. Turning inwards to the sphere of private life, they helped to articulate an ideology of love as the axis and confirmation of authentic life, a new version of the myth of romantic love. Lawrence's life and the direction of his work provide a more clearcut instance of this process than does Hardy's; but a comparison of Jude the Obscure and Sons and Lovers in terms of the initial break with a life of poverty and restriction on the part of the sensitive and aspiring protagonist reveals some significant similarities.

In both novels the strongest image of imprisonment in poverty, degradation and strife is a marriage relationship, a marriage that appears as the focus for all the pressures of exploited labour and restrictive social customs on the human spirit. The Jude-Arabella marriage and the Morels' marriage are, moreover, both of a kind that had seldom been portrayed in English fiction, based on sexual attraction (with its associations of blind compulsion rather than choice of a mate) and continued as a conflict of wills between two people who have opposing class identifications. In each case it is the brutal vitality of the lower-class partner (Arabella and Morel) that emerges as the stronger force, oppressing the more refined partner physically and emotionally. What is to be escaped from appears in the fiction to be conventional marriage itself, not the poverty and ignorance enforced by class oppression. The aspiring individual seems to be trapped not so much by his or her subordinate relation to the economic sources of social power as by his or her lack of power in the sexual-marital relation which in turn binds him or her to the working-class community; ultimately, sexual love seems to stand in the way of personal fulfilment. Again, the alternative relationship in each case is one which opposes to this physical and degrading tie a spiritual bond of intelligence and sensitivity within

which the aspiring protagonist is supported both by love and by the promise of personal fulfilment. The love of Jude and Sue, like that of Gertrude Morel and her son Paul, is a reflection of their deepest desires for themselves, and the inextricable connexion between shared ideals and supportive, non-sexual love emerges as a pattern common to both novels.

## The Primary Bond

The important difference is, of course, that for Gertude Morel there is not even the possibility, as there is for Jude, of directly fulfilling her aspirations. As a woman permanently trapped in the private world of the family, her escape can only be gained vicariously, through her sons. In this respect it is she who is the real protagonist of Sons and Lovers, the driving force whose dreams for herself are transferred first to the eldest son and then to the second. Here is the positive impulse towards that "life beyond" which Lawrence was later to represent symbolically by the unnamed Brangwen woman who looked out beyond the Marsh farm to "the far-off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man . . . where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled," and where men endeavoured "to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom."[27] It is a man's world, and Gertrude can only experience it through her sons.

The intense relationship, amounting to identification, between mother and son in Sons and Lovers is clearly more than an Oedipal fixation in the Freudian sense as it is generally understood as frustrating the son's "development into sexual and artistic maturity."[28] The

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[27] The Rainbow (rev. ed. 1926; rpt. London: Heinemann-Phoenix, 1955), p. 3.

[28] R.E. Pritchard, D.H. Lawrence: Body of Darkness (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 13.

mother figure in this case appeals not only to the unconscious desire to return to the total security of the womb and the egocentric universe of the infant. She also consciously offers her son a way out of the powerlessness and frustration of an impoverished childhood. Raymond Williams makes this point against the abstraction of the Oedipal sexual attachment from the whole social context of the novel:

> The mother's offer to her son . . . isn't only an offer of a kind of love, a kind of sex or delay of sex; it's a whole way of growing up - the deliberate contrast with the father who is there in his pit-clothes and his drinking; an alternative then, a conscious alternative to her own sense of waste, of degradation even; a projected idea of what a good life would be, what getting on would be - as Clym's mother had put it in The Return of the Native.[29]

The father with "his pit-clothes and his drinking" offers more than a contrast, as Williams puts it, to the mother's alternative - he offers a threat to it, a threat to her. He tyrannizes his wife and children with the threat of physical violence, and they form an alliance against their oppressor. But Gertude also demands from William and then from Paul a more positive relationship than this, through which she can gain access to a world beyond the prison of her marriage. The classic resolution of the Oedipal dilemma is that the son's infantile fear of the alien father is overcome by respect and emulation; and in taking on masculine identity he gains access to the source of that fear and respect, the social authority vested in the male in patriarchal society.[30] But Paul's sympathetic identification with his mother's oppression in the family is strengthened by his recognition that the power she derives from her superior intelligence and refinement is proving stronger, in this family, than the father's working-class masculinity signified by the pit-clothes and drinking.

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[29] The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (1970; rpt. St Albans, Herts: Granada-Paladin, 1974), pp. 141-42.

[30] Sociological interpretation of the Oedipus complex derived from Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (1970; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1971), pp. 46-54.

The feminine identification with his mother remains strong because it promises the son access to middle-class culture and social power, and this identification with the hegemonic class further complicates his rejection of the father. A purely psychological account of this relationship between mother and son "ignores the social causes of Mrs. Morel's frustration and of Morel's inadequacy as a father figure."[31] Kate Millett puts it bluntly:

> But the Oedipus complex is less a matter of the son's passion for his mother than his passion for attaining the level of power to which adult male status is supposed to entitle him. . . . The way out of his dilemma lies then in becoming, at first, like his mother rather than his father.[32]

The child's fear of the paternal tyrant changes to contempt mixed with pity for the old, broken miner as Paul himself rises to the position of male authority in the household. The superb Friday night scene of "Strife in Love" brings together all the elements of this change. Paul, now an overseer at work and fast becoming the chief money-earner in the family, is included in the exclusively male ritual of the butties' reckoning at the end of the week. He reacts impatiently when his mother's complaints about money interrupt his work, and neglects his household chore of watching the bread while he flirts with Beatrice. But his entry into man's estate is also marked by an erotic intensification of the relationship with his mother: "'I've never had a husband - not really -' . . . His mother kissed him a long, fervent kiss."[33] It is as rival "husbands" that he and his father finally confront each other. Paul's authority is shown to be established when, at the sight of his

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[31] Scott Sanders, D.H. Lawrence: The World of the Major Novels (London: Vision, 1973), p. 43.

[32] Sexual Politics (1969; rpt. London: Sphere-Abacus, 1972), pp. 247-48.

[33] Sons and Lovers (1913; rpt. London: Heinemann-Phoenix, 1956), p. 213. All further references to this work appear in the text.

mother in a faint, he can call their fist-fight to a halt with a single word of warning and revive her while his father looks on helplessly. He wins the decisive battle on his own terms, not by the strength of his arm but by the psychological strength of his exclusive alliance with Gertrude. It is a most humiliating defeat for the father: "The elderly man began to unlace his boots. He stumbled off to bed. His last fight was fought in that home" (p. 214).

The real man-to-man fight comes later, between Paul and Baxter Dawes, but its outcome is not decisive and neither man is humiliated - in fact, a bond grows up between them. This test of Paul's manhood coincides with the beginning of his mother's final illness, and here the dramatic structure of the novel belies Lawrence's contention that the mother dies in order to free the son to love another woman.[34] The only comfort he does have at the time of "The Release" is his friendship with Dawes, and both Clara and Miriam are finally cast off. It would appear that the mother dies in order to free the son to transfer his emotional loyalties not so much to another woman as to the world of men and to find his place in the "faintly humming, glowing town" to which he turns at the novel's end.

## Paul Morel in Love

The Oedipal relationship is presented as the origin of Paul's conflicts with the women he loves, and these conflicts are given far more prominence in the novel than the problem of masculine identification in his relations with his father and with Baxter Dawes. If Paul's major concern is to establish his identity, both social and sexual, then the

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[34] Letter to Edward Garnett, 14 November 1912, Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Harry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1962), I, 160-61.

hierarchy of relationships in his life is clear. His mother always provides "that enormous and expansive support, that dynamic motivation which can inspire the son of a coal-miner to rise above the circumstances of his birth and become a great artist."[35] She gives him a projected image of himself and the love, support and stimulation necessary for him to create himself in that image. But with his refusal to identify with his father's social role comes Paul's inability to identify with the male sexual role that he also represents. This makes it all the more urgent for Paul to find his sexual identity wholly and solely within his relationships with women, by defining his maleness in opposition to their femaleness, his strength against their weakness, and his emotional self-sufficiency (thanks to his mother) against their need for love. Supported and urged forward by his mother, he implicitly demands from his lovers the confirmation of his masculinity.

Once this aspect of the Oedipal situation is perceived, we can account for Paul's particular fear of being overwhelmed or diminished by love. Miriam is said to want to "suck his soul dry" like a succubus or, in a contradictorily domestic image, to "put him in her pocket"; and yet she is castigated, in their final interview, for being unable to claim him as her possession, to "take him and relieve him of the responsibility of himself" (p. 418). Clearly, Paul now needs a substitute for the supportive and possessive love his mother had always given, and Lawrence presents this need as a challenge which Miriam is too weak to take up without sacrificing herself. How she could possibly "relieve him of the responsibility of himself" without sacrificing her life to his is not explained. Many readers have noticed the similarity between the mother and Miriam, particularly in their devotion to his

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[35] Millett, p. 247.

career. The significant difference is, of course, that while Gertrude was trapped in a situation where she could obtain fulfilment only by living through Paul, Miriam, although strongly tempted to do the same, has established at last the beginnings of a life of her own. The reasons for her sexual incompatibility with Paul are to be sought in her earlier role as handmaiden to his ambitions: while she, like his mother, identified with his achievements as a vicarious satisfaction of her own aspirations it was impossible for her to act the prescribed part of the Eternal Feminine in opposition to his masculinity in their sexual relationship (quite apart from the sexual inhibition that they both have inherited from their respectable Victorian upbringing).

With Clara there is more possibility of an equal relationship precisely because she does not worship him. Nor does he need anything from her except passion. With his mother behind him and Miriam at his feet (a "threshing floor" for his ideas), Paul is more than ready for sexual initiation, the "baptism of fire in passion" that he wants. It gives him the sexual confidence to fight Baxter Dawes, to assert his needs against the demands of his mother and Miriam - and even Clara's mother, in the scene of comic suspense when he spends the night at her house in Nottingham. More importantly, it gives him a sense of his place in the natural universe, a sense of identity at a deeper level than the personal levels defined by society in terms of sex and class:

> They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass-stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars. . . . It was for each of them an initiation and a satisfaction. To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, gave them rest within themselves. . . . [T]hey knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing. . . . (pp. 353-54)

The imagery here anticipates the final passage where Paul lacks this sense of belonging, and is terrified by his own nothingness. But afterwards, when "the fire slowly went down," Paul "felt more and more that his experience had been impersonal, and not Clara. . . . [I]t was not she who could keep his soul steady. He had wanted her to be something she could not be" (pp. 354-55).

In Lawrence's scheme of things, at this stage at least, the ego can only attain this sense of ontological affirmation through relationship with another, and it can only be confirmed and sustained in a relationship where the ego is constantly supported, as in the Oedipal relationship. But Clara cannot "keep his soul steady." Moreover, after his mother's death, she "could not stand for him to hold on to. She wanted him, but not to understand him. . . . She could not cope with him" (p. 407). It is said that she can only cope with Dawes because he, unlike Paul, is afraid of death and has "owned himself beaten" (p. 408). Neither she nor Miriam, it would seem, is up to Paul's heroic standards; the only woman who could hold him up, "keep his soul steady," was his mother. His grief after her death is marked by directionlessness, by a sense of total isolation: now his perception of the impersonality of the universe is felt not as affirmation but as terrifying alienation; this time it is "pressing him, so tiny a spark, into extinction" and he experiences an agony of need for his mother, "the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this" (p. 420). Death seems the only alternative to suffering, and yet the final paragraph suggests that he accepts the challenge to go it alone:

> But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly. (p. 420)

But the whole thrust of the novel has so strongly identified his personal development with the presence of that totally supportive love that the buoyancy of the assertion is, as many readers have complained, somewhat incredible.

## Love and the Conflict of Values

The Oedipal relationship in Sons and Lovers has all the essential characteristics of the redemptive, regenerative love ideal that is envisioned in The Rainbow and explored in Women in Love. It is a way into the future, a means of spiritual advancement, the vehicle of the "venture into consciousness" that Lawrence saw as his life's task. It is an alliance of rebels against the constraints of a traditional social environment, without conventional moral sanctions. It has a religious significance as the means by which the ego perceives its place in the impersonal universe. And it is a relationship within which the self is both affirmed and opposed by the other partner, and which can encompass conflict within a fully supportive bond.

The nature of this constructive conflict is problematic. In Women in Love it appears both as the conflict of interests between two fully self-responsible human beings and as an inevitable conflict between the sexes. Lawrence's recognition of the conflict of interests between individuals is simply a matter of psychological realism, which also serves to demystify the romantic conception of love as harmony; but his presentation of conflict between the sexes as natural, intrinsically necessary and creative, and not merely a fact of human relationships in a sexist society, serves to transmute fact to the level of ideology. In the early major novels under discussion here, this explicit ideology presupposes the existence of an essential maleness and an essential femaleness which, in the sexual act, become purified and polarized (the

aspect of stability) but which, in the relationship as a whole, exist as mixed and conflicting sets of values (the dynamic aspect).

Lawrence's use of this ideology in The Rainbow and Women in Love will require a fuller discussion later. As far as Sons and Lovers is concerned, the nature and significance of conflict in relationships is still implicit. At the level of Paul's consciousness, the great conflict of his life is between his loyalties to Miriam and to his mother; but the basic conflict, I would maintain, lies *within* the Oedipal relationship. It is the opposition of "female" security and "male" freedom that emerges in the following argument between mother and son over the question of his marriage:

> 'My boy,' said his mother to him, 'all your cleverness, your breaking away from old things, and taking life in your own hands, doesn't seem to bring you much happiness.'
> 'What is happiness!' he cried. 'It's nothing to me! How *am* I to be happy?'
> The plump question disturbed her.
> 'That's for you to judge, my lad. But if you could meet some *good* woman who could *make* you happy - and you began to think of settling your life - when you have the means - so that you could work without all this fretting - it would be much better for you.'
> He frowned. His mother caught him on the raw of his wound of Miriam. He pushed the tumbled hair off his forehead, his eyes full of pain and fire.
> 'You mean easy, mother,' he cried. 'That's a woman's whole doctrine for life - ease of soul and physical comfort. And I do despise it.'
> 'Oh, do you!' replied his mother. 'And do you call yours a divine discontent?' (p. 257)

In symbolic terms, these conflicting needs for love and individuality are finally obliterated in the death of the loved one, the mother. Miriam and Clara are both relatively independent women who are able to provide Paul, the developing ego, with the kinds of support and stimulation that assist his self-definition. Neither of them, however, challenges his sense of self in the way Lawrence's Brangwen women do. The failure of both relationships is put down to each woman's failure to take Paul on. Both quail before his intensity, which is by no means dismissed by his mother's wry reference to "divine discontent."

Given the egocentric structure of the novel in its Bildungsroman aspect as Paul's search for identity, the conflict of values between love and individuality, security and freedom, points to a deep and lasting ambivalence in Lawrence himself, an ambivalence which seems to be the source of his best work where, in his own words, "morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance."[36] As it is dramatized in the early fiction and theorized in the essays, there is ample evidence in Lawrence's work of the particularly strong attraction he felt towards two opposing modes of life, neither of which was satisfactory in itself. Perhaps the most fruitful way these two modes can be examined is to see them in historical and sociological terms as male and female culture; that is, on the one hand, the "wider world" of industry, politics and culture where the individual is paradoxically free to create himself and also experiences himself as a mere social function, alienated from his fellows and ultimately alienated from the deepest springs of human vitality, and on the other hand, the "close, intimate world" of home and family relationships regulated by traditional sanctions and the rhythms of domesticity, where the individual has scarcely emerged from the collective consciousness of a community bound together by mutual need. This duality emerges most clearly in The Rainbow where Lawrence telescopes together the apparently timeless aspect, the development of the individual out of the family, with the historical perspective of the breakup of the feudal forms of family and community and the rise of capitalist work relations and individualist values. In that novel he applies the label "male" to the latter social structure (the "man's world of work") and, as the women appear to be the presiding

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36 "Morality and the Novel," Phoenix, p. 528.

influence over the earlier marriage relationships among the Brangwen clan, he implicitly names the family domain as "female." Here we have a paradigm of the three sets of conflicts that operate in Sons and Lovers, between generations, between classes and between sexes. Of course, the labels "male" and "female" are metaphorical, but they contain a core of historical and sociological truth that enabled Lawrence to employ the above analogies.

Historically, the division between home and work and the sex segregation that accompanied it was a result of the long changeover from a feudal to a capitalist society. By the early nineteenth century, however, the separation of the domestic, "female" sphere of life from the public, "male" sphere was fully developed, at least for the middle class. Evidence recently reinterpreted in the light of the present rebirth of feminism and the search for women's "hidden history" suggests that this process of separation only reached its peak in the late eighteenth century and that the rise of the feminist movement from that time can be explained as the response of middle-class women to a comparatively recent phenomenon.[37] The immediate impetus of the nineteenth century feminist movement in England shows up in its practical demands for legal equality with men, the right to education and to work - all rights which would enable women to be, and to be recognized as, persons in the public world. Along the way, of course, the feminists had to surmount not only practical barriers but also ideological ones, sexist and male supremacist prejudices with a history far older than the industrial revolution itself. As a generalization, however, it is true to say that it was their exclusion from that "wider world" that prompted the early feminists to act. They felt the separation more acutely, more

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[37] William O'Neill, The Woman Movement (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 17.

oppressively, than men, who had at least a place in both spheres, a confirmation of their identity (albeit split) as both sexual and social beings. Relegated to the sphere of domesticity, urged to find fulfilment in reproduction, condemned to a life of immanence rather than transcendence, many women of the middle class began to question whether this was in fact the best and most equitable arrangement of human society. They began to refuse, as Lawrence later did, to "let the world, or (their) own portion of it, choose (their) plan of life for (them)."

Both of these social groups, middle-class women and men aspiring beyond the working class into which they had been born, were engaged in the attempt to liberate themselves from the oppressive material and spiritual poverty and powerlessness of their inherited lot in life. The possibility, for men, of upward social mobility had been built into the structure of capitalist society, but by the end of the century there was a significant number of women going through the same process, emerging *via* education from the restrictions of customary life into the relative freedom of bourgeois culture. Lawrence had his formative personal relationships with women like these, beginning with his mother who, sharing their aspirations but prevented from realizing them herself, attempted to realize them vicariously through her son. And so he, who shared in this way their experience of breaking out of the past only to become disillusioned with the alienating realities of the "wider world", was in a unique position to understand the painful contradictions for women of this necessary process of liberation. His sympathetic acknowledgement of this common experience, so evident in his portrait of Ursula in *The Rainbow*, was always complicated by the fragility of his masculine identity. Moreover, his response to the women of his own generation remained a central and vital concern in the works of a writer who sought, by reinventing love in "ultimate marriage" between men and women, a

power which could regenerate humanity from the corruption of contemporary society and reconcile the positive values associated with its opposing spheres of male and female culture.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE WOMAN QUESTION II: STUDENTS AND SUFFRAGETTES

During Lawrence's formative years the movement for women's emancipation began to manifest itself in a range of organizations and activities far wider than before. In _Sons and Lovers_ and _The Rainbow_[1] references to further education and training for girls, the Women's Co-operative Guild and the suffrage movement, in particular the militant Women's Social and Political Union, all bear witness to the increasingly assertive presence of women in public life. As well as these and other novels of the period 1900-1920 in which women's emancipation has a clear bearing on the themes and situations explored, there are several topical novels in which the suffragette movement is the principal focus. In all these novels of the early years of the twentieth century, fictional representations of feminists reveal a pattern of conservative ideological response to the challenge of a militant feminist political movement.

### Lawrence: Education and Emancipation

Like Lawrence's own mother, Mrs Morel in _Sons and Lovers_ is a member of the Women's Guild of the Co-operative Wholesale Society. The following passage suggests that she was not the only one of her generation among the miners' wives who was dissatisfied with the conditions of their life, and thus plays down the class conflict between the parents which takes on major significance in the novel as a whole and in most accounts of Lawrence's own life:

> The Guild was called by some hostile husbands, who found their wives getting too independent, the 'clat-fart' shop - that is, the gossip-shop. It is true, from off the basis of the Guild, the women could look at their homes, at the conditions of their own lives, and find fault. So the colliers found their women had a new standard of their own, rather disconcerting. (p. 51)

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[1] _Sons and Lovers_ (1913; rpt. London: Heinemann-Phoenix, 1956). _The Rainbow_ (rev. ed. 1926; rpt. London: Heinemann-Phoenix, 1955). All further references to each of these works appear in the text.

The Women's Co-operative Guild, which began in 1883, encouraged its working-class members to recognise their own rights and powers as mothers, wives and consumers. "They have become conscious that they have better opportunities than their husbands of taking an allround view of labour questions, their experiences being wider and less specialized," wrote Clara Collet, one of the first feminist sociologists. She pointed out there were fewer wives and widows employed in 1901 than there had been in 1851 and suggested that working-class wives now had leisure and "sufficient education to enable them to use it to advantage."[2]

Lawrence confirms these conclusions in an autobiographical fragment which stresses his mother's representativeness as a working-class woman:

> My mother's generation was the first generation of working-class mothers to become really self-conscious. . . . The woman freed herself at least mentally and spiritually from the husband's domination, and then she became that great institution, that character-forming power, the mother of my generation. . . . [She] was in reaction against the ordinary high-handed, obstinate husband who went off to the pub to enjoy himself and to waste the bit of money that was so precious to the family. The woman felt herself the higher moral being: and justly, as far as economic morality goes. She therefore assumed the major responsibility for the family, and the husband let her.[3]

Clearly, Lawrence's loyalties are divided here, and he is more concerned about the effects upon himself of his mother's self-assertiveness than about the social conditions that gave rise to it. But it is significant that she is seen as representative in this respect, and her ambitions for her children, too, may be traced to the lack of opportunities for women's employment outside the home in mining villages, and their

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[2] "The Economic Emancipation of Women" in Some Aspects of the Women's Movement, ed. Zoe Fairfield (London: Student Christian Movement, 1915), pp. 106-108.

[3] Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. E.D.McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), p. 818.

husbands' relatively high earnings that made possible the children's longer period of dependence on the family income.[4]

In Sons and Lovers it is the Co-op. that provides William, the eldest, with his first clerical job when he leaves school. It is an escape from going "down pit" and an access to "the bourgeois of Bestwood," made at his mother's instigation and in the face of his father's scorn ("All he'll do is to wear his britches behind out, an' earn nowt," Morel grumbles). For the mother, the disadvantage of low wages to start with (six shillings a week as opposed to ten in the mines) is easily outweighed by William's chance to learn new skills and his consequent social advancement. "By the time he was sixteen he was the best shorthand clerk and book-keeper on the place, except one. Then he taught in the night schools (p. 52). The connection suggested here between the frustration of her own abilities and the hope she places in education as a means of social mobility for her sons is reinforced by the example of Miriam in the novel. In her case, however, ambition is seen as mere snobbery, and ill-founded at that.

Miriam resents being tied to the home as unpaid servant to her father and brothers. Her elder sister succeeds in rebelling against the home atmosphere and gains her independence as a school-teacher, and so does Annie Morel. But the real value of higher education in the form of teacher training, such as these two minor characters would have received and as Lawrence, Jessie Chambers and their circle of friends received, is not stressed in the novel. Without this context of practical opportunities and ambitions, Miriam's desire to learn appears to spring simply from that romantic idealism which is the hallmark of

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[4] Peter N. Stearns, "Working-Class Women in Britain, 1890-1914" in Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 107-108.

her character in the novel and which Paul is justified in scorning. In Lawrentian terms, she is guilty of sheer assertion of will, and the narrative tone of the following passage wavers characteristically between ridiculing it and fearing it:

> She hated her position as swine-girl. She wanted to be considered. She wanted to learn, thinking that if she could read, as Paul said he could read, 'Colomba,' or the 'Voyage autour de ma Chambre,' the world would have a different face for her and a deepened respect. She could not be a princess by wealth or standing. So she was mad to have learning whereon to pride herself. For she was different from other folk, and must not be scooped up among the common fry. Learning was the only distinction to which she thought to aspire. (p. 143)

Clara, too, "having had some of Miriam's passion to be instructed, had taught herself French. . . . She considered herself as a woman apart, and particularly apart, from her class" (p. 264). The passive verb, the choice of French as an accomplishment and its association with snobbery as a substitute for genuine self-respect, form a consistent pattern of rejection. Paul provides the standard against which the two women are tested and found wanting. His learning is acquired effortlessly, his right to struggle for a place in the world unquestioned. At the same time, their aspirations make them more interesting to Paul, a more significant challenge to him than the light-hearted ease and warmth of Beatrice, the girl who later marries his cheerful, feckless brother, Arthur. Miriam and Clara are necessary to his self-development; they both serve, in their different ways, as a "threshing-floor on which he threshed out all his beliefs" (p. 227).

Yet the novel reveals, at a deeper level than the overtly ideological statements suggest, a great deal about the actual situation of women like Miriam and Clara. It is obvious, for instance, that Miriam's development is crippled by the influence of her mother's doctrine of humility and submission, no matter how often the narrative insinuates that she is essentially lacking in a proper sense of self. As Kate

Millett so memorably demonstrated, the scenes between Paul and Miriam are remarkable instances of "sexual sadism disguised as masculine pedagogy."[5] But they are peculiarly disturbing to read because the character of Miriam has more validity than Lawrence was consciously willing to allow. The interpretations of her behaviour offered by the narrator, like the example quoted above, are often so merely spiteful as to indicate that the writer's own insecurity about his hold on middle-class culture and its concomitant freedoms is the impulse behind them. When this spitefulness is attributed to Paul himself, Lawrence is on safer ground. At the end of the novel Paul makes a classic statement of post-Freudian sexist ideology about female fulfilment. "Earning your own living isn't everything," he tells Miriam, who has at last left home to go to college. While a man can give himself to his work completely, "a woman only works with a part of herself. The real and vital part is covered up" (p. 416). The truth of the proposition is demonstrated in The Rainbow, where Ursula, the female protagonist, experiences a development in self-consciousness similar to Paul's. But in this novel Lawrence concludes that the world of work offered no vital fulfilment to men, either. Skrebensky is shown to be no mate for Ursula because he is debilitated by his acquiescence to the split between his social function (as a soldier) and his passional life as a man.

Lawrence's long-recognized ambivalence about middle-class culture and mores is further confused by his ambivalent identification with the New Women of his generation who were fighting their way out of their particular oppression as women, using the same means as he did, education. That generation was the product of the historical coincidence between

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[5] Sexual Politics (1969; rpt. London: Sphere-Abacus, 1972), p. 253.

the Education Acts' provision of opportunities for the ambitious minority of the working class and the feminist movement's encouragement of women from all social strata to emerge from the hidden sphere of domesticity into the so-called "male" world of work. They were the women whose frustration and determination provided the force behind the militant suffrage movement of the years prior to World War I.

## The Suffragettes in Fact and Fiction

If the concept of "domesticity" is taken to include, as well as housekeeping, the main kinds of paid work hitherto available to women - domestic service, piecework done at home and governessing - then the majority of women could be said to be still "hidden" there at the turn of the century.[6] Women employed in public services and industry, though little better off financially, were at least in a position independently to see and collectively to protest against their working conditions. Disillusioned schoolteachers and struggling working women formed the bulk of numbers in the great groundswell of feminist agitation that found its most powerful expression in the Women's Social and Political Union, founded in 1903.[7] Its first members were working-class supporters of the Independent Labour Party in Manchester, its leaders and public speakers Emmeline Pankhurst and her three daughters and Teresa Billington, then an elementary school teacher who had come into conflict with the authorities over her refusal to give religious

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[6] The 1901 Census showed that half of all employed women in England were domestic servants. See Vera Brittain, Lady into Woman (London: Andrew Dakers, 1953), pp. 20-21.

[7] Standard accounts of the history of the WSPU: E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement (London: Longmans, 1931); Antonia Raeburn, The Militant Suffragettes (London: Michael Joseph, 1973); Andrew Rosen, Rise Up, Women! (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

instruction to her classes. They were soon joined by Hannah Mitchell, a seamstress married to a fellow member of the ILP, and Flora Drummond, a clerical worker and also a married woman. Annie Kenney, who was to become one of the most famous of the Suffragettes during the eleven years of the WSPU's existence, also had connections with the Labour movement. She read the ILP newspaper, and had discovered Ruskin, Morris and Carpenter. At the age of ten she had begun half-time work in a cotton factory, and when she joined the WSPU at the age of twenty-six, she had been working the eleven-and-a-half hour day of a cotton operative for thirteen years. Her three younger sisters were students at the night school and left the mill to become a shop-assistant, an elementary school teacher and a shorthand typist respectively. This was a class background similar to Lawrence's, but more politically radicalized, as was typical of textile industry workers at the time (in 1910 according to Clara Collet, over 80% of unionized female workers were employed in the textile industry).

As it became known in the Midlands the WSPU attracted the support of prominent socialists like Keir Hardy, Ramsay MacDonald, Charlotte Despard, Edward Carpenter and Margaret Bondfield.[8] When the Union moved to London in 1906, working-class Suffragettes with socialist sympathies and political experience like Hannah Mitchell faded from the limelight, although branches in the provinces continued active. Although its policy of non-party alignment took the WSPU further and further from its original close connections with the Labour movement, the tension

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[8] Margaret Bondfield, the first woman to chair the TUC General Council and Minister for Labour in the 1929-31 Labour Government, is probably the "Margaret Bonford" referred to in Sons and Lovers, p. 282.

between class interests within it did not reach breaking-point until very late. It was only at the beginning of 1914 that the East London Federation and Sylvia Pankhurst were finally forced to sever formal ties with the Union. Recent criticisms of its exclusively middle-class character[9] have depended on published statements in Votes for Women and The Suffragette (which was entirely written by Christabel Pankhurst), for the WSPU kept no adequate record of membership and so there is no way of ascertaining the proportion of working-class women among its members. It would be reasonable to suggest, however, that the minority of such women in the available accounts of the Suffragette movement could be explained by the fact that they could not have afforded to risk the prison sentences that were the inevitable consequence of the WSPU's increasingly militant activism. This would apply in particular to older women, and those who had children to look after.

According to Sylvia Pankhurst, at the height of its growth,

> With the young factory worker, the shop assistant and the teacher, seeking relief from ill-paid and monotonous toil, leisured and sheltered women rallied to the call of the WSPU, which promised them a wider life of romance and adventure, wherein they might be translated to persons of consequence in the public eye, and regarded as benefactors of their kind. (p. 227)

A small but important group of women omitted from this description of the class identity of the Suffragettes were the educated and financially independent middle-class women. Some of these, like Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Sylvia herself, felt strongly the need to help the poor but were dissatisfied with charity organizations, preferring to work for political power for the oppressed. Sylvia Pankhurst was torn between this side of her nature and her desire to be an artist, but in that area,

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[9] For example R.S. Neale, "Working-Class Women and Women's Suffrage" in his Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 143-68.

gifted as she was, it seemed to be impossible for her to earn a living. Others, like her sister Christabel, a brilliant law student, were excluded from the professions of their choice, or else their ambitions were frustrated by the fact that only inferior pay and positions were available to women in teaching and other branches of the public service.

In the novels of the period up to 1925 where Suffragette characters appear, they are almost invariably young, middle-class women from cultured or moneyed families, like many of the most prominent Suffragettes. Lawrence's characters in Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow are exceptional in representing the class position of what was probably the majority of WSPU members, but then these early novels share a preoccupation, still rare among serious novelists at the time, with working-class and lower middle-class life. Writers of topical novels inevitably chose the more sensational personalities and incidents of the feminist movement to base their tales on. Militant action, with its consequences of police brutality, imprisonment, even death, was good material for fiction, but there is little interest shown in the politics of the feminist movement. Young, beautiful, talented heroines abound in topical fiction whatever its subject-matter, and the Suffragette novels are no exception.

Older feminists appear rarely, and then only as caricatures of the dedicated reformer, like Miss Birdseye in James' The Bostonians. Miss Miniver, in H.G. Wells' Ann Veronica, is one of these - mentally and physically untidy, priding herself on the way she keeps in touch with all the progressive movements of the time, she is impoverished, dedicated, and without an ounce of dignity or beauty. A kinder version is Sally Seal in Virginia Woolf's Night and Day.[10] None of the novels considered

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[10] Ann Veronica (1909; rpt. London: Reader's Library, n.d.). All further references to this work appear in the text. Night and Day (1919; rpt. London: Hogarth, 1938). All further references to this work appear in the text.

here gives an indication of the number of married women among the Suffragette militants.[11] In Delia Blanchflower Mrs. Humphrey Ward presents a range of minor characters that reflects the still-prevalent stereotype of the Suffragettes as "odd women." Not one of them has ever been married, and they are all from the lower middle class: a village dressmaker, a grammar school teacher, the daughters of a local farmer and a shabby-genteel widow and, most significantly, a former typist-clerk who has gained her university degree only through her association with the feminist movement. The heroine of this anti-Suffragette novel is an heiress, the daughter of a knighted member of the Civil Service, and of course her association with the militants proves to be short-lived.[12]

The young, single, gifted middle-class heroines of Ann Veronica, Night and Day, Sir Harry Johnston's Mrs. Warren's Daugher, May Sinclair's The Tree of Heaven and Ford Madox Ford's Some Do Not. . . .[13] are all somehow frustrated in the employment of their talents. Vivie Warren and her friends are Economics graduates from Newnham who cannot find satisfactory professions, and so is Dorothy in Tree of Heaven. Vivie tires of her work as an unofficial solicitor, actuary and broker and, going one better than Christabel Pankhurst, disguises herself as a man in order to take her law degree at the Inns of Court and set up in practice as a barrister. Ann Veronica, a science student, defies her father's insistence that she stay at home and wait for a husband, only to find that she is unemployable in London:

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[11] The heroine of Gertrude Atherton's Julia France and her Times is a runaway wife who joins the Suffragettes out of "disillusionment with all things male . . . , more to compensate herself for other failures with a career," Gertrude Atherton, Adventures of a Novelist (New York: Liveright, 1932), p. 470.

[12] Delia Blanchflower (New York: Hearsts, 1914). All further references to this work appear in the text.

[13] Mrs. Warren's Daughter (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920). (cont.)

> Slowly and reluctantly she came to realize that Vivie Warren [of Shaw's play] was what is called an 'ideal.' There were no such girls and no such positions. . . . With such qualifications as she possessed, two chief channels of employment lay open, and neither attracted her. . . . One main avenue was for her to become a sort of salaried accessory wife or mother, to be a governess or an assistant school-mistress. . . . The other was to go into a business - into a photographer's reception-room, for example, or a costumier's or hat-shop. . . . And nearly all these things were fearfully ill-paid. They carried no more than bare subsistence wages, and they demanded all her time and energy. (pp. 97-98)

That is precisely the situation sketched out by Sylvia Pankhurst. She also noted that many girls of this class were still denied by their families the formal education for which they now had opportunities, a claim supported by the examples of Katharine Hilbery in _Night and Day_ and Valentine Wannop in _Some Do Not. . . ._ Katharine's ambition to study mathematics is circumscribed by her attachment to her literary family; like Virginia Stephen in a similar family, she feels keenly her lack of formal education, and her lack of connection with the public world of government and commerce - although her counterpart in the novel, Mary Datchet, scarcely presents an attractive alternative. Committed to social reform, well-educated and efficient, Mary is employed in the dingy office of a society for women's suffrage and expends her intellectual energies in preparing papers for the discussion group to which she belongs. Ford's Suffragette character, Valentine, suffers an imprisonment in the family circle similar to Katharine's, acting as secretary-housekeeper to her widowed mother, who is a novelist. She explains ruefully that her father, a scholar, "being a brilliant man, had ideas. And one of them was that I was to be an athletic, not a classical don at Cambridge, or I might have been, I believe" (p. 105).

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_The Tree of Heaven_ (London and New York: Macmillan, 1917). _Some Do Not. . ._ (London: Duckworth, 1924). All further references to each of these works appear in the text.

Valentine may be singled out as the only one of these characters whose feminism is presented as an integral part of her political idealism. She is introduced into the novel, and brought to the reluctant attention of the hero, as a Suffragette engaged in sabotaging the golf-courses of the male ruling class. Her explanation for this commitment is that, having worked as a kitchen maid for a time, she really understands the oppression and exploitation of women. As the hero's secret love, she re-emerges towards the end of the novel, still passionately idealistic, now a pacifist protesting against the conduct of the Great War. Political and moral idealism are Ford's central concerns in Some Do Not. . . and so this emphasis on Valentine's feminism is appropriate. But the fact remains that she is the only Suffragette character in the novels of this period for whom political commitment is the guiding impulse. By their neglect of this issue, other novelists tend to underrate the capacity of their feminists for considered political action, and the explicitly anti-Suffragette writers present their characters as mere victims of manipulation by power-hungry Pankhurst types.[14] For example, Wells confronts his heroine with a recognisable caricature of Christabel, attractive and persuasive but "about as capable of intelligent argument as a runaway steamroller. She was a trained being - trained by an implacable mother to one end" (p. 164). In fact, many WSPU activists had had wide political experience through their association with the Labour movement, and it is unlikely that many of them would have believed that votes for women was the be-all and end-all of political demands, although this is a common criticism of WSPU policy. It is made, for

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[14] The Soul of a Suffragette, by W.L. Courtney, "told of the effect of suffrage propaganda on a young, half-educated, unawakened girl of lower middle-class parents who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for throwing a bomb through the window of a Cabinet Minister in a cause she did not really understand." Reported by Amy Cruse, After the Victorians, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 136.

example, by Tietjens, the hero of Some Do Not. . . (pp. 143-45). But Valentine's socialist views, embracing pacifism as well as feminism, are more in keeping with the political origins of the militant suffrage movement than was the uncritical support given to the war effort by that minority of Suffragettes who followed Mrs. Pankhurst and Christabel when they took up the cause of national chauvinism and rechristened their newspaper, The Suffragette, as Britannia.

In Mrs. Warren's Daughter, Johnston has two representative middle-class supporters of the WSPU in Vivie, one of the educated, independent women who became Suffragette activists because they had nothing to lose, and her friend Honoria, one of the wealthy married women who contributed to the Union's enormously successful fundraising efforts. Accurate, too, is his account of the horrors of the police brutality and forcible feeding suffered by the militant women. However, he presents an unrealistically rosy picture of the Union in its political aspects. The anger of the Suffragettes against the male institutions of government and law, the bitterness of the Pankhursts' split with the Pethick-Lawrences in 1912, and the autocracy of the later Pankhurst rule are made light of. Sylvia Pankhurst and the East End women are ignored completely (and Vivie has a "suffragette maid"!). So too is Christabel's ill-conceived moral purity crusade of 1913, which would undoubtedly have alienated Suffragette supporters like the avuncular narrator of this novel. Nor does the WSPU's indecently sudden conversion to extreme patriotism at the outbreak of the war present a problem to the heroine's conscience, for Vivie spends the period of the war with her mother in Belgium.

To question the representativeness of the feminists portrayed in these novels is not necessarily to demand documentary realism. Rather, when we can recognize the choices a novelist makes of character and social context, we have an important indication of the ideological

position implicit in the fiction. Such positions are elaborated in the interpretative framework provided in the novel's structure, as well as by explicit authorial comment, and the next section attempts to demonstrate this. But for a final example of the discrepancy between fact and fiction, we might well return to Sons and Lovers and Lawrence's portrayal of Clara Dawes, the feminist.

Through the Hopkin family in Eastwood, Lawrence as a young man would have met "Socialist, Suffragette, Unitarian people," as Paul does in the novel (p. 259). Alice Dax was one of these. At one time they were lovers, and she was almost certainly the prototype for Clara Dawes, the feminist. Enid Hopkin's sketch of her, and of their life in Eastwood in the 1900's, shows that to her contemporaries Alice Dax represented the wide social significance of the women's movement, not just the suffrage cause:

> Alice Dax and my mother were years ahead of their time (which may have been one of her attractions for D.H.L.), and both were widely read, "advanced" in dress, thought and house decoration. . . . Together [they] worked for the women's cause, and I remember being taken to "meetings" in the city of Nottingham. We waved green, purple and white flags, and the speakers, the Pankhursts, Annie Kennie [sic] and others . . . stayed at our house, and discussions went on and on far into the night. . . . Alice Dax . . . became a NAME in the district, a person to whom people turned in trouble, and who initiated all the good community enterprises, such as nursing associations, local forms of health insurance and so forth.

There is no woman with this range of interests and influence in any of Lawrence's fiction. Clara is seen, on the contrary, as a pretentious upstart who, while considering herself superior to other women of her class, "lives separate from her husband, and talks on platforms," and so, according to Paul, "she's already singled out from the sheep, and . . . hasn't much to lose" (p. 314). We are led to believe that she fights for the women's cause because she hates and fears men, particularly her husband. But the real feminist, Alice Dax, was, according to Enid Hopkin,

> one of the kindest persons I have ever met, but most of the men of her generation feared her. She represented a kind of ramrod, forcing the future into their present in an uncomfortable and uncomprehended manner . . . and she dared to be right, too often.[15]

Clara, unlike her prototype, presents no threat to men. She does, however, present a sexual challenge to Paul, with her combination of beauty and "a grudge against men" (p. 187). It is only in this latter respect that her feminism is relevant to the novel's central concern with the hero's bid for freedom and self-realization.

## The "Woman Problem": Definitions and Solutions

To the extent that Clara *is* representative of the women of her generation, she shows that the "Woman Problem" was, in Lawrence's estimation, a sexual rather than a social problem. Her feminism is revealed as merely a superficial pose, a flimsy social identity which is quickly sloughed off during her restorative relationship with Paul. Having experienced the "baptism of fire in passion" with him, Clara emerges self-assured and "eased of her self-mistrust, her doubt" (p. 361). It is clear that this new assurance comes from the discovery of her true, sexual identity, her femininity: because she is no longer sexually frustrated, she stops mistrusting herself and hence fearing and hating men. She has learned that "men were not the small egoists she had imagined them" (p. 407). Armed with this valuable knowledge she returns, not to her independent life and feminist commitment, but to the husband who has bullied and degraded her. The lesson is clear: independent women are unfortunate, and those who are feminists are merely sexually frustrated man-haters who may be "cured" by the love of a proper man and returned to their true sphere of fulfilment, marriage.

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[15] *D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, ed. Edward Nehls (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), I, 135-36.

The "explanation" of Suffragette militancy as the result of sexual frustration was becoming a common line of attack. When ladies were not supposed to have any sexual feelings at all, the nineteenth-century feminists were dismissed as "wicked," "mad" or "hysterical" (implying that the frustration of their biological function as mothers was the problem). In the early years of the twentieth century when, under the influence of Ellis and Freud, (hetero)sexual expression was coming to be seen as a value in itself, their more emancipated and militant successors were attacked as sexual, rather than moral, deviants from the norms of behaviour defined by patriarchal society. Cruder male supremacists than Lawrence attacked the women as unattractive, embittered man-haters and inverts.[16] He, however, admitted that they had a genuine grievance; but by reducing the "woman problem" to the single dimension of sexuality, he was proposing that sexual fulfilment was both necessary <u>and sufficient</u> for women's freedom.

Upholders of the patriarchy had attempted to dismiss Victorian feminists as not being proper ladies, the domestic angels of Ruskin's vision; now they tried to ridicule the Suffragettes as not being true women. <u>Sons and Lovers</u> shows that the transformation of "lady" into "woman" (hailed as an advance by feminists themselves) could be just as oppressive as the older ideological norm, if women were now to be regarded only as sexual beings and not as individual persons. The portrait of Miriam is an implicit condemnation of the sexual and personal repression involved in the socialization of a middle-class "lady," but the novel itself holds Miriam personally responsible for

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[16] Evidence of this "sexual" attack on the feminists is given by W.L. O'Neill, <u>The Woman Movement</u> (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 96, and by Samuel Hynes, <u>The Edwardian Turn of Mind</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 206-207. Hynes quotes from a letter to the <u>Times</u> by Sir Almroth Wright, who returned to the old argument that the feminists were the unmated females in the population, the "odd women," went on to list the psychological perversions to be found among them, and (cont.)

her plight. The kinds of social reform for which women were agitating held no interest for Lawrence. His own youthful attitude to the women's cause can probably be gauged by Paul Morel's response to a feminist meeting held by "Margaret Bonford":

> 'I think she's a lovable little woman,' said Paul. . . .
> 'And, of course, that is all that matters,' said Clara witheringly.
> He rubbed his head, rather perplexed, rather annoyed.
> 'I suppose it matters more than her cleverness,' he said; 'which, after all, would never get her to heaven.'
> 'It's not heaven she wants to get - it's her fair share on earth,' retorted Clara. *She spoke as if he were responsible for some deprivation which Miss Bonford suffered.*
> 'Well,' he said, 'I thought she was warm, and awfully nice - only too frail. I wished she was sitting comfortably in peace - -'
> '"Darning her husband's stockings,"' said Clara scathingly. (pp. 230-31)

Paul's teasing reveals an uneasy combination of admiration for "advanced" women and a patronizing refusal to recognize their demands, a refusal supported by Lawrence as narrator in the comment I have italicized.

H.G. Wells, on the contrary, expresses not the slightest unease about the challenge presented by the New Woman. He welcomes her warmly to the rebellious band of free spirits and confidently analyzes the social situation that oppresses her. In *Ann Veronica* the "deprivations suffered" by his heroine are obvious: she has education but no employment and independence, a mind of her own but no social freedom in which to exercise it, and a passionate heart that cannot be satisfied by either of her suitors. Wells lays the responsibility for her plight squarely on the impervious shoulders of the Victorian male: the weakly authoritarian father who will not let her live her own social life, a sentimental courtier who quotes Ruskin and offers her marriage on a pedestal, and

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finally attacked all women as morally and intellectually incomplete due to their "physiological emergencies." Even Mrs. Ward, a leading anti-suffragist, wrote in to deny this charge.

a dashing rake who, inflamed by her lively eyes and protestations of freedom, attempts to rape her in a hotel room.

Ann Veronica firmly discards the patriarchal male in these easily-recognizable Victorian stereotypes, and she even manages to do this without seriously damaging his ego. A short spell in prison for Suffragette activity (the famous "Trojan Horse" raid on Parliament in 1908) brings her to the realization that she is out of place among the feminists because she likes men. "I can talk with them. I've never found them hostile. I've got no feminine class feeling," she muses to herself (p. 179). Ann Veronica is a beguiling projection of the male imagination, a woman who rebels against the past, against social convention and the Rule of the Father, but who professes no aspirations of her own apart from finding Love. A comparison with the hero of Wells' The New Machiavelli is instructive here: Remington, too, commits himself to an illicit love affair, and must give up his successful political career in consequence. But Ann Veronica experiences no such conflict. Her major discovery in prison is that:

> 'A woman wants a proper alliance with a man, a man who is better stuff than herself. She wants that and needs it more than anything else in the world. . . . She wants to be free - she wants to be legally and economically free, so as not to be subject to the wrong man; but only God, who made the world, can alter things to prevent her being slave to the right one.' (p. 179)

Freedom, then, is only a means to an end. Love is a woman's whole destiny, maternity her deepest purpose. Long before Ann Veronica discovers this for herself, her friend, Hetty, analyzes their dilemma as young women:

> 'We're regarded as inflammable litter that musn't be left about. We are the species, and maternity is our game; that's all right, but nobody wants that admitted for fear that we should all catch fire, and set about fulfilling the purpose of our beings without further explanations. . . . They don't marry us off now until high up in the twenties. . . . So the world is choked with waste and waiting daughters. Hanging about! And they start thinking and asking questions, and begin to be neither one thing nor the other. We're partly human beings and partly females in suspense.' (p. 36)

This is the account of the "woman problem" demonstrated by the action of novel. It is a problem not to be solved by women getting the vote, for political power, in Wells' opinion, had nothing to do with the case. The Suffragettes were simply failed women, potential Miss Minivers. Even the problems of women's social and economic powerlessness, so clearly outlined by the events of the novel, are denied, by Ann Veronica herself, as "nameless discontents." With her lover at last, she exclaims, as a prelude to one of Wells' breathless encomiums on love as the solution to everything:

> 'And to think that it's not a full year ago since I was a black-hearted rebel school girl, distressed, puzzled, perplexed, not understanding that this great force of love was bursting its way through me! All these nameless discontents - they were no more than love's birth-pangs.' (p. 244)

And at the end of the novel, marriage, motherhood and social respectability are Ann Veronica's reward for having pursued love so courageously and single-mindedly. Little wonder that Lawrence professed himself sickened by Wells' conception of love and morality. Still, it may be seen as a "respectable" version of the Romantic elevation of passionate love as the only authentic and fulfilling experience in modern life, a doctrine that Lawrence himself was largely responsible for reviving.

It is a staple ingredient of popular romantic fiction that love provides the resolution of all human problems, and Mrs. Ward's Delia Blanchflower is a classic example of what has come to be recognized as the women's-magazine romance. Blancheflor was the maiden rescued by Perceval in medieval Grail romances. Her namesake, Delia Blanchflower - young, beautiful, rich, orphaned - is finally extricated by the chivalrous love of her guardian, Mark Winnington, from her enchantment with the Suffragettes in the person of her tutor and companion, Gertrude Marvell.

Gertrude is not portrayed simply as the monster or witch, the "sinister influence" that Mark must overcome (p. 148). The relationship between the elder woman and her pupil is convincingly strong, as is their influence over the other dissatisfied women who join them. The object of Ward's criticism is not the feminists' demands, but their militancy, which she presents in its most sensational forms of property destruction, in a way obviously intended to horrify her respectable readers. But all the women in the novel are in some sense rebels against the patriarchal order, including the rector's daughter who, hopelessly in love with Delia's handsome guardian, persuades her parents to let her go off to London to study nursing. The admirable Lady Tonbridge, divorced from her brutish husband and living in genteel poverty, affirms that she, too, is a suffragist:

> 'Here am I, with a house and a daughter, a house-parlour-maid, a boot-boy, and rates to pay. Why shouldn't I vote as well as you? . . . I say we ought to have it - that it is our right - and you men are dolts not to give it us. But I sit and wait peaceably till you do - till the apple is ripe and drops. And meanwhile these wild women prevent it ripening at all.' (p. 105)

She is addressing Mark Winnington (as one of his many female admirers) and the "wild women" are of course Gertrude and her ilk. Mrs. Ward admits that there is a "woman problem" of considerable proportions, but the novel shows that the women can gain nothing on their own. The Suffragettes are prey not only to unscrupulous males like the manipulative Lathrop, but to their own weaknesses as a sex - fanaticism and rivalry. The solution recommended is that women ally themselves with the gentlemanly males who will help them, but unfortunately there is only one such type in the story, and he is devoted to Delia's welfare in particular. The dependence of women on men for chivalrous love is the appropriate answer to Mrs. Ward's typically Victorian definition of the "woman problem" as that of the "odd women" who are denied their true fulfilment as wives

and mothers. Gertrude's death in the fire for which she herself was responsible actually brings her a kind of redemption, for she dies in the attempt to save a crippled child trapped in the burning house, uttering "that wail of a fierce and childless woman - that last cry of nature in one who had defied nature - of womanhood in one who had renounced the ways of womanhood: '*the child* - *the child*!'" (p. 381).

The final holocaust also removes the threat of feminist insurgency from the world of the novel. Mrs. Ward concludes:

> Two days after the death of Gertrude Marvell, the immediate cause on which she and her fellows had wrought such havoc, went down in Parliament to long and bitter eclipse. But the end is not yet. And for that riddle of the Sphinx to which Gertrude and her fellows gave the answer of a futile violence, generations more patient and more wise, will yet find the fitting key. (p. 382)

Romantic fiction can always resolve by authorial fiat the social problems it draws upon for its setting. On the other hand, the strange novelistic hybrid of documentary and dramatization into which Johnston places characters out of G.B. Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* follows history by dissipating in the Great War the "woman problem" posed by the Suffragettes.

Johnston's *Mrs. Warren's Daughter* genially poses "the problem" in terms of those artificial barriers to women's development condemned by all liberal thinkers since J.S. Mill. It is, then, the "man problem," the blind prejudices of the male, that Vivie Warren is up against. At the beginning of the story she declares herself bored by "all this sexual nonsense" about the New Woman:

> 'I'm a sort of neuter. All I want in life is hard work . . . a cause to fight for. . . . Revenge . . . revenge on Man. God! How I hate men; how I despise them! We can do anything they can if we train and educate.' (p. 12)

In her attempt to prove the latter proposition, her male disguise is discovered, quite by accident, by the married man she has fallen secretly in love with. Having realized that she is by no means "a sort of neuter," but that she must not break up Rossiter's marriage, she joins the Suffragettes so as to take her mind off him. (The idea of disappointed women seeking martyrdom in the WSPU is common to Ann Veronica and Delia Blanchflower as well.) She sets out on an exciting career of public speaking, underground espionage, disguises and dramatic acts of militancy until her one-woman campaign of sabotaging racing-stables in revenge for the death of Emily Davison is brought to an end by her arrest. Her three-year prison sentence is fortunately cut short by the outbreak of war and the amnesty granted to all Suffragette prisoners. The war brings other changes, too: the deaths of her disreputable mother and of Rossiter's shrewish wife mean that Vivie can at last gain love and social respectability.

Vivie's militant extremism is presented as a valid form of protest against her frustration in love and work - and great fun, too - although Johnston's jovial account of her ploys to outwit male stupidity sits uneasily beside the moral indignation with which he reports the brutality of the law's reaction.[17] It is hard to imagine such a sanguine account of the Suffragettes being published before the war had absorbed the energies generated by their militant activism and their constant threat of civil strife. Later social historians have placed the phenomenon of the Suffragettes in the context of pre-war turbulence in the British body politic. Hynes, in The Edwardian Turn of Mind, finds that:

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[17] In her novel, The Convert (1907), Elizabeth Robins "repeatedly suggests that the [authorities'] handling of the suffragettes had brutally sexual significance, a fact that . . . was repressed in contemporary historical accounts," notes Elaine Showalter in A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 222.

> There was an element of aggressive, hysterical hostility in the militant movement that cannot be explained in terms of political aims and political frustrations. The movement offered man-haters an outlet . . . and in so doing it played an important role in that deterioration of relations between the sexes that marked the course of the period.[18]

He suggests that Edwardian men drew back in alarm from the chaos and violence threatened by the Suffragettes and "went to war in 1914 with apparent relief, as a husband might leave a nagging wife"! This pseudo-historical account of the period seems to draw upon an earlier work by Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, which offers the theory that the militant feminist and socialist movements released "energies" that revivified a Britain obviously "in decline." Dangerfield explains the Suffragette rebellion as a reaction against the Victorian "ideal of personal security through respectability," and characterizes it as a fusing together of those "scattered and wasting elements of a great female principle" (the "odd women" again). Sympathetic, even romantic about the Suffragettes, Dangerfield's account has since been used to reinforce the stereotype of them as frustrated spinsters.[19] According to Dora Russell, the attack on feminists as sexual deviants was renewed as soon as the "good fellowship" of wartime ended. In Hypatia (1925) she recalled the Suffragette movement as a real battle between the sexes, on account of male intransigence:

> We made our just demands and were met with ridicule. We followed with abuse - all the pent-up anger, misery and despair of centuries of thwarted instinct and intelligence. Man retaliated with rotten eggs. We replied with smashed windows; he with prison and torture.[20]

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[18] Hynes, p. 207.

[19] George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1910-14 (1935; rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), pp. 148-50.

[20] Hypatia, or Woman and Knowledge (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, n.d.), p. 3.

An early statement of this psycho-sexual theory of the period is central to May Sinclair's novel of 1917, The Tree of Heaven. Unlike Dangerfield, she places no faith in the "great female principle." Her theme of individual autonomy and responsibility is illustrated by contrast with both the WSPU and the "Vortex" group of artists[21] to which the heroine, Dorothy, and her brother are respectively attached. This novel covers the period from 1895 to the First World War, and Sinclair provides a significant retrospective glance at the previous generation of "odd women" in the characters of the three unmarried aunts, all of whom are portrayed as sexually repressed and slightly dotty, having had no outlet for their energies in the life of society. Dorothy herself, yet another educated middle-class girl with nothing to do and nothing to lose, throws her energies into the "Women's Franchise Union," which is ruled autocratically by a thinly-disguised Mrs. Pankhurst and characterized by petty rivalry and what Sinclair calls "herd-emotion" among its members. After a spell in prison, disillusioned, Dorothy eventually finds her place in the "Social Reform Union" writing "reconstructive" articles on economics for The New Commonwealth.[22] Sinclair imagines the war as the Great Vortex itself, the inevitable outcome of a period of social unrest in which violence was regarded as an end in itself, a means of generating purely destructive energies.

In the Suffragette novels published after 1914 - The Tree of Heaven, Mrs. Warren's Daughter and Some Do Not. . . - political differences melt in the great cauldron of the war, and in a world

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[21] Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex was the name of the journal published by Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound in 1914, which propounded proto-fascist ideas.

[22] Probably the New Statesman, founded in 1913 by Beatrice and Sidney Webb and others associated with the Fabian Society.

plunged into mortal conflict, the supreme value of personal relationships, of love, is reasserted. In one way or another, love defeats the anger of militant feminism in all the novels dealing with the Suffragettes. Taken together, they strongly reinforce the belief that personal relations are the only possible human defence against the bitter conflicts of social and political life. The individual is powerless, the group is dangerous, or at best ephemeral. Only the relation between individual man and woman holds any promise of happiness.

The Personal Solution

At the time, only a few writers in the mainstream of the English liberal humanist tradition - Forster, Woolf and Lawrence - attempted to explore the implications of this new faith. While accepting the absolute necessity of centering one's life in personal relations, and rejecting the possibility of political or even religious solutions to the oppressiveness of bourgeois society, each of these writers confronted the contradictions and imperfections inherent in the only solution they could believe in.

In Woolf's Night and Day (completed in 1918) and Lawrence's The Rainbow (1915), the ground is cleared for such an examination of the possibilities for personal salvation offered by love. In both novels, the central female figure struggles out of the bonds of the traditional patriarchal family and avoids a conventional marriage, in order to emerge at the end an individual apparently free to choose her own life. Neither Woolf nor Lawrence makes much, explicitly, of the heroine's oppression as a woman: her problem, to put it simply, is the past, not the patriarchy. The personal solution, in both cases, involves an overt rejection of political commitment.

The significant difference between the two is in the dynamics of the heroine's progress. In Night and Day, Katharine learns spiritually to transcend the past without rejecting it. Until awakened by passion, she is the sleeping princess figure so often portrayed by women writers. Only the final realization that her love for Ralph matters to her more than anything else gives her the courage to step out of her enchanted castle, the home of her rich, cultured family, and venture into the streets of London, the wider world, with him. Ursula, in The Rainbow, is compelled to reject violently her family, social milieu and the "Great Machine" of society itself. In the effort to destroy its hold on her she is almost broken, but in the end she is given a vision of the world transformed, as she has been, by a mystical death and rebirth - and a premonition that she will eventually find her mate in a man sent by God.

The predominant note of bitter struggle in The Rainbow is an indication of the turmoil that Lawrence himself was feeling at the time he wrote it, a major cause of which was the war in Europe. The war is not mentioned in this novel, but one can feel its presence there, and even more strongly in the sequel, Women in Love. This note of crisis and despair is entirely absent from Night and Day, however. Katherine Mansfield felt that the book was "a lie in the soul" because its message seemed to be that the war had never happened; reviewing it in the Athenaeum, she expressed this opinion more discreetly:

> We had thought that this world was vanished for ever, that it was impossible to find on the great ocean of literature a ship that was unaware of what has been happening; yet here is Night and Day, fresh, new and exquisite, a novel in the tradition of the English novel. . . . We had never thought to look upon its like again![23]

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[23] Athenaeum, 21 November 1919, 1227; rpt. in Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage, ed., R. Majumdar and A. McLaurin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 82.

Night and Day is a conventional novel, a romantic comedy, in situation reminiscent of Meredith. Katharine is engaged to William Rodney, but doubtful about marriage. Mary Datchet is in love with Ralph but when he becomes infatuated with Katharine she can only give up and throw herself into her work in social reform. William finds he is really in love with someone else, and Katharine and Ralph persuade themselves that their mutual passion is to be trusted and that nothing else matters to them. Given her interest in the choices made by the young women and her evocation of the pre-war period, Virginia Woolf's neglect of the Suffragette movement is even more extraordinary than her silence about the war. But as a contribution to the myth of the Edwardian era as a kind of Golden Age - or, at the very least, as the period of calm before the storm of war - Night and Day could not accommodate a reflection of the violence and desperate heroism of the militant feminist struggle during those years.

The novel is now most interesting for the sympathetic and complementary portraits of the two women. Although Virginia Woolf ridicules Mary's colleagues, the suffragists and socialists, she presents with a minimum of irony Mary's commitment to improving the world by her reformist efforts. Her capability and independence are a source of envy to Katharine - but Katharine's good fortune in love is affirmed, and recognized by Mary herself, as the only thing in life really worth having. Mary resolves, as her author had once resolved,[24] never to pretend to herself that she has not missed out on something important.

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[24] "Years and years ago, after the Lytton affair, I said to myself . . . never pretend that the things you haven't got are not worth having. . . . And then I went on . . . to say to myself that one must . . . venture on to the things that exist independently of oneself." From an unpublished section of A Writer's Diary, quoted in Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography (London: Hogarth, 1973), II, 89.

Having renounced love, she feels that she is no longer a "volunteer" but is now "enlisted in the army" of those, like her colleagues in the Suffrage society, who are "not quite 'in the running' for life . . . - eccentrics, undeveloped human beings, from whose substance some essential part had been cut away" (pp. 278-79). But Mrs. Seal and Mr. Clacton have a faith in their cause that she lacks; Mary is sure that, "for herself she would be content to remain silent for ever if a share of personal happiness were granted her" (p. 271).

Despite Katharine's doubts about the permanence of love, "personal happiness" is affirmed by the novel as the ultimate value. The pathos of Mary's renunciation is intensified by the dinginess, the "eccentricity" and the ineffectuality of the life she is now, as it were, condemned to, even in the Fabian-socialist reform society she later joins up with. The Suffragettes and the enthusiastic solidarity generated by the WSPU's massive campaigns could have provided a far more challenging alternative, had that been to the novelist's purpose; but that would have made it more difficult to validate Mary's certainty that political work runs a poor second to marriage "'in the running' for life." As it is, Woolf confirms Mary's judgement by caricaturing her associates and, consequently, the kind of life they represent:

> Mary and Mr. Clacton argued with a cogency and a ferocity which made the little woman feel that something very important - she hardly knew what - was taking place. She became much excited; one crucifix became entangled with another . . . ; and how any combination of Cabinet Ministers could resist such discourse she really did not know. . . . Mr. Clacton himself had been vaguely impressed by something in Mary's behaviour towards him. He envisaged a time even when it would become necessary to tell her that there could not be two masters in one office - but she was certainly able, very able, and in touch with a group of very clever young men. No doubt they had suggested to her some of her new ideas. (pp. 279-80)

Woolf's amused distaste for the woman's confused enthusiasm and for the man's patronizing smugness does not necessarily signify an objection to political feminism as such. Herbert Marder, in Feminism and Art, says it does, and is forced to conclude that the place of feminism in the scheme of the novel is unclear: "Both too much and too little is made of feminism as a theme - too much for it to remain mere background; too little for it to become a significant part of the fictional pattern."[25] But feminism is not quite the issue. The "woman problem" is given an essentially Victorian definition in this novel - it is Katharine Hilbery's problem of getting free of her family in order to discover love; and in the wider world it is only the formal lack of a vote that constitutes the Woman Problem. The suffrage question is subsumed under the head of politics, and the major thematic conflict set up in the novel is between the opposing spheres of private and political life, personal happiness and "impersonal" satisfactions, conventional family life (as represented by the Hilberys) and the world of work and individual independence (where both Ralph and Mary belong).

Katharine wants to connect with this world and with its intellectual dimension, that of impersonal scientific and political thought. For her, the miraculous element in Ralph's love is that it offers her this connection and, despite her father's initial objections to their relationship, enables her to maintain her links with home. Their marriage will include both worlds, two aspects of the dual vision implied by the title, Night and Day. Another dimension of the title's meaning is revealed in the final scene of the novel. The dark streets of London where the lovers wander are studded with lighted windows, signifying

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[25] Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 22.

all the individual lives, like Mary's, that are included in their "vision of an orderly world." Their task will be to "piece together in a laborious and elementary fashion fragments of belief" that lack the unity of phrases fashioned by "the old believers."

> Together they groped in this difficult region, where the unfinished, the unfulfilled, the unwritten, the unreturned, came together in their ghostly way and wore the semblance of the complete and the satisfactory. The future emerged more splendid than ever from this construction of the present. . . . [I]t swam miraculously in the golden light of a large steady lamp. (p. 537)

"I shall do a novel about Love Triumphant one day. I shall do my work for women, better than the Suffrage."[26] Lawrence made this joking promise in a letter to Sallie Hopkin in 1912. But by the time The Rainbow was finally rewritten in 1915 he was in full retreat from English society and its political struggles. The change he underwent during the war years cannot be underestimated, and is reflected in the tone of most of the later part of the novel. Here Ursula expresses her youthful determination to smash the social mechanism:

> Her soul's action should be the smashing of the great machine. If she could destroy the colliery, and make all the men of Wiggiston out of work, she would do it. Let them starve and grub in the earth for roots, rather than serve such a Moloch as this. (p. 349)

This violent reaction, which was Lawrence's, and the political conclusions he drew from it, help to explain his antagonism to feminism as a political movement.

His revulsion from the Moloch of the industrial machine turned Lawrence against the human beings who were enslaved by it. He insisted that the working class's enslavement was, at some deep psychic level, a

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[26] Quoted in Emile Delavenay, D.H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. 26.

voluntary one. Refusing to recognize that the class system is based on the exploitation of labour by capital, he could see in the Labour movement no sign of the oppressed fighting collectively to free themselves, but only universal competition among individuals, where "democracy" would simply mean "equality on a money basis," as Ursula expresses it (p. 461). It was clear that the capitalist system demanded "hands" or functions rather than whole human beings, but Lawrence was somehow unable to look further into this universal alienation and see that there is also a hierarchy of functions involved, and that some functionaries have power over the mass of workers. In Ursula's eyes the manager, her uncle Tom Brangwen, and the colliers are identical by virtue of the fact that they all work for the same machine. In _Women in Love_, Lawrence extends this analysis of industrial capitalism: Gerald Crich, the capitalist, becomes a kind of "god in the machine," a figure of admiration to the extent that he exploits the system in its own terms instead of mistakenly trying to humanize it as his father had done.[27] These are the only two possibilities Lawrence can envisage, short of a religious transcendance of the whole social order, like the vision Ursula has at the end of the earlier novel. Lawrence opposed universal suffrage because it appeared to contradict the separation of spheres of power ("responsibility") essential to a hierarchic social organization. As is evident in these extracts from letters he wrote in 1915, his political ideal incorporated both class and sex divisions:

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[27] The discussion of "Lawrence and Democracy" in David Craig, _The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change_ (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973) still fails to perceive the connection between Lawrence's anti-working class sentiments and his anti-feminism, a connection suggested but not explored by Millett, pp. 248-50.

> I don't believe in democratic control. . . . The working man shall elect superiors for the things that concern him immediately, no more. . . . The thing must culminate in one real head . . . something like Julius Caesar.[28]

> And women shall not vote equally with men, but for different things. Women _must_ govern such things as the feeding and housing of the race. And if a system works up to a Dictator who controls the greater industrial side of the national life, it must work up to a Dictatrix who controls the things relating to private life. And the women shall have absolutely equal voices with regard to marriage, custody of children, etc.[29]

His position is really a kind of inverted materialism: industry, the machine itself, is invested with a life of its own that rules all individual human lives and informs intellectual as well as social life. Hence any ideas of social meliorism, or even revolution, are by definition "mechanical" and corrupt.

The feminist movement is presented in _The Rainbow_ as just another emanation of the mechanical system:

> Maggie was a great suffragette, trusting in the vote. To Ursula the vote was never a reality. She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote. But her fundamental, organic knowledge had as yet to take form and rise to utterance. . . . For her, as for Maggie, the liberty of woman meant something real and deep. She felt that somewhere, in something, she was not free. And she wanted to be. She was in revolt. For once she were free she could get somewhere. (p. 406)

Ursula is being singled out as one of the spiritual aristocrats with the strength to resist the system and finally to move on beyond it. While

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[28] To Bertrand Russell, 26 July 1915, _Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence_, ed. Harry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1962), I, 355.

[29] To Lady Cynthia Asquith, 16 June 1915, _Collected Letters_, I, 349.

all her women friends are portrayed as feminists, they are dismissed contemptuously as slaves of the system. Maggie is one of those who accepts the split between her working life and her emotional life: she is a good teacher, proving herself in "the man's world of responsible work, " but "her soul was always wandering in far-off valleys and glades of poetry" (p. 391). Ursula leaves her behind in the miserable village school, an unwilling cog in the machine with "a note in her voice of bondaged contempt and fear" (p. 420). Dorothy, whom Ursula meets at college, "spent her spare moments slaving for the Women's Social and Political Union" (p. 432). It is she who later urges Ursula into marriage to save herself from "promiscuity" when Ursula confesses her disillusionment with Skrebensky and the ideal of love as an end in itself (p. 475). This is obviously meant to show Dorothy up as a conventional woman who acts out of fear instead of the proud confidence she affects.

Maggie and Dorothy are shadowy figures, too weak to have any influence over Ursula. But Winifred Inger, the schoolteacher, combines feminism with a more powerful personality, which attracts the younger Ursula's romantic hopes and sexual desire. She is strong, beautiful, self-confident, intelligent. A humanist, she rejects religion based on fear; a feminist, she ridicules the male egoism expressed in romantic love. Like the other women, however, she is ultimately defeated by fear, a deeper, metaphysical fear. She is made to represent the kind of nihilism that makes her the perfect partner for Tom Brangwen in his demonic worship of the machine: "There, . . . in service of the machine, was she free from the clog and degradation of human feeling. There, in the monstrous mechanism . . ., did she achieve her consummation and her perfect unison, her immortality" (p. 349). Obviously, the new era of

Love Triumphant that Lawrence envisaged would not be the achievement of the feminists.

"Lawrence began in the midst of the feminist movement, and . . . he began on the defensive," as Kate Millett points out.[30] While it is seen as something of a joke in Sons and Lovers, feminism in The Rainbow is taken much more seriously as a manifestation of the "automatic system"'s power to extend false hopes of human liberation. And Millett is also right, historically speaking, when she states that the feminist movement is "the driving force behind Ursula's efforts" even although the novelist insists that her driving force is, on the contrary, "that passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system."

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[30] Millett, pp. 260-61.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP IN D.H. LAWRENCE: THE RAINBOW AND WOMEN IN LOVE

### The Movement in Time

After he had finished *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence wrote to Garnett that his new novel, *The Sisters*, was to be about "woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative,"[1] an apt description of that part of the double novel which was to become *The Rainbow*. And yet if this is Lawrence's feminist novel, it is also the one that he at first referred to, deprecatingly, as a "pot-boiler" for which he set aside *The Lost Girl*; and it might well have been conceived of as that contribution to the Women's Cause, something "better than the Suffrage" that he had humorously boasted about earlier. Nevertheless, the novel as it stands is an intensely serious work that reveals an appropriately serious ambivalence about the value of that very process of "becoming individual, self-responsible."

The novel's structure incorporates a process of becoming that is indicated by the recurrent metaphor of life's "widening circle" (chapters 10 and 14), by the growth of each generation of Brangwens out of the one before, and by the emergence of Ursula as a *Bildungsroman* hero in the latter part. The process has both historical and meta-historical dimensions. It begins with the break-up of a rural culture and its traditional values, a culture in which community is located within the family or household where men and women work co-operatively and where relationships repeat the same essential pattern generation after

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[1]Letter 22 April 1914, *Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. Harry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1962), I, 273.

generation; and it ends with a vision of industrial society in its death-throes, dominated by technological progress, atomized individualism and the virtual segregation of the sexes. As history, it concisely sketches the change in English society from the feudal to the capitalist era, a change which spread over a period more like three centuries than three generations. As meta-history, it dramatizes the growth of human consciousness from a state of immanence imaged in the Brangwen men at one with nature, "full and surcharged," but "unable to turn round,"[2] to a state of transcendence embodied in Ursula, fully conscious of her separateness from other persons and from things, unfulfilled but unable to stop moving onwards.

This movement in time is not simply linear. Like music, it contains cycles of repetition within the forward development or, like a river, it alternates between swift forward leaps and slower, more expansive eddies. Still, the strong forward movement is the keynote of _The Rainbow_, and attempts to relegate this movement to second place, as so many critics have done, in favour of Lawrence's concern with "three couples' engagement in what he sees as the essential struggle for a satisfactory relationship" are mistaken.[3] Such an emphasis places too much weight on Ursula's relationship with Skrebensky and results in a misunderstanding of the visionary ending. To say that "the cost of maintaining her integrity . . . postpones her maturation in marriage" is seriously to underestimate Ursula's achievement of a religious sense of connection with

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[2] _The Rainbow_ (rev. ed. 1926; rpt. London: Heinemann-Phoenix, 1955), p. 3. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[3] H.M. Daleski, _The Forked Flame: A Study of D.H. Lawrence_ (London: Faber, 1965), p. 75.

the impersonal universe without the loss of her individuality, her vital self.[4] Edward Engelberg's essay, "Escape from the Circles of Experience" reinforces my own view that the Bildungsroman aspect of The Rainbow actually determines the whole shape of the novel, and artistically justifies its ending. He argues that Ursula, as the final embodiment of that voracious appetite for experience manifested in both Lydia and Anna before her, searches for selfhood in a world which, as it extends in "widening circles," also diminishes the possibility of her finding fulfilment in it. She is forced to strip back all the layers that protect the self in a painful series of refusals and rejections, until she is extricated from this state of negation by her "earned vision" at the end. It is a vision of the unknown, beyond the world of experience which is like "a circle lighted by a lamp," denying the darkness that cannot be reached by "man's completest consciousness" (p. 437).[5]

My own interest is in the social and psychic origins of that "voracious appetite for experience," and in the features of the "widening world" that Ursula is compelled to negate and resist. Ursula's life has a convincing inevitability about it. At every crisis point she is forced to break new ground, to step off into the unknown. Because she is more highly individuated, more aware of her single self confronting a world far wider than the Marsh Farm, she is constantly forced to make radical departures from the customary way of life that the Farm stands for. As an individual, she must escape from the "swelter of fecundity" that is her mother's life in the family (p. 263). In her

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[4] David Cavitch, D.H. Lawrence and the New World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 50-51.

[5] "Escape from the Circles of Experience: D.H. Lawrence's The Rainbow as a Modern Bildungsroman," PMLA, 78 (March 1963); rpt. in Critics on D.H. Lawrence: Readings in Literary Criticism, ed. W.T. Andrews (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), pp. 70-76.

first romantic rebellion against the narrow intimacy of village life and home, she experiences going to Grammar School in Nottingham as a move to "inherit her own estate. . . . There, she was going to walk among free souls" (p. 266). As she grows away from the family and leaves behind the duality of the weekday world and the Sunday mystery, her father's sustaining sense of life, she strives for a wholeness and integration of being, even if it means living only in one half of life at a time.

Her religious and sexual yearnings are answered by her passion for Anton Skrebensky, who "brought her a strong sense of the outer world" (p. 288) but who also appears as one of the "sons of God" she has been dreaming of (p. 290). Her mother had chosen such a passionate first love as this to be the basis of her life, marriage and procreation; but Ursula, on the day of the last traditional wedding at Marsh Farm, puts Skrebensky to the test and finds him wanting. Her sexual "annihilation" of him follows directly on her discovery that the "strong sense of the outer world" that he offers her means only a mindless acquiescence to his function in a life-denying social system. It seems to her that he himself is "nothing" (p. 309), and so her annihilation of him in their sexual battle under the moon takes on the appearance of a purging from herself of her own falseness, the destruction of a mere image of a man that she had created to answer to her own awakening desires. Her affair with Winifred Inger can be seen in a similar light. It brings her into contact with the avant-garde intellectuals of that mysterious "outer world," whose ideas, although critical of the _status quo_, ultimately acquiesce in it also. That aspect of herself which is attracted to intellectual despair is exorcized by marrying Winifred off to Tom Brangwen, always a figure of sinister fascination to the younger Ursula.

Left alone now with the "burden of self," Ursula resolves that "her soul's action should be the smashing of the great machine" (p. 349). But this resolve necessitates her entry into the "man's world of work and duty," Anton's world, which demands that each of its inhabitants become "just a brick in the whole great social fabric" (p. 326). At this point she must sever her emotional ties with her parents, and it is an angry, bitter battle of wills between her determination to have a life of her own in the wider world and both parents' defensive reaction against this rejection of their own way of life. Anna is harshly contemptuous of her daughter's dreams of freedom and equality in the "man's world," while Will is humiliated that she should shake off his protective love and angered by this challenge to his power as head of the family: "He had always hugged a secret pride in the fact that his daughters need not go out to work" (p. 358). Her mother's break with the parental family had been effected with dignity and warmth, through the marriage ceremony and the customary celebrations that had ended with the men, led by her step-father, singing carols under the window of the nuptial bedroom. For Ursula, however, there are no such rites of passage from one clearly-defined stage of life to the next, rites where "all's accustomed, ceremonious."[6] Ursula's crucial initiation is not into the sphere of marital love and strife, but into the world of "work and mechanical consideration" (p. 406), the dehumanizing school system.

Defeated in her attempt to "personalize" the role of efficient, authoritarian schoolteacher and later disillusioned with the university,

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[6] W.B. Yeats, "A Prayer for my Daughter" in Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 211.

the "religious retreat" that turns out to be "only a little side-show to the factories of the town" (p. 435), Ursula is strongly reminiscent of Lawrence himself in her reactions. Her youthful idealism is tested against experience and burns out. The form this disillusionment takes is a complete reversal of that same idealism, an absolute rejection of "the system" and the social roles it imposes, uncompromised by the demands and contingencies of everyday life. After this, the visionary ending is the only possible one.

Ursula as the New Woman: the Problem of Identity

It is important to point out, however, that Ursula's dilemmas are exacerbated by her sex. Her position as a woman allows the choices, and their illusory nature, to be seen more clearly, for through marriage a woman can choose from a range of vicarious lives. As an adolescent, she had speculated that "she had always her price of ransom - her femaleness" (p. 333), but her subsequent career provides the ironic commentary on this piece of wishful thinking. She is strongly tempted to marry Maggie's brother and share with him a rural existence that reflects the permanence and unconsciousness of the earlier Brangwens' life at Marsh Farm; but retreat is impossible and she must go on, "a traveller on the face of the earth /while/ he was an isolated creature, living in the fulfilment of his own senses" (p. 417). Just as it is impossible for her to go back to that archaic life, so it is impossible to marry Skrebensky and take her place in India, the colonial extension of the English social system, along with the imperialist "travellers on the face of the earth." In the world of freedom she has fought so hard to reach, her choices finally narrow down to two equally restrictive social roles: "Ursula Brangwen, spinster, schoolmistress" or "Mrs. Skrebensky, even Baroness Skrebensky, wife of a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers (p. 474).

Historically speaking, she was the first heroine of the major English novelists to have been confronted with that conscious choice: even Isabel Archer's exercise of freedom had consisted of the choice between an American, an Englishman and a "European" and the world each one inhabited. Nevertheless, *The Rainbow*'s chief concern is with Ursula's representative quest for individual freedom, rather than her representative femaleness. Apart from the particular barriers put up to her plan to escape the family, and the choice of vicarious lives open to her through marriage, Ursula's struggles are not noticeably different from those of any other *Bildungsroman* hero. Her development as a sexual being is singularly free from the kinds of repression normally experienced and internalized by a young girl, and the "shame" that she feels after her affair with Winifred Inger is clearly not caused by the fear of social disapproval, nor by disgust at the reflection of her own femaleness in the other woman; it is, on the contrary, a revulsion from her own potential spiritual affinity with the worshippers of the machine. Her desperate choice of marriage as an alternative to promiscuity, on Dorothy's advice, is again not a typically female dilemma - certainly not at the turn of the century. And her feminist sympathies are placed as simply a minor element of her romantic individualism: "For her, . . . the liberty of woman meant something real and deep. She felt that somewhere, in something, she was not free. And she wanted to be. . . . For once she were free she could get somewhere . . . the somewhere that she felt deep, deep inside her" (p. 406).

I would suggest that, having chosen a female protagonist for this work, Lawrence was able to highlight dramatically the network of social pressures on the aspiring individual, while underplaying the problem of sexual identity that had so haunted his earlier protagonist, Paul Morel. F.R. Leavis points out the parallel between Lawrence's relation with his

mother as recreated in Sons and Lovers and Ursula's intense relation with her father, in which Will "makes adult demands of her" and she is "wakened too soon," prematurely forced into life. Leavis concludes that through Lawrence's choice of a female protagonist in The Rainbow, the Oedipal relation has been "turned into insight, impersonalized and extended."[7] It is also clear that the kind of life Ursula aspires to is comparable to that which Lawrence himself had attained and was still in the process of evaluating when he wrote the book: "She wanted to read great, beautiful books, and be rich with them; she wanted to see beautiful things, and have the joy of them forever; she wanted to know big, free people" (p. 406). Also like her creator, Ursula becomes deeply dissatisfied with teaching, the work that had seemed to promise her both independence and fulfilment: the extended agony of that experience, recounted in chapter 13, is surely drawing on Lawrence's own experience at Eastwood and elsewhere.

The importance of such similarities between Lawrence and Ursula can be seen when they are placed in the context of the problem of sexual and social identity that was examined in Sons and Lovers. Social identity is defined largely in terms of one's relation to the sources of power in society, which are both economic and ideological. For a middle-class man in patriarchal society, there is no inherent contradiction between sexual and social identity - his gender grants him a degree of power over women in personal relationships, and his membership of the dominant class extends this power over all members of the subordinate classes in society, and constitutes his personal freedom. For

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[7] D.H. Lawrence, Novelist (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955), pp. 131-32.

Lawrence, at this stage of his life, there were contradictions on both levels of identity: sexual, because of his refusal of the working-class style of male dominance and his identification with the mother within the family; and social, because of his class background and limited access to middle-class power. By working through the female protagonist, he was able to by-pass the sexual problem in order to focus on the social one; but in Women in Love he returned again to the problem of male sexual identity, as the discarded Prologue shows.

In The Rainbow, it is only the male characters who have difficulty in coping with their sexuality, while the women, as Kate Millett remarked, are surprisingly uninhibited.[8] Traces of the Sons and Lovers sexual dilemma are found in the opening chapter. Tom Brangwen, even more deeply influenced by his mother's "Angel in the House" moral superiority than by her ambitions for his education, recoils from sexual relations with women in classic Victorian terms:

> The disillusion of his first carnal contact with woman, strengthened by his innate desire to find in a woman the embodiment of all his inarticulate, powerful religious impulses, put a bit in his mouth. He had something to lose which he was not sure even of possessing. (p. 14)

Fortunately for him, he finds both sensual joy and a religious sense of connection with the unknown in his marriage with Lydia Lensky, the Polish woman - a combination of experiences foreshadowed by his brief affair with the girl at Matlock and his attraction to her lover, the "foreign gentleman" who symbolized for him subtlety and reserve of manner and a kind of inherited, ageless wisdom (pp. 19-20).

It is this magical combination of sensuality and civilization that makes both Lydia and Anna Lensky so buoyant in their self-assurance,

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[8] Sexual Politics (1969; rpt. London: Sphere-Abacus, 1972), p. 258.

their "singleness of being." Ursula inherits this, but she also inherits from her father and Tom Brangwen their religious impulse and the constant conflict of fear and desire that had characterized the Brangwen men since Tom's mother drew him out of the total sensuous absorption of his ancestors and imbued him with some of her desire for knowledge and "the finer, more vivid circle of life" (p. 4). Both Tom and his nephew, Will, are ultimately defeated by their fear of this life beyond, which is also associated with effort, articulation, and multiplicity of experience. Whereas Tom approaches the mystery of the unknown, the "beyond," through his relation with Lydia, Will submits himself to it blindly, through a religious faith that is entirely cut off from everyday life. Anna, on the contrary, confined to immanence in her chosen role of Magna Mater, has "relinquished the adventure to the unknown" (p. 193) and is content with her daily miracle.

Out of the sexual dialectic that is set up through these two marriages, Ursula's character emerges as androgynous, in the sense that she inherits as much of the religious impulse associated with Tom and Will as she does of the sensual vitality that Lydia and Anna manifest. The novel's structure indicates that only _this_ particular configuration of psychic energies and impulses is capable of withstanding the test of experience in the wider world. In this respect, Ursula can be seen as an idealized conception of human capacities that answered Lawrence's need to reconcile the conflicting impulses towards both male and female identification within himself. As he portrays her, Ursula confronts the world of experience beyond the community of the family with the physical and metaphysical freedom of a man and the essential stability of a woman.

Male and Female

The male-female dialectic is a strong undercurrent in the novel, as most recent critics have recognised. Its significance, however, proves harder to determine - so much so, that we find diametrically opposed interpretations of the sex dualism, and of the character of Ursula. A critic who recognises Ursula's historical role as the New Woman, Marvin Mudrick, sees the conclusion of the novel as a celebration of her superior power,[9] while Kate Millett's radical feminist reading finds evidence of Lawrence constantly undercutting his heroine's independence and strength in order to show that women ought never to have entered the "man's world" in the first place. As the most telling example of this anti-feminism, she quotes the following passage:

> In coming out and earning her own living she had made a strong, cruel move towards freeing herself. But having more freedom she only became more profoundly aware of the big want. . . . /T/here remained always the want she could put no name to. (p. 406)

"The big want is obviously a husband," notes Millett sarcastically[10] - a conclusion justified by her reading of Lawrence's later work, but not by the context of the passage here. It is Ursula's "strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote" that drives her on to seek fulfilment of a "want" that is clearly not defined by her sex but rather by her dual inheritance of sensual vitality and religious questing. Mudrick's interpretation may well be closer to Lawrence's conscious intentions, so far as Ursula's sex is significant at all:

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[9] "The originality of The Rainbow," in Spectrum, 3 (Winter 1959); rpt. in D.H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Mark Spilka (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 47-49.

[10] Millett, p. 261.

> In a time of human degradation, the unique powers of woman have at last asserted themselves; and such powers, coming so unexpectedly out of the very sources of life, cannot be without a commensurate object and response.[11]

Ursula _is_ a romanticized figure, in the sense I have already suggested, but she is not Robert Graves' White Goddess, as Mudrick implies; nor do I find in _The Rainbow_ the sense of threat conveyed by the phrase, "cannot be without a commensurate object," although there is no question that the Ursula of _Women in Love_ presents that kind of threat to Birkin. The attribution of innate sex-determined characteristics and their formulation into sexist ideology is an element of that novel which is virtually absent from _The Rainbow_.

Later critics, who have taken a psycho-biographical approach to Lawrence's work and recognized the important element of self-identification in his portrait of Ursula, have also paid attention to the sexual dualism implicit in The _Rainbow_. Starting from the theoretical formulations Lawrence made about male and female in "A Study of Thomas Hardy," Daleski offers an interpretation of the novel, focussing on the sexual relationships, that attributes the failure of those relationships to the male characters' failure to assume their proper role as "reckless voyagers into the unknown who come back to [the women] and complete them." Ursula cannot find a man to meet her as an individual because "it is the men, as the opening pages emphasize, who have the longest road to travel."[12] In both Anna and Lydia he sees women who, finding fulfilment in their "female being" which is indifferent to the outside

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[11] Mudrick, p. 48.

[12] Daleski, pp. 81-82.

world and ruled by sensuous experience, unwittingly draw their men into this mode of existence, to their detriment. Ursula's experience in the "man's world" forces her to be less than herself, merely "Standard Five teacher," while her disastrous sexual relationship with Skrebensky forces her to recognise that she cannot become more than herself either, cannot become "Woman," "all-containing, universal" (p. 444): "its ultimate import is a recognition on her part that she cannot . . . try to recoup at night the losses of the day, cannot be Woman, cannot be more than Ursula Brangwen."[13] It is implied that Ursula thus transcends the dualism of male and female, although Daleski does not draw this conclusion from his own analysis.

It is only to be expected that Lawrence's theoretical formulation of duality in the Hardy essay should present a more consistent set of terms than the novels do. These can be abstracted and listed under the general headings of Male and Female Principles as Daleski has done. The elements of the Male Principle most relevant to a reading of The Rainbow are: activity, movement towards discovery, spirit, utterance, the service of some idea, consciousness, knowledge and light. These are matched in the Female Principle by: permanence, movement towards the origin, flesh, gratification in the senses, full life in the body, instinct, nature, and darkness. Lawrence also refers to these principles in theological terminology as Love (the spirit of God the Son) and Law (the spirit of God the Father), respectively. One is immediately struck by the appropriateness of a dualism of Law and Love to the conflict at the heart of Jude the Obscure, but it is an opposite kind of dualism: that novel reverses Lawrence's sex categories, since it is Jude who

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[13] Daleski, pp. 120-21.

represents Law, Sue who is Love. If this is not warning enough against identifying these principles directly with male and female characters in Lawrence's own fiction, reference to the opening prose poem of The Rainbow should suffice. Here, it is the Brangwen men who are absorbed in the "female" life of sensuous gratification, and the women who look out towards the "male" world of discovery, knowledge and utterance. In this novel, where the movement in time allows a spiral of repetition and innovation to evolve, no single element in its pattern of dualities remains unchanged or is tied to one single character.

Fiction contradicts the theory in both cases, which seems in itself to prove the wrong-headedness of attributing innate, sex-determined characteristics to the characters. Whatever mental acrobatics Lawrence may later have performed within this system of dualities in order to correlate male supremacist ideology with his belief in the ultimate value of instinct and blood-consciousness,[14] its appearance in The Rainbow reflects the undeniable fact that the public world of power and achievement was a male domain, that the development of human consciousness so far had excluded women and relegated them to the sphere of immanence, reproduction. The male characters are thus atypical, in that because of their obscure origins they have not inherited the light of Knowledge, but are still struggling towards it, both fearing and desiring it; they are on a par, in that respect, with the women. Lawrence's sexist labels are meaningless except as markers of the historical separation of men and women in bourgeois culture. His own formulation of the ages of Law and Love points to the historical dimension

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[14] R.E. Pritchard, D.H. Lawrence: Body of Darkness (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 53, alleges that the pattern of Male and Female principles defined in "A Study of Thomas Hardy" is "totally uncharacteristic" and that "normally for Lawrence the male body contains the unknown, while woman is intellectually active."

of the duality that characterizes his work: the age of Law was the first age, followed by that of Love. "Europe followed the Male Christ; for a moment of perfection at the Renaissance . . . Male and Female were perfectly fused" but now "we are at the end of an age of Love, . . . and we shall enter the third only when Male and Female find themselves, unite, and usher in the Holy Ghost." Kermode concludes this paraphrase of Lawrence's essay on Hardy with his apocalyptic notion of world history:

> The decadence of the spirit is almost contemporary with the moment of its regeneration; the new age, the renovation of time, is born out of the death struggles of the old. . . . In the midst of the terrors, a sign; after the flood, a rainbow.[15]

While Ursula represents the possibility of such a regeneration on a personal level and has a vision of historical regeneration, the novel's conclusion also suggests that it is only through "ultimate marriage," both literal and metaphorical, that the New World can be brought into being. The rainbow appears first as a symbol of the consummation of Tom's and Lydia's marriage, their mutual completion. After the pseudo-rainbows of Anna's daily miracle (pp. 192-93) and Will's cathedral arch (pp. 202-03), the true rainbow appears only to Ursula as a consequence of her spiritual death and rebirth, and then as a promise, not as a sign of achieved completeness. Having rejected the older way of life, the close, restricted world of the family, and having been disillusioned by the sordid "freedoms" of the wider world, Ursula breaks with "all the vast encumbrances of the world that was in contact with her, from her father, and her mother, and her lover, and all her acquaintance" (pp. 491-92) in order to be reborn, a kernel, "free and naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the

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[15]Frank Kermode, _Lawrence_ (London: Fontana-Collins, 1973), pp. 40-42.

flux of Time" (p. 492). Her extreme weakness and the possibility of fulfilment promised by the rainbow vision together suggest that she can go no further alone but must await the arrival of "a man created by God" to support and centre her further development. But this hint of the necessity for "ultimate marriage," as elaborated in Women in Love, remains only a hint. More importantly, The Rainbow ends with a sure sense of artistic completeness: the process of individuation, the venture into consciousness, has extended as far as it can. Only a New World can provide the human soul at this level of development with the fulfilment it demands. And since the novel must return from visionary apocalypse to the intractable world of social reality, it is not surprising to find Women in Love opening with an ironic discussion of marriage as the possible road to the New World. Lawrence is finally forced to discard the movement in time that characterizes The Rainbow in favour of that movement in space, the travellers' exile together, that characterizes the marriage relationship of Ursula and Birkin. The "finer, more vivid circle of life" that the Brangwens have aspired to now appears not as a place in the world, a community, but as the circle described by the relation between the two lovers.

## Love as Salvation

While the keynote of The Rainbow is change - the "widening circles" of human consciousness and the gradual disintegration of organic order - that of Women in Love is crisis. Lawrence presents the end of a process of social change and individuation, a lacuna in time. It is his record of "the results in one's soul of the war: it is purely destructive,"[16]

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[16] Letter to Waldo Frank, 27 July 1917, Collected Letters, I, 519.

and he had thought of calling it Dies Irae. The novel's tone is set by its apocalyptic imagery, both biblical and fin de siècle, and by a Futurist "reduction of states of being to states of matter" in which "under the stress of violent emotions, persons tend to dissolve into lumps of matter or lines of force, inter-acting by means of electricity, magnetism, friction, radio-activity or gravitation."[17] Thus the movement and imagery of organic growth in the previous novel are contradicted in Women in Love. "It proceeds by awful discontinuous leaps; its progress enacts those desperate religious plunges into an unknown Lawrence so much wanted."[18] The precipice, the edge of an abyss, is a recurring symbol of the crisis which confronts the characters. The moment demands a decisive response, but there is no guide to a new life: the past is unredeemable, the future inconceivable.

In the opening chapter, "Sisters," a casual, intermittent discussion between Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen about the possibility of marriage is finally silenced by their mutual panic when confronted by a spectre of the future as "a void, a terrifying chasm, as if they had looked over the edge." Behind them is the "obsolete life" that they shun, with its routine work and conventional marriages like their parents', and Ursula is frightened by the depth of her loathing for her home, this "sordid, too-familiar place." Gudrun's particular nightmare is "this amorphous ugliness of a small colliery town in the Midlands."[19] To her artist's eye, it is "'like a country in an underworld. . . . Everything is a

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[17] Scott Sanders, D.H. Lawrence: The World of the Major Novels (London: Vision, 1973), p. 100.

[18] Kermode, pp. 63-64.

[19] Women in Love (London: Heinemann, 1921), pp. 10-11. All further references to this work appear in the text.

ghoulish replica of the real world, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It's like being mad, Ursula'" (p. 11). The fragility of her sense of "the real world" against the threat of this "dark, uncreated, hostile world" makes her feel "as if she were treading in the air, quite unstable, her heart was contracted, as if at any moment she might be precipitated to the ground" (p. 12). This fear counteracts the bravado of her earlier remark that "if one jumps over the edge, one is bound to land somewhere" (p. 10): the somewhere is likely to be this very "uncreated" underworld. Marriage, she had suggested, was "bound to be an experience of some sort," even an undesirable one, but Ursula thought it was "more likely to be the end of experience" (p. 7). Thus the question of marriage introduces into the novel a sense of crisis that expands to include the individual, the society, and the whole human world:

> The very deepest psychic processes and the most intimate personal relations are affected by the social disintegration . . . so that public strife, conflicts within the unconscious and struggles between lovers all seem to be part of the same historical phenomenon.[20]

All the major characters save Ursula are fascinated by this process of disintegration and its attendant beauties and mysteries, but Rupert Birkin, who suffers this mortal illness most consciously, is also its critic and opponent, the bearer of the new consciousness which was promised by Ursula's vision at the end of The Rainbow. He is granted no such vision himself, but is willing to contemplate the end of the human race, trusting to what he calls "the creative mystery" to throw up new forms of life, a new embodiment, in a new way, of "the incomprehensible" (p. 60). In the meantime, only the individual who is able to deny in himself the power of the "social mechanism" and the "old, dead ideals"

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[20] Sanders, p. 105.

(p. 59), has a chance of survival. Despite his despair of humanity, though, Birkin wants something more than a survival like the life of his Bohemian friends who "live only in the gesture of rejection and negation" (p. 61). He wants life to centre somewhere and, given that he has decided to go on living as if the rest of humanity did not exist, the only possible centre appears to be, "seeing there's no God," the "single pure activity of love," the "finality of love." He explains this to his friend, Gerald Crich: "'It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman -- sort of ultimate marriage -- and there isn't anything else'" (p. 59).

It appears that the search for such a relationship is to be the sole positive impulse in this "destructive" novel, fulfilling Lawrence's original intention of writing a book about "the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women."[21] There are, however, three major problems raised by Birkin's formulation of the ideal of "ultimate marriage." First, it cannot be wholly new and "pure" when the man and the woman have been formed by a decadent society to want incompatible things from it. Birkin and Ursula illustrate the problem which Lawrence described in a letter: "The older world is done for, toppling on top of us: . . . it's no use the men looking to the women for salvation, nor the women looking to sensuous satisfaction for their fulfilment. There must be a new world."[22] The possibility that "ultimate marriage" could in itself create such a new world is both suggested and retracted by the action of the novel - and even by Birkin himself. Second, as an integrating

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[21] Letter to Edward Garnett, 18 April 1913, Collected Letters, I, 200.

[22] Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, 7 February 1916, Collected Letters, I, 422.

"centre" for all of life, a substitute for religious faith, such a relationship is bound to crack under the strain of the enormous demands placed upon it: "the finality of love" is a phrase which takes on sinister connotations in the final scenes between Gerald and Gudrun. Third, as Birkin is soon to realize, this "perfect union" cannot be single, self-sustaining, and need not be heterosexual. He wants a similar "eternal conjunction" with Gerald, recognizing his need "to love a man purely and fully" (p. 216). The novel ends with his stubborn insistence on the possibility of "two kinds of love" (p. 508); and there is always his Utopian dream of "freedom together" with Ursula and "a few other people," which will exist not in a locality but in a "perfected relation" (p. 333). With all these qualifications taken into account, however, what is striking about the ideal of personal relationship presented in the novel is its isolation from the rest of society, its potential for saving the individual from the common fate. Such an ideal is symptomatic of the tendency to elevate the self-sufficiency of sexual love relationships which was a major cultural reaction against the emancipation of women into civil society. Viewed in an historical perspective, *Women in Love* is a key text in the literature of this sexual revolution.

## "Ultimate Marriage"

The novel's definition of this ideal emerges from a rejection of the kinds of personal relationship already in existence. The relationship Birkin envisages will have nothing in common with the traditional marriage based on private property, which he scornfully describes as "a sort of tacit hunting in couples: the world all in couples, each couple in its own little house, watching its own little interests, and stewing in its own little privacy. . . . One should never have a *home*"

(p. 372). Traditional family relationships as seen in both the Brangwen and the Crich homes are oppressive and destructive. Will Brangwen's attack on Ursula when she announces her intention to marry Birkin can be seen as the violent, lower-class version of patriarchal power operating in the family institution, a parallel to Mr. Crich's loving oppression of his wife, which breaks her spirit and turns her into a cunning, wolf-like figure who takes her revenge by undermining his power over the children. But, while rejecting the traditional patriarchal family, Lawrence is concerned to resuscitate the marriage relation itself: he rejects altogether the libertarian idea of free love as an alternative to marriage. Birkin scorns it as nothing but a meaningless reaction against legal marriage, "mere promiscuity" (p. 208) - a peculiarly female vice, in his eyes, as he attributes it to the female cat in "Mino." All such relationships in the novel are portrayed as sado-masochistic: Minette and Halliday, Gudrun and Gerald, Hermione and Birkin himself.

In Birkin's view, the forms of personal relationship are less damaging, ultimately, than the values which inform them: conventional marriage expresses the values of private property, possessiveness and _égoisme à deux_, while Bohemian free love is a pretext for sensual and psychological power-struggles. There is a third and, to Birkin, more dangerous alternative in Ursula's offer of loving as an end in itself. It is against this idea that he has to argue most subtly for his conception of "ultimate marriage," of relationship as the means of contacting forces that are "impersonal," beyond the individual self.

The first round in this debate is in "An Island," when Birkin expresses indignation at the hypocrisy of people who "say love is the greatest thing" while acting on its opposite (p. 130). Ursula readily accepts the demolition of this social myth, but she perseveres in her belief in "individual love," against his contention that "love isn't a

desideratum -- it is an emotion you feel or you don't feel, according to circumstance" (p. 133). While this is going on, of course, their undeclared attraction to each other is the strongest argument on Ursula's side, and he subsides with the statement that the word itself has been vulgarized and should be proscribed "till we get a new, better idea" (p. 134). He is better prepared for their next verbal encounter, in "Mino," when he tries to define his "new idea" of a bond beyond the mere emotional relationship of personalities. What he wants is "a strange conjunction . . . not meeting and mingling . . . but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings" (p. 153). His parable of the cats, however, mocks this idea of sexual equality, and so Ursula is quick to see "the old dead morality" in his insistence on unison as a bond that forfeits other possibilities (which he, revealingly, identifies with "all the possibilities of chaos" - (p. 158). That round of their combat ends with an embrace which is, for him, a "submission" to her declaration that "we can only love each other" (p. 160).

Birkin does a lot of solitary thinking before their next encounter, in "Moony." The idea of polarized balance in relationship has acquired a strongly heterosexual emphasis since his self-communings in "Man to Man" about the causal relation between "the process of singling into individuality" and "the great polarization of sex." He imagines the consummation of this historical process:

> There is now to come the new day, when we are beings each of us, fulfilled in difference. The man is pure man, the woman pure woman, they are perfectly polarized . . . each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarized. (p. 210)

The anxiety about pure "uncontaminated" manliness, together with the assertion that "sex" will be subordinate to individuality, indicate what lay behind Birkin's self-contradictions in the previous argument with Ursula. There is a fear of sexual passion as it threatens individuality <u>and</u> as it threatens manliness, a fear explicitly related to his

susceptibility to woman as "the Great Mother . . . to whom everything must finally be rendered up" (p. 209). The two aspects of identity, selfhood and sexuality, are inseparably linked in his scheme, developing with the "world-cycle." Both are aspects of humanity's coming to consciousness, if the terminology of The Rainbow still held good. But in this novel there is a contrary insistence on the unconscious, unwilled, effortless nature of the relationship Birkin wants, a "paradisal un-knowing." This is not ecstasy, he explains, but "I want you not to care about yourself, not to insist -- be glad and sure and indifferent" (p. 263). He wants, evidently, to be so sure of his sexual identity that he need not insist on it, and to be able to take for granted the woman who verifies his maleness. Ursula makes this objection quite convincingly, but by the end of the chapter Lawrence is fully supporting Birkin's paranoid fear of women, in this account of Ursula's consciousness:

> She wanted unspeakable intimacies. She wanted to have him, utterly, finally to have him as her own, oh, so unspeakably in intimacy. To drink him down -- ah, like a life-draught. She made great professions, to herself, of her willingness to warm his foot-soles between her breasts. . . . But only on condition that he, her lover, loved her absolutely, with complete self-abandon. . . . For she believed in an absolute surrender to love. She believed that love far surpassed the individual. He said the individual was more than love, or than any relationship. (p. 278)

This highly schematized conflict is resolved in "Excurse" by Birkin's, not Ursula's, "letting go" of his insistent self-defensiveness. After she has abused him for his "spiritual rottenness," he frets himself into exhaustion and "the terrible knot of consciousness that had persisted there like an obsession was broken. . . . He breathed lightly and regularly like an infant, that breathes innocently, beyond the touch of responsibility" (p. 326). Only then does Ursula see him as "a strange creature from another world," not childlike, as he feels, but godlike, as he would like to be. She feels "neither love nor passion. It was the daughters of men coming back to the sons of God, the strange

inhuman sons of God who are in the beginning" (pp. 329-30). This is the fulfilment of her old fantasy in The Rainbow. He is "something other, something more" than a man to her, and she is "a new marvellous flower," "beyond womanhood," to him (p. 330). Whatever this means, it is clearly not the polarized sexual balance Birkin wanted as an alternative to the incomplete male's immersion in the Great Mother. On the contrary, here and at the time of their marriage, he imagines Ursula as a newborn thing, a child:

> She had the perfect candour of creation, . . . like a radiant, shining flower that moment unfolded in primal blessedness. She was so new. . . . And he was so old, so steeped in heavy memories. . . . He worshipped her as age worships youth, he glories in her . . . . This marriage with her was his resurrection and his life. (p. 390)

This is not love on Ursula's terms, but nor is it even human relationship:

> In the new, superfine bliss, a peace superseding knowledge, there was no I and you, there was only the third, unrealized wonder of existing not as oneself, but in a consummation of my being and of her being in a new one, a new, paradisal unit regained from the duality. How can I say 'I love you,' when I have ceased to be, and you have ceased to be. . . . (pp. 390-91)

The sexual struggle is left behind, in this Platonic state of fusion. There is not even the stellar balance of two single beings. Both individuality and sexual identity are transcended in the "paradisal unit regained from the duality," the duality which, according to Lawrence's historical myth here and in The Rainbow, is the product of the human development of consciousness and individuation. The "ultimate marriage" creates not a third human being but a super-human state; it is not generative but regenerative, religious.

The relationship between Ursula and Birkin is not the stellar marriage of pure male and pure female which he had described to her. It is more like the relationship of worshipper to godhead, the daughter of man to the son of God - obviously not the material for a novelist. Lawrence loses interest in these two, and in later chapters their

"perfect union" seems to involve little more than a rejection of conventional domesticity and a growing anxiety on Ursula's part at the failure of the promised "new worlds" to eventuate. Taking leave of her sister, in "Continental," she parrots Birkin's words: "One has a sort of other self that belongs to a new planet. . . . I believe what we must fulfil comes out of the unknown to us, and it is something infinitely more than love. It isn't so merely human" (pp. 462-63). Meanwhile Birkin's new status is not in evidence: he is a wraith-like figure, witness to Gerald's fatal decline. Only in the very last scene, as he mourns Gerald's death, does it become clear that it was not "something more than love" he wanted, but something more than marriage with a woman. His human identity, his individuality, is still the problem: what he wanted to make his life "complete, really happy," was "eternal union with a man too." Ursula is allowed to have the last word on this: "It's an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity" (p. 507); but the novel shows it to be otherwise. Birkin needs to define his sexual identity, but maleness cannot adequately be defined in relation to femaleness because he -- and Lawrence, in this novel -- can only see the woman as Mother (threatening to engulf the male child) or as Child (worshipping the more-than-human godhead). The woman is not a candidate for the attainment of the uniquely human state of "singleness of being." Maleness might, then, be defined more satisfactorily in its own terms, that is, in relation to another man.

The Myth of Gerald

The argument of love between Birkin and Gerald places Lawrence's problem of identity and relationship in a clearer light. There is no need for the discarded "Prologue" to establish Birkin's strong physical and emotional attraction to the "manly," "soldierly" Gerald (p. 60), although the Prologue does bring his problematic sexual identity into

focus as the great dilemma of his life whereas the novel in its final version refers to this only subliminally and employs Birkin's analytic consciousness centrally on the Dies Irae theme.[23] When Birkin confronts Gerald, as he is later to confront Ursula, with this message of the end of humanity, Gerald's detached response is in marked contrast to her engaged antagonism. He "did not take much notice" of his friend's words, and it was "the rich play of words and quick interchange of feelings he enjoyed," but "he felt himself older, more knowing" (p. 60). He does not share Birkin's faith in the saving grace of marriage, but refuses to argue about it. It appears later that he cannot believe in Birkin because he fears the other's changeability: "I'm never sure of you. You can go away and change as easily as if you had no soul" (p. 215). This chameleon quality is what Hermione hates in Birkin ("He is treacherous," she thinks, "not a man, less than a man," p. 95) and it is indeed a quality seen in the insidious Loerke. Revulsion against such "uncertainty" clearly has a strong component of sexual fear in it. And yet it is a profoundly ambiguous quality, for here it is given a positive "young, animal-like spontaneity of detachment" (p. 216), an image which attributes to Birkin the youthfulness which he, in turn, finds in Ursula. This element of difference, even opposition, between the two men is presented as a valid basis for their need of each other; but the novel insists on Gerald's fatal wariness that prevents him from opening himself to the regenerative possibilities offered by Birkin's love.

Birkin's offer of Blutbrüderschaft is made in much the same terms as his offer to Ursula of "ultimate marriage": "We will swear to stand by each other -- be true to each other -- ultimately -- infallibly -- given to each other, organically -- without possibility of taking back"

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[23] D.H. Lawrence, "Prologue to Women in Love" with introductory note by G.H. Ford, Texas Quarterly, 6 (1963), 92-111.

(p. 216). But Gerald's response is again to avoid either answer or argument, and Birkin sees him with new eyes, "as if fated, doomed, limited . . . to one form of existence, one knowledge, one activity, a sort of fatal halfness" (p. 217). The last phrase recalls Birkin's complaint that "Always a man must be considered as the broken-off fragment of a woman, and the sex was the still aching scar of the laceration. Man must be added on to a woman, before he had any real place or wholeness" (pp. 209-210). Gerald's "fatal halfness" is his complete masculinity, the quality which attracts Birkin so strongly and which, ironically, drives Gerald to a woman to complete himself. It is because of this that Gerald now becomes the novel's tragic protagonist.

The wrestling match in "Gladiatorial," undertaken at Gerald's instigation, leaves Birkin stabilized and fulfilled but Gerald questioning -- at last -- what his fate will be, doubting that he will ever love a woman. His father's dying then becomes a "ghastly wrestling for death in his own soul" and his need for "something to make good the equilibrium" between his outer life of activity and the "great dark void" inside drives him to Gudrun (p. 340). It is clear that he comes to her out of weakness, a failed Christ-figure:

> As the evening of the third day came on, his heart rang with fear. He could not bear another night. Another night was coming on, for another night he was to be suspended in chain of physical life, over the bottomless pit of nothingness. And he could not bear it. He could not bear it. He was frightened deeply, and coldly, frightened in his soul. He did not believe in his own strength any more. He could not fall into this infinite void and rise again. If he fell, he would be gone forever. He must withdraw, he must seek reinforcements. He did not believe in his own single self, any further than this. (p. 356)

Giving up the effort for singleness of being, Gerald turns to Gudrun in the traditional way as the Mother and this makes him, paradoxically, both "a man again, strong and rounded" and also "a child, so soothed and

restored and full of gratitude" (p. 364). This sets the pattern of their relationship, in which neither is fulfilled.

Gerald is shown to be ultimately vulnerable because of his desire for the woman. It is a need which "blasts" him and leaves him "sightless," he tells Birkin (p. 464) - images which reinforce the suggestion of an Oedipal fixation on the Mother. In the following passage, however, there is an odd inversion of psychoanalytic terms: the erect penis is a wound, a flowering wound, implying that phallic sexual desire is always self-destructive:

> This wound, this strange, infinitely-sensitive opening of his soul, where he was exposed, like an open flower, to all the universe, and in which he was given to his complement, the other, the unknown, this wound, this disclosure, this unfolding of his own covering, leaving him incomplete, limited, unfinished, like an open flower under the sky, this was his cruelest joy. Why then should he forgo it? Why should he close up and become impervious, immune, like a partial thing in a sheath, when he had broken forth, like a seed that has germinated, to issue forth in being, embracing the unrealized heavens. (p. 471)

Having "flowered" he cannot become a seed again, "impervious" in its "sheath." The logic of the botanical image points inevitably toward death as the final outcome of his insatiable desire for the woman:

> A strange, deathly yearning carried him along with her. . . . He would never be gone, since in being near her, even, he felt the quickening, the going forth in him, the release, the knowledge of his own limitation and the magic of the promise, as well as the mystery of his own destruction and annihilation. (p. 471)

Incomplete in himself, the male is tragically bound by his desire for the female to the natural cycle of reproduction and death. But such an interpretation of Gerald's death is inadequate because the character of Gudrun is resistant to her assigned place as Magna Mater in this "natural" scheme and, more significantly, because Gerald is shown to have rejected the saving alternative of Birkin's love. The "absence of volition"

which explains this rejection of the male bond that would enable him to "pledge himself to the woman . . . in absolute, mystic marriage" (p. 373) is essential to the characterization of Gerald. He does not want to forgo the joy of his vulnerability in desire: the image of his flower-like wound is a masochistic one, with anal as well as phallic overtones. In his openness, it seems, Gerald has failed to turn toward that saving power which Ursula is supposed to have discovered in Birkin, "from the smitten rock of the man's body, . . . further in mystery than the phallic source" (p. 331).

Gudrun's response to Gerald's undeveloped singleness of being contradicts all Birkin's theory about the sexual voraciousness of woman as Magna Mater. She feels that "like a boy who . . . tears open a bud to see what is in the flower, he tore at her privacy, at her very life" (p. 471) and she hates his coming to her, like a child, for repose: "An infant crying in the night, this Don Juan" (p. 492). Her continued erotic attraction to him is inexplicable except, it has been suggested, as a displacement of the homoerotic attraction of Birkin to Gerald described in the Prologue.[24] She is also fascinated, as Birkin is, by his masculinity in the socially-defined sense of his relation to the world of power and production. When she no longer envies this she can look back and see that

> He was to her the most crucial instance of the existing world, the ne plus ultra of the world of man as it existed for her. In him she knew the world, and had done with it. Knowing him finally she was the Alexander seeking new worlds. But there were no new worlds, there were no more men, there were only creatures, little, ultimate creatures like Loerke. (p. 477)

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[24] Cavitch, p. 67.

Similarly there is envy as well as irony in Birkin's introducing Gerald to his friends as "a soldier, and an explorer, and a Napoleon of industry" (p. 65). With all the power that the social structure confers on his sex and class, Gerald is desirable not only to women but also to the sexually ambivalent and socially alienated man. But in the novel's terms, as set by Birkin, this masculinity is reduced to mere biological maleness, the "fatal halfness" which binds him to the female in the cycle of reproduction and death, unless it is transcended in an "eternal bond" with another man.

Gerald dead is reduced to "the frozen carcase of a dead male" (p. 503). Birkin looks at his face:

> It had a bluish cast. It sent a shaftlike ice through the heart of the living man. Cold, mute, material! Birkin remembered how once Gerald had clutched his hand, with a warm, momentaneous grip of final love. For one second -- then let go again for ever. If he had kept true to that clasp, death would not have mattered. (p. 506)

The absolute certainty that he could have redeemed Gerald from this fate may be seen as a measure of Birkin's own need to connect himself with what the other man represented. That he is for Birkin, as well as for Gudrun, the "last man" is suggested by the sense of finality and representativeness that is created in the account of his death. It is not only a personal tragedy, Birkin's loss of a loved friend, but also the death of masculinity in the known sense, in the old world. The parallel between Gerald's death and the destruction of the old world in the holocaust of war is drawn by Birkin's echoing the Kaiser's words as he cries, "I didn't want it to be like this," over the body (p. 506). Gerald represented the productive and executive power of the male in that world, and there is nothing left for Birkin but his union with a woman, which connects him with natural creativity at the cost of isolating him from the human (that is, male) community.

According to Lawrence's doctrine of sexual duality the withdrawal from the world which Ursula favours is a female tendency, opposed to the male principle of community, the desire for unison with others.[25] Gudrun sees Gerald's "attachment to the rest, the whole" as his great limitation: he was "subject to his necessity, in the last issue, for goodness, for righteousness, for oneness with the ultimate purpose" (p. 478). And Birkin, for all his despair, has in him a "final tolerance," much to Ursula's dismay, which makes him go on "trying to save the world" (pp. 132-33). The sisters, lacking this tragic and sometimes humiliating attachment, are ultimately less than fully human; they are expressions of a femaleness that belongs, in its "healthy" state, to the natural world. They are in this sense more powerful, more sure of their power, than the men; but they are not human subjects, in this scheme of things. In fact, they threaten the male's humanness, that is, his independent "singleness of being" <u>and</u> his impulse toward community with his kind. This accounts for the strong element of a "male alliance" against women which is evident in the relationship which Birkin wants with Gerald, an element pointed out in Kate Millett's study of sexual politics in the novel.[26]

The emotional power invested, through Birkin, in the figure of Gerald and the dangerous attraction of a male bond against women go a long way toward explaining why the apparently central heterosexual relationship becomes a sub-plot to the main tragic action of the novel. The relationship between Ursula and Birkin does not, finally, carry much imaginative weight. In it Lawrence attempts to define an ideal marriage relationship, "ideal" in that it is meant to transcend

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[25] Daleski, pp. 182-84.

[26] Millett, pp. 266-67.

heterosexual "humanity" and vindicate the spiritual primacy of the male. But the novel fails to realize the promised "new relation between men and women" because of Lawrence's failure to imagine a female humanness. The "ultimate marriage" performs an artistic function rather like the opening section of The Rainbow, as a touchstone, an idealized standard against which the real drama is played out.[27] In this novel the real drama is of unfulfilled love between men and their deadly struggle with women in the real, "corrupted" world which they cannot escape.

Birkin's theory of "ultimate marriage" is historically interesting because of its undercurrent of debate with Edward Carpenter's ideas: the criticism of monogamy as "égoisme à deux," the anticipation of the marriage relation opening out to involve both partners in the love of others of their own sex, the insistence that "union" is the prime object of even heterosexual desire and that generation is a secondary result only.[28] Lawrence's specific ideological response to the "New Woman" can be seen in Birkin's revision of the Pygmalion myth whereby the male "gives birth to the female,"[29] so that he can be acknowledged as god-like and can draw strength from her newness without being challenged by her self-created power.

Their relationship illustrates the displacement of Lawrence's emotional identification from Ursula in The Rainbow to Birkin in this novel. The problem of sexual identity and individual independence

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[27] S.L. Goldberg, "The Rainbow: Fiddle-Bow and Sand," Essays in Criticism, II (1961), 420-21.

[28] Emile Delavenay, D.H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition (London: Heinemann, 1971), pp. 91-93.

[29] Millett, p. 264.

has reverted to the male protagonist. Ursula is now a confusing mixture of echoes from the earlier novel of her resilient energy with images of her as a naive child or a newly-opened flower. Just as her symbolic function is narrowed down to that of unconscious natural creativity, so her place in the novel's argument on love reduces her former Romantic aspirations to a stubborn belief in the debased idea of love as sensuous fulfilment. In this respect she has certainly become the New Woman condemned by contemporary moralists for her lack of proper respect for man-made morality, whether that morality be Mrs. Grundy's or Lawrence's own.

Lawrence was the last important male novelist to make a serious and sustained examination of love in terms of the power struggle between men and women. His acute awareness of sexual politics sprang from his sympathy with his mother's opposition to male dominance in the crude form expressed by his working-class father. Eagerly identifying with the only kind of power available to her to combat this, the power of intellect and middle-class "character and refinement,"[30] Lawrence was then confronted with the enormous problem, never fully resolved, of conflicting loyalties in both sexual and social identity. His personal history may explain the centrality in his work of "the amazingly difficult and vital business of human relationship,"[31] but the "difficulty," the depth and urgency of the exploration, was made possible by the vital presence in his life of the "New Women" of his generation. Jessie Chambers, Alice Dax, Helen Corke, Katherine Mansfield, Ottoline Morrell, and above all Frieda von Richthofen, were all in their various ways

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[30] D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Edward Garnett describing Sons and Lovers, 14 November 1912, Collected Letters, I, 160.

[31] Leavis, p. 150.

unmistakably women of their time -- highly intelligent, involved in the political and cultural questions of the day, self-assertive, and subject to deep-seated doubts and debilitating confusions about the direction in which their rebellion against traditional femininity was taking them.

Their representatives in his novels, as Miriam and Clara in Sons and Lovers, Ursula in The Rainbow and Gudrun in Women in Love, have a depth and complexity of being that resists reduction to symbolic or polemical figures. The women themselves, however, at times saw their roles in relation to Lawrence in the light of ideological stereotypes of Worshipper, Muse, Magna Mater, Vampire and so on. Jessie Chambers accepted the reproach of Sons and Lovers that "You are a nun," objecting only to the "dehumanized vehemence with which it was uttered."[32] Alice Dax, in a letter to Frieda, denigrated herself for having been too embittered and confused about sex to have been "the vessel from which D.H. might drink to his joy and well-being."[33] Frieda, with the confidence engendered by her aristocratic and cosmopolitan background, never appears to have accepted the notion that she could fail Lawrence. She seems to have embraced the authority granted to her in the relative role of the Eternal Feminine who represents living and suffering, necessary complement to the "Dynamic Masculine" that produces Art: "There is one triumph for us women, you men can't do things alone. Just as little as we can live alone."[34]

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[32] D.H. Lawrence and "Sons and Lovers": Sources and Criticism, ed. E.W. Tedlock (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 42.

[33] Tedlock, p. 34.

[34] Frieda Lawrence, The Memoirs and Correspondence, ed. E.W. Tedlock, (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 202.

Lawrence gives some indication of the importance of this complementary power in his relationship with Frieda in a letter to W.E. Hopkin: "She is the one possible woman for me, for I must have opposition -- something to fight or I shall go under."[35] It is never finally clear, in the test-relationships dramatized in Women in Love, whether this constructive "opposition" comes from the Eternal Feminine in the woman, or simply from her self-responsibility as a person, her "flame of life." Nor is it ever convincingly demonstrated in the later fiction that, in the sexual power-struggle in marriage, "a woman must yield some sort of precedence to a man, and he must take this precedence." "I believe this," Lawrence continued in this letter to Katherine Mansfield, "but Frieda doesn't. Hence our fight."[36] "The fight" was a necessity for Lawrence, against the psychological danger of "going under." But it was also a central fact of life in a society in transition from Victorian to modern relations between the sexes.

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[35] D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography, ed. Edward Nehls (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), I, 71.

[36] Nehls, I, 480.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE WOMAN QUESTION III: VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

Virginia Woolf confessed in "Notes on D.H. Lawrence" that it was not until 1931 that, moved to discover for herself the major work of this "prophet, the exponent of some mystical theory of sex," she finally came to read Sons and Lovers.[1] Expecting a dogmatic moralist she found, to her pleasure, an exciting and original artist:

> The world of Sons and Lovers is perpetually in process of cohesion and dissolution. . . . Hence whatever we are shown seems to have a moment of its own. Nothing rests secure to be looked at. All is being sucked away by some dissatisfaction, some superior beauty, or desire, or possibility. . . . The whole world - it is a proof of the writer's remarkable strength - is broken and tossed by the magnet of the young man who cannot bring the separate parts into a unity which will satisfy himself. (p. 354)

In this sensitive sketch of the novel's tone one may see a recognition of preoccupations similar to her own; but it was the restlessness that struck her most forcibly, and she suggests that it reflects Lawrence's own dissatisfaction with the working class conditions in which he grew up. He "received a violent impetus from his birth. It set his gaze at an angle from which it took some of its most marked characteristics" (p. 355).

The same could be said of her own work. Having grown up in the most Victorian of middle-class families, she was always aware of how profoundly her life had been affected by the movement towards women's emancipation. But without Lawrence's restlessness, his disregard of the past, she remained haunted by the ghost of the woman she might have been

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[1] Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1966), I, 352. Further references to this work appear in the text of the following paragraph.

had not the doors of the private house been opened, as she put it, and the women of her class emerged from the patriarchal family. To the Lighthouse, dominated by the almost mythic figures of the mother and father, recreates the Stephen family and performs a function similar to Lawrence's Sons and Lovers in delineating the emotional environment that formed the artist and giving it authenticity as an historically representative family. It was with this book in mind that she characterized all her fictions as "elegies":[2] it was the remembrance of things past - in her own life and, by extension, in English social life.

For Virginia Woolf, women's achievement of the right to earn their own livings, their independence from fathers and husbands, was the essence of emancipation: the right to vote was only secondary. "£500 a year and a room of one's own" was, in her famous phrase, the only sound basis upon which a woman could develop the most valuable achievement of all, a mind of her own. Her career as an artist and woman of letters was a conscious and highly disciplined contribution to the efforts of all those women of her time who were, as she assured them in an address to the Women's Service League, "in the process of showing us by your experiments what a woman is."[3] "Experiment" was her motto as an artist, for she wrote as a pioneer exploring the newly liberated zones of the female imagination and consciousness. As a critic, on the other hand, she habitually spoke as the representative of a newly-emerged class, "the common reader." In this persona she presents herself as an outsider, a trespasser on the common ground of literature, until recently closed to those like herself.

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[2] A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (1953; rpt. New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1973), p. 78. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[3] "Professions for Women," in Collected Essays, II, 286.

One of the essays in which this persona is most explicitly presented is "The Leaning Tower," a paper read to the Workers' Educational Association in 1940, which concludes:

> Literature is no one's private ground. . . . Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf - if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and to write, how to preserve, and how to create.[4]

She claims no more common ground between herself, a middle-class woman, and her working-class audience than this, that they all have educated themselves and know the experience of being outsiders, commoners, looking in on what has seemed the exclusive and privileged palace of art.

Her abiding interest in the angle of one's point of view, rather than its content of information and ideas, is the point of connexion between her artistic vision and her political consciousness. The way one experiences life, which is a function of one's place in the social structure, is the basis of individuality: "one" is both an individual consciousness and a representative of some part of human history, "the common life which is the real life, [not] the little separate lives which we lead as individuals."[5]

Woolf's consciousness of herself as a woman writer, her awareness of being a member of the first generation of women at least legally emancipated from patriarchal power, had a vital influence, then, on her work both as artist and as critic. If, however, the course of women's liberation had run smooth after the right to vote and to enter the professions had been gained, she might never have emerged as a polemicist

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[4] Collected Essays, II, 181.

[5] A Room of One's Own (London: Hogarth, 1929), p. 171. All further references to this work appear in the text.

as well. Her two feminist works, A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938), are offered in response to the ideological reaction against women's freedom which marked the years between the wars. They belong with the literature of ideological struggle, a fact to which their combative tone bears witness. The popular image of Woolf as an elitist aesthete shrinking from engagement in public debate is belied by her own delighted report that a review of Three Guineas called her "the most brilliant pamphleteer in England" (A Writer's Diary, p. 284).

A Room of One's Own, 1929

"When you asked me to speak about women and fiction," Virginia Woolf tells her women's college audiences at Newnham and Girton, "I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant":

> They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontes and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs. Gaskell and one would have done. (p. 5)

Having rejected the innocuous survey she might have given, Woolf leads her readers by devious paths to an account of women's writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which is informed by a wise, witty and unmistakably feminist consciousness. The word "feminist" does not cross her lips, but by dint of some apparently irrelevant introductory observations about the meagre dinner of beef and prunes which she was offered at the women's college, "Fernham," and the luxurious luncheon of partridges and wine to which she was invited at the men's college, "Oxbridge," she leads up to questions of "the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer" (p. 37).

Again, looking at the Elizabethan age, she brings up the "perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (p. 62). Imagining what fate would have befallen Shakespeare's hypothetical sister had she tried, with the same gift, to follow in his footsteps, Woolf concludes that she would have been destroyed: "All the conditions of her life, all her own instincts, were hostile to the state of mind which is needed to set free whatever is in the brain" (p. 77). A definition of that "state of mind most propitious to the act of creation," and the recently-won possibilities for women, too, to achieve it, are the central subjects of this essay on women and fiction. Constructive and optimistic suggestions about the future of women's writing emerge only in the context of a feminist critique of their past and present situation: many conditions of women's freedom remain to be fulfilled before they can be poets. The essay concludes:

> For my belief is that if we live another century or so - I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals - and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton's bogy, for no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. . . . I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while. (pp. 171-72)

What makes this essay so exciting for women to read - and so acceptable, it seems, to men - is that it has such a clear and unassailable sense of the value of women's liberation. Simply, women are becoming

free to create great works of the imagination, to write poetry. But when political and economic upheavals threatened that hard-won freedom, the clear intensity of Woolf's feminist vision was lost. Three Guineas is a measure of that loss, for there she expresses radical doubts about the social structure nurturing the culture which, in the earlier essay, was seen as women's rightful inheritance. "Whereas A Room of One's Own is a book about money, sex, and culture, Three Guineas is a book about money, sex, and power."[6]

In A Room, then, her subject is the mind of the writer. Her audience is ostensibly made up of the women at Girton and Newnham ("Fernham") and her persona is that of the visiting lecturer, Mary Beton, named after the adventurous aunt from whom she inherited the £500 a year that gave her a room of her own; other characters in the lecture are Mary Seton, a Fernham scholar, and Mary Carmichael, the young author of a new novel called Life's Adventure. With such an audience and such fictional companions, Woolf's wit is playful rather than ironic, conspiratorial rather than distancing. It reveals patriarchal attitudes as anachronistic - intrusive, but no longer destructive. Even so, there are times when an undercurrent of anger ruffles the poise of her tone; for example:

> That cupboard there - you say it holds clean table-napkins only; but what if Sir Archibald Bodkin were concealed among them? Let me then adopt a sterner tone. Have I, in the preceding words, conveyed to you sufficiently the warnings and reprobation of mankind? I have told you the very low opinion in which you were held by Mr. Oscar Browning. I have indicated what Napoleon once thought of you and what Mussolini thinks now. Then, in case any of you aspire to fiction, I have copied out for your benefit the advice of the critic about courageously acknowledging the limitations of your sex. I have referred to Professor X and given prominence to his statement that women are intellectually, morally and physically inferior to men. . . . How can I further encourage you to go about the business of life? (p. 108)

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[6] Lillian S. Robinson, "Who's Afraid of a Room of One's Own?" in The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays in the Teaching of English, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (1970; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1973), p.401.

A major reason for this occasional uncertainty of tone would have been Woolf's desire to keep the sympathy of an audience indifferent to, if not mistrustful of, the feminist point of view. Several feminists writing in the thirties noted that the young women of the postwar generation felt no call to concern themselves about the position of their sex, and could scarcely believe that public debate had raged over the question of whether women could claim to be fully-fledged members of civil society.[7] This is the audience, Woolf is aware, whose imagination she must fire.

Modestly, she confesses at the outset that the question of women and fiction is too large for her:

> All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point - a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. (p. 6)

The chapters which follow demonstrate that human nature and creative imagination are constantly changing in response to historical changes in the material and ideological conditions that shape them. They demonstrate, too, that no answer to the problem of woman's nature will be found until women themselves are free to examine it, until they have leisure and a room where they can shut themselves away from the sound of hectoring voices telling them what they are and are not, and develop minds of their own.

When she takes her questions about women and fiction to the British Museum, she finds a confusing abundance of opinion on "the true nature of women." "Have you any notion," she asks her audience, "how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion

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[7] Mary Agnes Hamilton, "Changes in Social Life" in Our Freedom and Its Results, ed. Ray Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1936), pp. 238-41.

how many are written by men?" The subject of sex ("women, that is to say," she slyly adds) attracts not only doctors and biologists but all kinds of men who "have no apparent qualification save that they are not women" (pp. 40-41). In all this mass of paper she finds, not answers, but a new problem: Why are these men so angry? Why do they insist on the inferiority of women? It is obvious to her that society is a patriarchy, its power and wealth in the hands of men; but confidence, she suggests, is as necessary as wealth and power in the arduous struggle of life:

> Hence the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself. It must indeed be one of the chief sources of his power. . . . Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. . . . That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men. And it serves to explain how restless they are under her criticism. . . . For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. (pp. 54-55)

The clash between women's newly-acquired freedom to tell the truth and men's angry reaction to it explains why "no age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own" (p. 149). Little wonder that the young women at Fernham will have nothing to do with "all this pitting of sex against sex, . . . all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority" (p. 159). But Woolf has led them, tactfully and firmly, to see that whether they like it or not this conflict is a determining influence on their lives. She reminds them that they may find themselves angered, as she was, by the professors' misogyny, and that unless they can understand and control that anger they too will write their scholarly studies "in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth" (p. 49). Or as artists they will allow themselves to be distracted by the shouts of warning and advice:

> You can't do this and you shan't do that! Fellows and scholars only allowed on the grass! Ladies not admitted without a letter of introduction! Aspiring and graceful female novelists this way! So they kept at her like the crowd at a fence on the race-course, and it was her trial to take her fence without looking to right or to left. If you stop to curse you are lost, I said to her; equally, if you stop to laugh. (p. 141)

The essay ends, as "the pressure of convention decrees," with a peroration which succinctly contradicts this plethora of masculine advice:

> When I rummage in my own mind I find no noble sentiments about being companions and equals and influencing the world to higher ends. I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else. Do not dream of influencing other people, I would say, if I knew how to make it sound exalted. Think of things in themselves. (p. 167)

Freedom to "think of things in themselves" is only possible when the mind is unimpeded by the anger and fear aroused by accusations of female inferiority; but Woolf adds a sly reminder that flattering exhortations to "influence the world to higher ends" as the companions of men also deny women's freedom to work out their own independent destinies. "It is much more important to be oneself than anything else. Do not dream of influencing other people. . . ." Mildly but decisively, she rejects the only positive role offered to women by nineteenth-century patriarchal ideology, that of the Angel in the House, of Ruskin's Queens. As a feminist she is not interested in negotiating offers of "separate but equal" complementary roles for women. Nor is she attracted by the notion of a merger: "It would be a thousand pities" if women became identical with men, "for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?" (p. 132). Both of these alternatives define woman's destiny in subordinate relation to patriarchal culture, but her basic argument, here as in Three Guineas, is that women, for the first time materially independent, may now choose the direction of their own development in

relation to "the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women" (p. 172).

The admonition against attempting to influence others also reflects Woolf's belief that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (pp. 156-57). "Sex-consciousness" is an obstacle that blocks the flow of creative energy and prevents the mind from attaining that state of incandescence which was the source of Shakespeare's genius, where

> All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance was fired out of him and consumed. Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded. If ever a human being got his work expressed completely, it was Shakespeare. (p. 86)

The Ideal Poem which exists in the mind can only be brought to complete expression by the unimpeded flow of creative energy through a mind free of any "personal" emotion. The creative moment is one of "unconsciousness" in the sense that the mind is free of self-consciousness of any kind; as Woolf describes it, it is a state comparable to what Keats called "negative capability." Later, in "The Leaning Tower," an essay on the writers of the thirties, she likened it to Wordsworth's "recollection in tranquillity" and described it as a fusion of the surface mind and the inner mind - a creative state impossible for writers like Auden and Isherwood whose class-consciousness kept their surface minds too hard at work for the inner, unconscious mind to be freed. Instead of this telescoping of the inner and surface minds, the image of creative fusion employed in _A Room_ is, appropriately, sexual:

> It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; . . . for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death. It ceases to be fertilized . . .; it cannot grow in the minds of others. Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace. (pp. 156-57)

The marriage metaphor here is naturalistic rather than Platonic: creative energy is identified with Eros, bringing about the fertilization of female and male in the mind. Thus the creative state of mind is signified by two different images, this naturalistic, sexual fusion and the "miraculous" pure singleness of purpose achieved by Shakespeare.

The implicit contradiction between these two images is present in Woolf's discussion of the androgynous mind. She introduces this idea by describing the sight of a young woman and a young man approaching from opposite sides of the street and entering a taxi together, and goes on:

> When I saw the couple get into the taxi-cab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to cooperate. . . . But the sight . . . and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female. . . . The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. . . . Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. (pp. 147-48)

The existence of "two sexes in the body," as proposed by Freud, is a matter of potential rather than actuality. In the usual course of human psychological development, as he described it, this bisexual potential is inevitably denied, for the formation of clearly-defined male and female identity is essential to culture as we know it.[8] If Woolf's mind/body analogy is just, then the androgynous mind must indeed be, as Coleridge said, exceptional. It must be able to regain

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[8] Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 42-52.

some original undivided state that might correspond to the polymorphous sexuality of the infant. It is a mind, "resonant and porous," that "transmits emotion without impediment," that is "naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided" (p.148). But the androgynous fusion that Woolf has in mind is also "the normal and comfortable state of being." It is, then, both an ideal state of mind more easily attainable in ages other than this present "stridently sex-conscious" one and a "natural" state corresponding to sexual union.

The notion of the androgynous mind has caught the imagination of Woolf's readers, notably at times of intensified awareness of the conflict between the sexes - when A Room was first published and again since the second wave of the feminist movement began in the mid-sixties. Because it emerges from a condemnation of sexual conflict, the idea of androgyny is seized upon as the ultimate resolution of that conflict, an ideal state of human being that is also a return to the "natural" harmony of male and female.[9] But it is too neatly symmetrical to answer properly to Woolf's own political account of the sexual conflict as women struggle against the oppressive power of the patriarchy. The androgynous ideal presupposes conflict between equal and opposite forces, which are characterized in patriarchal mythologies as the natural dualism of male/ female, light/dark, good/evil and so on. Because it inevitably draws upon this traditional dualism, Woolf's account of the androgynous mind lacks cogency as a possible solution to the problem of conflict between the sexes and its effect on the mind of the writer. But it is so vaguely

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[9] The concept of androgyny is as old as recorded history in many cultures: Hindu, Greek, Egyptian and Jewish mythology include such figures as Shiva-Shakti, Eros, Isis-Net and Lilith-Adam; Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating (New York: Dutton, 1974), pp. 168-71.

inclusive an idea that its interpretation by recent critics varies greatly.[10] Marder and Bazin tend to accept the traditional division between male and female and to elevate the neglected feminine qualities, such as intuition, to the status of transcendent values. On the other hand Heilbrun, who is more attentive to the feminist context of Woolf's vision of androgyny, stresses its unifying significance to the exclusion of the political insights of her feminism and the emotional complexities of her art. There is some basis in Woolf's work for both lines of interpretation, and both have important implications for the reading of the novels; but neither line recognises that the freedom of women and the assertion of their values "may actually involve pain and dread, and hence active resistance, on the part of men."[11]

It is worth recalling at this point that androgyny is proposed, in A Room, as a solution to the particular problem of the divided consciousness of the writer; it is a concept of form rather than content, a free state of "unconsciousness," not a system of values. When Woolf re-examined this problem in relation to the class-conscious writers of the thirties, she could only envisage its solution as the destruction of class barriers by gradual social revolution, implying that the mind could be truly free only in a free society. And when she came to re-examine the problem of sex-consciousness, in Three Guineas, she could reach no such optimistic conclusion about the imminent harmony of the sexes: world peace and social harmony could be gained only by struggle,

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[10] Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art: A study of Virginia Woolf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1973); Carolyn Heilbrun, Towards Androgyny: Aspects of Male and Female in Literature (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973).

[11] Adrienne Rich, "The Kingdom of the Fathers," Partisan Review, 43 (1976), 31.

albeit non-violent struggle. It was consistent with her general philosophical position that she should have proposed, in A Room, a revolution in consciousness as the first condition for the feminist revolution which, she was well aware, had to involve economic and political changes as well, for "intellectual freedom depends upon material things" (pp. 162-63). Even so, her historical imagination and her vivid sense of the tradition of women writers to which she belonged control the tendency to idealize the androgynous mind in the past or to declare its advent in the immediate present.

Reviews of A Room of One's Own showed little hostility to its point of view and reflected relief that the period of feminist militancy and sex antagonism seemed to be over. Arnold Bennett declared that it was not feminist because it showed no partisan interest in drawing conclusions about "the disparateness of men and women."[12] Vita Sackville-West declared: "Mrs. Woolf is too sensible to be a feminist. There is no such thing as a masculinist, she seems to say, so why a feminist?"[13] The T.L.S. reviewer praised her introduction of Coleridge's concept of the androgynous mind as a good antidote to "those divisions of sex-consciousness which are disastrous to our age."[14] And M.E. Kelsey, in a long article which related A Room. . . to Woolf's previous fiction, also expressed relief that "Mrs. Woolf's attitude is far from the polemics of traditional Feminism. From the ashes of those bitter conflicts has arisen a new conception of the whole problem," that is,

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12 "Queen of the High-Brows," Evening Standard, 28 November 1929, p. 9; rpt. in Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage, ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 259-60.

13 Review, Listener, 6 November 1929, p. 620; rpt. in Majumdar, p. 258.

14 Unsigned review, "Women and Books," Times Literary Supplement, 31 October 1929, p. 867; rpt. in Majumdar, p. 256.

the interdependence of male and female qualities in the mind.[15] In 1929, then, for literary intellectuals the meaning of "feminism" was purely ideological, without relation to any social and political movement, and the word's associations of sex antagonism aroused feelings of distaste for past conflicts. But their eager interest in speculation about the sexual components of the "androgynous mind" prefigured the hardening, during the thirties, of a renewed sexist ideology of innate and unchangeable differences which appealed for its justification to modern psychology rather than, as in the nineteenth century, to traditional morality.

The enormous spread of interest in psychological analysis and its application to political, social and sexual behaviour marks the intellectual life of the whole period. Popular psychology made free use of both Freudian psychoanalytic concepts and the Behaviourist theory of instincts, and both proved amenable to traditional sexist ideology, as the antifeminist reaction showed. As Woolf pointed out in Three Guineas, patriarchal ideology has always fallen back on "Nature," omniscient and unchanging, to justify the oppression of women. Now, it seemed, psychology had discovered at the root of all human character and behaviour the "sex instinct," which was generally taken to involve "a gulf of sexual difference. . . . Woman remains a 'mystery,' man an inscrutable 'power' . . . ," wrote Winifred Holtby in 1934. The role of woman, consequently, was now not so much a matter of the moral duty to sacrifice herself to husband, family and society but rather it was held to be her female subconscious that forced her to forgo every other avenue of fulfilment but the sexual satisfaction to be gained by her submission

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15 "Virginia Woolf and the She-Condition," Sewanee Review, October-December 1931, 425-44; rpt. in Majumdar, p. 260.

to marriage and motherhood. Regarding this revamped appeal to "womanhood" as an aspect of the rejection of reason, Holtby was inclined to dismiss "the whole force of the Freudian revelation, the 'modern' morality and the fashionable insistence upon nerves rather than reasons."[16] But unless, like her, the woman writing in defence of her sex denied that there was any value in the "Freudian revelation," she had to make some answer in kind to these arguments.

At the end of Three Guineas Virginia Woolf traces contemporary patriarchal attitudes back to the apparently irreducible conflict between men's desire to dominate and women's fear of their power. It is a significant indication of the state of sexual politics at the time at many reviews of the book assumed that she was proposing the innate moral superiority of women. Accepting the notion of instinctive, biologically-determined male domination, the reviewers hastened to remind their readers of the domineering possessiveness shown by women in the family.[17] Against this new psychological theory of the sexes, Woolf could only reply that very little is known about the human mind, and suggest that arguments based on the assumption that there is a biological basis for the "inferiority" of women are in fact forms of special pleading which conceal their emotional impetus of hate and fear, which originate in the unconscious mind. She appears to have accepted the essence of Freud's theory that the unconscious is the source of these powerful negative emotions, which have their origin in sexual feelings; but she had by no means accepted the popularized interpretation of his notorious dictum that "anatomy is destiny," that women were fated to remain the "second sex."[18]

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[16] Winifred Holtby, Women: and a Changing Civilization (London: Lane, 1934), pp. 161-62.

[17] Majumdar, pp. 400-19 passim.

[18] The Hogarth Press began in 1924 an association with Freud (cont.)

During the twenties and thirties there was a swelling chorus of accusations that women had failed to justify their emancipation into the public world. The feminist movement within which Woolf was writing was again placed on the defensive. In fact, in the two decades between the wars the whole fabric of British society was strained by economic boom and depression, by challenges to the traditional enclaves of state power, by far-reaching social changes among which the legal emancipation of women was only one of many factors. A brief survey of some changes affecting women will suffice to show why Woolf, like other feminists during this period, moved further into a defensive position on the Woman Question.

## "Women Have Failed:" 1919-1939

Virginia Woolf noted in her diary in 1932 that her mind was set running on the book that was to become *Three Guineas* when she read "*Wells on Woman* - how she must be ancillary and decorative in the world of the future, because she has been tried, in 10 years, and has not proved anything" (*A Writer's Diary*, p. 174).

The claim that women, once enfranchised, would regenerate a corrupt and warlike society by the exercise of their special virtues had indeed been made by some feminists in the heat of the suffrage struggle. After the war, however, as Sylvia Pankhurst recorded:

> Awed and humbled by the great catastrophe, and by the huge economic problems it had thrown into prominence, the women of the Suffrage movement had learned that social regeneration is a long and mighty work. The profound divergences of opinion on war and peace had been known to know no sex.[19]

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which led eventually to the publication of the standard English edition of his works, so that one might expect Virginia Woolf to have been familiar with his ideas.

[19] *The Suffragette Movement* (London: Longmans, 1931), p. 608.

At the same time, as Winifred Holtby recalled in 1934, there were high hopes that the work of social reconstruction would soon "build a brave new world upon the ruins of catastrophe":

> Old hampering conventions had broken down; superstitions were destroyed; the young had come into their kingdom. It was under the influence of this optimism that young women cherished ambitions for the wider exercise of their individual powers, and saw no limit to the kind and quality of service which they might offer to the community.[20]

The opening of the professions appeared to educated middle-class women like Holtby to be a great triumph, although in fact the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 had limited powers. It provided only that no woman should be disqualified by sex or marital status from the exercise of any public function. There was no obligation imposed, even on the Civil Service, to employ women on equal terms with men. The provision about marriage did not even stand in the courts, when the High Court refused the claim of women teachers to continue their employment after marriage. In the Civil Service the long legal battle for equality began under conditions particularly adverse to the women's cause, with recently demobilized men demanding the jobs in which women had been temporarily employed during the war. In 1936 Ray Strachey wrote that women had finally gained equal right of entry and promotion in the Civil Service, although "they do not, as yet, get the same pay, and they are normally dismissed if they marry." She was confident that it was because of the franchise, the women's movement having the House of Commons behind them in this struggle, that the Civil Service turned out to be the "storm centre" of postwar adjustments in women's labour.[21]

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[20] Holtby, p. 114.

[21] "Changes in Employment" in Strachey, pp. 135-6.

But the majority of women remained unaffected by these reforms. When the soldiers were demobbed, the women withdrew. They had performed well in the full range of skilled and unskilled jobs -- the Press had been loud in their praises -- and had earned higher wages than ever before, although these were still below the male rates for the jobs. Because of agreements reached with the unions in the early years of the war, however, employers were obliged to give up this cheap, hard-working and co-operative labour force. "Hundreds of thousands" of working women, according to Strachey, "fell into unemployment, into misery."[22] Many were forced to return to the drudgery and exploitation of domestic service: the numbers of women so employed increased by 200,000 in the years between 1921 and 1931.[23] In areas such as clerical and shop work, where the unions had been less well organized to protect men's jobs, women workers were retained but their wages depressed.

Although the economic boom and the development of new light engineering and chemical industries had created a demand for the cheap, non-unionized labour of women, the slump brought about a resurgence of antagonism between men and women workers. According to Holtby, "after 1928, jobs became . . . privileges to be reserved for potential bread-winners and fathers of families. Women were commanded to go back to the home." She also records that in November, 1933, a mass meeting of women's organizations was held at Westminster to proclaim the right of married women to paid employment, which "echoed faintly but unmistakably the spirit of pre-war suffrage meetings."[24] But the women's demands for

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[22] Strachey, p. 129.

[23] Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It (London: Pluto, 1973), p. 130.

[24] Holtby, pp. 112-13.

equal pay had no chance of success during the Depression. The majority of women in employment were not even unionized, and discriminatory practices in the payment of unemployment benefits forced many to accept wages as low as £1 a week. The trade unions ignored this exploitation, or acted "to drive women out of industry altogether," claimed a female contributor to The Communist in 1927; she pointed out that "agreements between unions and employers have been made to ensure that women shall be employed on certain operations only - these operations being invariably the worst paid."[25] In this antagonism to the employment of women, the male unionists were continuing the line they had always taken, not recognising that the existence of a "reserve army" of female labour was (and remains) a feature of the capitalist labour market which can be used to undermine the power of any union that fails to recruit women workers and ignores their real problems. Looking back on the thirties Margaret Bondfield M.P. analysed this situation with typical Labour Party pragmatism, her tone of mild exasperation suggesting that she had done this many times before for the benefit of male colleagues in the union movement:

> Low wages for men mean poverty in the home, and more women and young people driven by sheer need into work suitable or unsuitable, often against their best interests, or prematurely in order to secure a bare standard of life. This in turn intensifies the competition for jobs in the labour market, and aggravates the trouble. The vicious circle is complete. . . . In trade board rates, in Joint Industrial Council scales and in Trade Union agreements it is rare to find price fixing on the work basis only. . . . Let the price be fixed for the job, and then I believe we should find two thirds of the trouble about the unfair competition of women's labour with men's labour would disappear.[26]

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[25] Quoted in Rowbotham, p. 132.

[26] A Life's Work (London: Hutchinson, 1949), pp. 329-30.

The severe economic crisis, in which the conflict appeared to be between male and female workers instead of between the forces of labour and capital, provided the basis for the virulent anti-feminism that found expression in so many areas during the period. This reaction was particularly hard to bear for feminists dedicated to solidarity with the socialist movement. Hannah Mitchell, a lifelong member of the Independent Labour Party and one of the first to join the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union in the early nineteen-hundreds, served on the Manchester City Council from 1924 to 1935. She recorded that:

> One of the first things I sensed in public life was the strong undercurrent of anti-feminism which pervades most public bodies. The Labour Party itself was only lukewarm on such matters as 'equal pay', while on the employment of married women most of them were definitely reactionary. But they dressed up their objections, either by admirable sentiments about the 'domestic hearth' with 'mother's influence' thrown in as a tear-raiser, or else they went all Marxian and stressed the bad economics of two incomes going into one home, while men with a capital M were unemployed. Whichever reason was given, the results were the same when the vote was taken.[27]

Cicely Hamilton, a former Suffragette, noted among the anti-feminist tendencies of the time that "in the eyes of certain modern statesmen women are . . . the reproductive faculty personified, which means that they are back at the secondary existence, counting only as 'normal' women, as wives and mothers of sons."[28] The "back to the home" directive was a response not only to unemployment but also to the declining birthrate in Britain, which reached its lowest point in 1933:

> The low birthrate produced an 'underpopulation' scare. Behind this was the fear that the middle classes would be swamped by the higher birth rate among the poor and unemployed. The poor were making themselves visible in the national hunger marches which started in 1932. . . . There was also the fear that the white races would be over-run by the blacks. Nationalist movements in the

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[27] The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel, ed. Geoffrey Mitchell (London: Faber, 1968), p. 217.

[28] Life Errant (London: Dent, 1935), p. 251.

> British colonies made politicians afraid for the safety of the Empire. In 1935 Neville Chamberlain was muttering about the time when 'the British Empire will be crying out for more citizens of the right breed, and when we in this country shall not be able to supply the demand.'[29]

Despite such talk as this, there had been no significant improvement since the war in maternal provision and child care except for the passing of the Maternity and Child Welfare Act in 1919 which provided for the advice, treatment and social assistance for pregnant women for which the Women's Co-operative Guild had been agitating for some time. The Guild also believed women should have access to information about contraception, but this was not allowed under the scheme. The "underpopulation" scare no doubt strengthened opposition to the birth control movement in the twenties: the prosecution's case against the publishers of Margaret Sanger's Family Limitation in 1922 included the statement that "birth control was a danger to the race and against nature's law."

The birth control movement now brought together feminists and socialists as well as Malthusians and eugenicists, but an energetic lobby within the Labour movement called itself the Workers' Birth Control Group so as to underline its rejection of the eugenicist notion that the working class was "inferior stock." When their request to the Ministry of Health to allow birth control advice to be given at welfare centres was refused, they took it to the Labour Women's Conference in 1924. There they gained overwhelming support for an addendum to this effect made to a general resolution demanding paid maternity leave, improvement of maternity care and some form of payment to non-working mothers. But the Labour Party still would not accept birth control as a political issue. At the time controversy over women's rights to sexual pleasure

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29 Rowbotham, p. 144; the following discussion is indebted to Rowbotham's study of the period.

and autonomy was raging as Marie Stopes took from court to court her libel suit against Dr. Halliday Sutherland, who had attacked her birth control clinics and her books, Married Love and Wise Parenthood. Members of the Workers' Birth Control Group like Dora Russell and Stella Browne held radical views on women's right to sexual freedom outside of marriage and to abortion on demand, but in their public campaign the Group emphasized the health needs of working-class women. Dora Russell was reported in the Press as saying:

> Rich women are able to obtain the information from Harley Street. . . . Surely a woman who has had 15 confinements, or a tubercular mother who cannot bear healthy children, should have that same advice. The matter is one of public health, and must not be left to quacks, abortionists and non-medical people. Help should be given and given now.[30]

She discovered that the maternal death rate in some industrial towns was as high as nine per thousand births, and coined the slogan: "It is four times as dangerous to bear a child as to work in a mine, and mining is men's most dangerous trade." Significantly, it was almost a decade before the final report of the Committee on Maternal Mortality and Morbidity was published and the Women's Health Enquiry set up. Reforms of this nature always have to wait upon the "national interest," it seems. It was twenty years before the campaign for a mothers' allowance bore fruit, and the Family Allowances Act of 1945 coincided with the return of women to the home at the end of their wartime employment.

Welfare campaigns of this nature, complicated by the current class conflict, raised difficult problems for the women's movement. The feminist advocates of birth control were met with suspicion on the part of working-class men familiar with the old eugenicist arguments and the patriotic calls to the middle class to breed faster. In fact, the

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[30] Dora Russell, The Tamarisk Tree: My Quest for Liberty and Love (London: Elek-Pemberton, 1975), p. 173.

underpopulation scare was used in the mid-thirties as an argument in favour of the mothers' allowance by its most energetic feminist advocate, Eleanor Rathbone, M.P. Parents are on strike and the population of Great Britain is shrinking, she wrote: "The plaint of the recruiting sergeant and the echoes of marching feet abroad do not tend to reassurance."[31] Yet socialist women were well aware that if such allowances were introduced in conditions unfavourable to the working-class movement they could be used to keep men's wages down and to reinforce the discrimination against women in employment. On the other hand, these women were committed to bringing "women's issues" such as birth control, maternity, child care and housework into the political arena. And these issues were new to feminism. Dora Russell reports that her awareness of the powerless position of the working-class mother, dependent on her man's income and on the patronizing help of clinics and health visitors, raised disturbing questions:

> Feminist indeed, I began to wonder if the feminists had not been running away from the central issue of women's emancipation. Would women ever be truly free and equal with men until we had liberated mothers? Demanding equality and the vote, women in the Labour movement had argued that there should now be no distinction between men's and women's questions, a view which I had more or less accepted until I came up against this issue of maternity. What rights had the working class mother?[32]

Eleanor Rathbone saw the women who were active politically as divided into two groups, the "new feminists" like herself, demanding the recognition of housework and childcare as work vital to society, and the "old feminists" who could not admit that women had needs not shared by men

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[31] "Changes in Public Life" in Strachey, p. 68.

[32] Russell, p. 175.

and stuck to equal-rights issues, resenting what was in her opinion the "small differentiation" between men's and women's wages.[33]

Here, then, were conflicts among feminists themselves which contributed to the loss of power and solidarity in the postwar women's movement, its goals dispersed and its groups isolated from each other. "Feminism meant more reforms, more welfare, equal pay. It did not mean any longer a rejection of a man-made way of living and a man-made way of seeing," writes Sheila Rowbotham in her recent study of the period:

> Reasonable, constitutional, liberal feminism was, like the women in the Labour Party, incapable of understanding the changes in the structure of women's work, the embryonic market of household consumer durables and the cosmetics industry, the duality in welfare which meant every reform came as part of the consolidation and growth of the bourgeois male-dominated state and could be contained within a structure women could not control. They had no political weapons with which they could counter . . . those passionate natural women whom Lawrence moulded out of his fears of feminism. They were wary of thinking in terms of defining their own sexuality, because of their dismissal of sex. They were also too suspicious of working-class men to understand the contradictory pull of class and sex antagonism for working class women. In the 1930s some feminists opposed all industrial protection for women - on the grounds that this was responsible for discrimination. This ignored the position of women in the family and exposed women workers to greater exploitation.[34]

Women had not "failed," but the women's movement disintegrated under the pressure of objective circumstances of war and depression, which feminist theory was inadequate to analyze and feminist practice was powerless to deal with. The struggle for the vote had "imposed a spurious unity," ignoring class differences among women;[35] but this was

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[33] Strachey, p. 61.

[34] Rowbotham, pp. 162-63.

[35] William O'Neill, The Woman Movement: Feminism in the United States and England (London: Allen and Unwin, and New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), p. 93.

understood by most feminists. More importantly, while the suffrage struggle went on, the feminist analysis of women's position was halted, and they were left afterwards with only the spurious simplicity of a liberal demand for equal rights, which offered no explanation of the economic structure, sexuality, and ideology in general.

"Feminism" was in disrepute, and Virginia Woolf's Three Guineas is the work of a feminist with her back to the wall. She makes no claim to analyse the situation of working class women, or of women as mothers, or female sexuality, but sticks to her central argument that "the daughters of educated men" are still in no position to affect the course of public affairs. She even rejects the word "feminist" because it means "one who champions the rights of women" and "since the only right, the right to earn a living, has been won, the word no longer has a meaning."[36] She means that in public politics there ought to be no "women's issues" but "men and women working together for the same cause," the fight against tyranny (p. 185).[37] With respect to the situation of the women for whom she can claim to speak, middle class professional women, the major issue left in sexual politics was the psychological change necessary for men to overcome their "infantile fixation" of possessiveness and domination, and for women to overcome their internalized fear of patriarchal power.

Her argument indicates the limitations of a liberal feminism which, without analysing the economic and political bases of women's oppression,

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[36] Three Guineas (London: Hogarth, 1938), p. 184. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[37] Ethel Mannin, Women and the Revolution (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938) makes a comparable appeal to all women to choose between fascism and social revolution, seeing no need for a feminist movement as such.

expected that attitudes would change quickly as a result of legal reforms. Women like herself who had hoped that they could do whatever they wished and be accepted as men's equals were now dismayed to find themselves being forced by the anti-feminist reaction to justify their actions, to take up a defensive position and find weapons for that self-defence. Winifred Holtby confessed to feeling this unease in the face of so many antagonistic public utterances about women, and quoted a letter she had received from a woman whose young daughter was for the first time feeling the need to "defend her status":

> She finds men whose outlook she respects beginning to talk of what women should and should not do, and inclined to stress their value as women in a more restricted sphere than men. . . . The effect on her is expressed by a reluctant admission that though she has never thought of herself as a militant feminist, and would 'hate to be,' she feels a militant and protesting spirit rising within her: and this seems to me a deplorable setback.[38]

The older woman's distress at her daughter's "protesting spirit" indicates as much a rejection of her own generation's militant past as disillusionment with the male reaction against women's freedom.

Women's rejection of feminism is evident in a particularly damning review of Three Guineas published in Scrutiny by Q.D. Leavis. She called it a "release of sex hostility" which was "self-indulgent".

> /I/t provides Mrs. Woolf with a self-righteous glow at the cost of furnishing an easy target for unsympathetic males, and at the still greater cost of embarrassing those women who are aware that the only chance of their getting accepted as intellectual equals by intelligent men (and so ultimately by the men who run the institutions and professions) is by living down their sex's reputation for having in general minds as ill-regulated as Mrs. Woolf's is here seen to be.[39]

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[38] Holtby, p. 6.

[39] Scrutiny, September 1938, pp. 203-14; rpt. in Majumdar, pp. 411-12. Further references to this work appear in the text of the following paragraph.

Q.D. Leavis stipulated that only the exceptional woman, "capable of justifying her existence in any walk of life" and with "an at least masculine" sense of responsibility and capacity for self-criticism, should be allowed to advocate equality of opportunity for the sexes (p. 414). With reference to Woolf's aside about the need for a mothers' wage, she ridiculed the idea that women should be relieved of sole responsibility for housekeeping and child-rearing, either by their husbands or by the state (pp. 416-17). In her view, women were to keep the wheels of domestic life running smoothly and should attempt to "justify their existence in any walk of life" only if they were exceptional enough to reach the masculine standards against which their sex had been tried and found wanting. The fear of male disapproval expressed here is combined with fear of radical social change:

> The position then with regard to further female emancipation seems to be that the onus is on women to prove that they are going to be able to justify it, and that it will not vitally dislocate (what it has already seriously disturbed - and no responsible person can regard that without uneasiness) the framework of our culture. (p. 417)

The statement just quoted is no more than a carefully and "responsibly" worded version of the accusation that women had failed, the object of Woolf's criticism in Three Guineas. "Send the women back home" was the catch-cry, but the call to preserve "the framework of our culture" - traditional relations between the sexes within the family and between the family and the social structure of work and community - provided its ideological underpinning.

Feminists writing in the thirties all contended that, on the contrary, the real threat of dislocation was coming from Fascism, at home and abroad. They were quick to point out, for instance, the use to which the Nazis were putting this "back to the home" directive to women. "Herr Hitler's cure for unemployment," Winifred Holtby called it. The thoroughgoing exclusion of German women from employment and public

life was the practical application of Fascist theories of "biological mysticism and the Functional State," and Holtby could point to similar tendencies in English thought as expressions of "a revolt against reason which has affected the intellectual life of the entire Western World." As evidence she quotes Oswald Mosley on the proper place of women in the Fascist state, Wyndham Lewis on the exaltation of "blood-brotherhood," and draws attention to the similarity between the mystique of male leadership celebrated in D.H. Lawrence's Aaron's Rod and Goering's praise of Hitler in his book, Germany Reborn.[40]

Holtby's conviction that anti-feminism was part of the general reaction "against democracy, liberty, and reason, against international co-operation and political tolerance" was shared by other feminists as well as Virginia Woolf. Naomi Mitchison, in a discussion of current changes in the institution of the family, described the patriarchal ideology of "the home" being promulgated by the Fascist states in Italy and Germany as a counter-revolution against postwar "equalitarianism" in social as well as political relationships. She drew an explicit parallel between the patriarchal family and the patriarchal state:

> The German wife is owned both by the state and by her husband. Her job is to fill the cradles and the German home, by her husband and for the state, which will in time use the cradle fillings as cannon fodder. The home is closed in, a little group apart full of the smell of cooking and feather beds, but itself is only a part of the greater family group, the Volkstimmung, the supreme hierarchy.[41]

At the same time in Germany Wilhelm Reich was writing, in The Mass Psychology of Fascism:

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[40] Holtby, pp. 158-61.

[41] The Home: and a Changing Civilization (London: Lane, 1934), p. 105.

> Since authoritarian society reproduces itself in the individual structures of the masses with the help of the authoritarian family, it follows that political reaction has to regard and defend the authoritarian family as the basis of the 'state, culture and civilization.'[42]

Concepts like the "reproduction" of social forms and individual character "structure" indicate that Reich was trying to explore the relations between family and state in the light of both Marxist and Freudian theory, a synthesis intended to take account of the dialectical relations between economic, political and psychological factors in social change. The English feminist writers, however, had no social theory adequate to this task and so were confined to the rhetorical tactic of drawing impressionistic parallels between public and private tyranny (Woolf), and calling for the gradual abolition of the emotion of possessiveness from personal and political relations (Mitchison). Under the threat of a second European war and after a decade of strikes, unemployment and hunger marches at home, they envisaged a revolution in consciousness that would overcome conflict at the deepest, psychological level; unable to challenge its power, they appealed to the good will of the patriarchy to transcend its destructive "infantile disorders." They stressed the need for education rather than direct political action for change.

## Three Guineas, 1938

As To the Lighthouse is Virginia Woolf's most personal and autobiographical work, so Three Guineas may be placed at the opposite extreme of her range as the most public and radical attack on patriarchal rule.

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[42] Trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, 1970), p. 104. (The first English translation was not published until 1946.)

This work has been largely ignored by the critics, or else dismissed as an aberration; even Herbert Marder, who is expressly interested in and sympathetic to her feminism, is adamant in his judgement that the book is a failure:

> In spite of the genuineness of her indignation, Three Guineas is a rather pallid book. There is an unresolved contradiction in it. While Virginia Woolf the controversialist is battling for certain reforms, the insidious voice of Virginia Woolf the artist keeps chiming in, implying that there is a higher reality, a realm which practical politics cannot enter. The tone of her argument is subtly wrong. Occasional hints, not only of satire, but of levity, undermine its seriousness. The ways of the world, especially the masculine official world, always seemed ludicrous to Virginia Woolf. . . . In Three Guineas she was trying to play the politics game herself, and at the same time to remain detached, to be both part of the battle and above it.[43]

Such claims reveal a serious misunderstanding of Woolf's strategy and tactics in Three Guineas and, ultimately, of her feminism in its contemporary political context, and this misunderstanding distorts Marder's account of the relation between her feminism and her art, the whole subject of his influential book.

Three Guineas takes the form of a letter in reply to an appeal to the author to support a society for the prevention of war. The time is the winter of 1936-37, and she has on her desk newspaper photographs of the Spanish Civil War dead. The central point of her reply is that the threat of fascism, so horribly real in these pictures, is present, too, in England, in every private and public tyranny. She leads her reader slowly to this point, taking up first of all the general question: how are we to prevent war?

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[43] Marder, p. 155.

Her first tactic is to dismantle this familiar "we." The letter before her, she quickly reminds its author, is "perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented?" (p. 8). The educated man and his self-educated sister are separated, she maintains, by a deep gulf of power and privilege. It is her acute awareness of this distance between herself and her ostensible audience which defines the epistolary tone, a tone which is highly contrived and fluctuating - but not "subtly wrong" unless its purposes are mistaken.

United in their aim of preventing war, the writer and her correspondent are deeply divided as to the means at their disposal to effect this aim. Before they can work together "certain reforms" - equal education and access to the professions for women - are vitally necessary; but even in this hypothetical future when women like herself are in a position to "play the politics game" they, too, will very likely commit the same abuses of power that lead men to make war. In her discussion of women's education and employment, Woolf raises radical doubts about the value of merely including women in the present competitive, property-based power structure. What she is exposing in _Three Guineas_ is not, as Marder's criticism suggests, confusions in her own mind, but the contradictions inherent in the women's movement's aims of gaining equality with men _and_ transforming society according to the principles of peace, freedom and justice for all its members, principles which rarely do enter into the realm of "practical politics." Woolf's air of "detachment" reflects both her inherited position as an "outsider," on account of her sex, and her conviction that women must remain outsiders, detached from and critical of the patriarchal system and its values. Her strategy is to make the insider see that the causes of war are to be found in the institutions of this system, by making him see from the point of view of the women who are oppressed by them. These

institutions, the "ways of the world," are indeed ridiculed, but the point of the satire is that they are far too powerful and dangerous to be dismissed as merely "ludicrous."

This general strategy involves various and subtle tactics. First, there is the distinction between writer and audience: the writer, "we," is speaking for women like herself ("the daughters of educated men") to "you," the educated man who wants to prevent war but who, whether or not he accepts responsibility for its warlike nature, represents the male ruling class, the patriarchy. Unlike most polemic, Three Guineas is for the most part addressed directly to the opposition, an opposition which is not some faceless monster but the writer's own "brother." The varieties of mockery and appeal which she can therefore employ serve as means of controlling her indignation, distancing it.[44] For instance:

> Inevitably we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially; where, daubed red and gold, decorated like a savage with feathers he goes through mystic rites and enjoys the dubious pleasures of power and dominion while we, 'his' women, are locked in the private house without share in the many societies of which his society is composed. For such reasons compact as they are of many memories and emotions . . . it seems both wrong for us rationally and impossible for us emotionally to fill up your form and join your society. (pp. 191-92)

The passage quoted is also an example of her use of another tactic, the viewpoint of radical innocence about power and politics. The writer sees not imperialism, racism, sexism, but a child, daubed and decorated, going through "mystic rites." Elsewhere, she proves the "value" of her brother's education by citing evidence of the immense sum of money that

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[44] Woolf remarked that the letter form allowed her to put herself "in the position of the one asked" (A Writer's Diary, p. 253).

has been spent on it over the past five hundred years (p. 45), and notes that "the men's scholarship list at Cambridge printed in The Times of December 20th, 1937, measures roughly thirty-one inches; the women's scholarship list at Cambridge measures roughly five inches" (p. 277). Sex discrimination may be measured as well in column inches as in anything else. She constantly appears to draw the right conclusions from the wrong evidence, pointing to isolated but scrupulously documented facts to suggest the wider application of her points. She takes up the pose of an amateur, in effect defending herself against attacks on the evidence presented in her arguments by the repeated claim that history and biography - and Whitaker's Almanac - are "the only evidence available to an outsider" (p. 61).

In each of the first two parts of Three Guineas there are "sub-plots" - letters addressed to women's societies which have also asked for her support, one for education and the other for employment opportunities. In these letters she pretends to instruct and to scold her correspondents, imitating the manner of her ultimate audience, the educated man. It is a version of Swift's tactic, appearing to side with the opposition so that the inhumanity of their "modest proposals" will speak for itself. Here, for instance, C.E.M. Joad's accusation, that modern women are not prepared to give as much money and energy nor to suffer as much humiliation in the cause of peace as their mothers gave and suffered in the cause of equality, is the case for the prosecution:

> 'The sooner they give up the pretence of playing with public affairs and return to private life the better. If they cannot make a job of the House of Commons, let them at least make something of their own houses. If they cannot learn to save men from the destruction which incurable male mischievousness bids fair to bring upon them, let women at least learn to feed them, before they destroy themselves.' Let us not pause to ask how even with a vote they can cure what Mr. Joad himself admits to be incurable,

> for the point is how, in the face of that statement, you have the effrontery to ask me for a guinea towards your rent? According to Mr. Joad you are not only extremely rich; you are also extremely idle; and so given over to the eating of peanuts and ice cream that you have not learnt how to cook him a dinner before he destroys himself, let alone how to prevent that fatal act. (p. 79)

The grotesquerie which this technique of double irony gives rise to was obviously a way of containing her anger at the enormity of Joad's hypocrisy.[45]

More male pontifications about women - flattering ones this time - are demolished by the same method further on. The call upon professional women to use their "different sense of values" to "build a new and better world" not only implies that the men who have built that world are unhappy with it but also, Woolf reminds her female correspondent, "by calling upon the other sex to remedy the evil imposes a great responsibility and implies a great compliment." For if those men believe that

> 'at a disadvantage and under suspicion' as she is, with little or no political or professional training and upon a salary of about £250 a year, the professional woman can yet 'build a new and better world,' they must credit her with powers that might almost be called divine. They must agree with Goethe:
>
> The things that must pass<br>
> Are only symbols;<br>
> Here shall all failure<br>
> Grow to achievement,<br>
> Here, the Untellable<br>
> Work all fulfilment,<br>
> The woman in woman<br>
> Lead forward for ever
>
> \- another very great compliment, and from a very great poet you will agree. (pp. 134-35)

But the women "do not want compliments." They want a practical solution to their problem: how can they enter the male world of the professions

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[45] She adds a note to the effect that if Joad's accusations were to be taken seriously they could easily be refuted (p. 285), but confessed in _A Writer's Diary_ (p. 279): "I'm suspicious of the vulgarity of the notes: of a certain insistence."

"with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed" and yet remain "civilized human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war?" (pp. 135-36).

The new morality proposed to help professional women out of this dilemma is that "you refuse to be separated from the four great teachers of the daughters of educated men - poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties" (pp. 144-45). The proposition is a serious one, but Woolf's definition of its meaning is ironic, for these new values are to be developed out of the injustices which such women have suffered under the patriarchy in the past. Referring to the testimonies of Victorian women about the moral education imposed upon them, she points out that it will not be difficult for women to remain "immune, through no merit of their own" from "the great modern sins of vanity, egotism and megalomania" because the four traditional teachers are still with them. Derision is freely provided by their brothers; excluded from the clergy and without equal rights of citizenship, without an equal share in the ancient schools and colleges, they need feel no "unreal loyalties" to church, nation or class; women, even professional women, are still poor in relation to their brothers; and "it should not be difficult to transmute the old ideal of bodily chastity into the new ideal of mental chastity - to hold that if it was wrong to sell the body for money it is much more wrong to sell the mind for money, since the mind, people say, is nobler than the body" (pp. 149-50).

When the ironies created by her epistolary stance go unnoticed, the meaning of Woolf's feminist critique of the patriarchy can be distorted. Marder reads the passage referred to above as self-congratulation:

> Women thus form a kind of human reservoir into which virtues neglected by society have fallen. These virtues are innate, not merely acquired. . . . Society and the arts can be rejuvenated only by restoring the despised feminine elements to their proper place among the faculties of man. It follows that women, as the chief bearers of the feminine qualities, have a mission to bring about this regeneration, a mission for which their long martyrdom has made them especially fit.[46]

On the contrary, turning weaknesses into strengths, as professional women are recommended to do, is not presented as noble martyrdom or moral superiority but as a purely pragmatic way of living in the present with a frail but passionate hope for peace in the future. The male attribution of divine powers to the Eternal Feminine ("a very great compliment, and from a very great poet") has already been laughed out of court, as was Joad's special pleading that allowance be made for "incurable male mischievousness." Woolf nowhere states a belief in innate, sex-determined virtues and vices. Indeed, she exposes the viciousness of such a belief by quoting examples of it and drawing out their implications. Here, again, is the persona of the ignorant amateur psychologist:

> As it is a fact that [a woman] cannot understand what instinct compels him, what glory, what interest, what manly satisfaction fighting provides for him - 'without war there would be no outlet for the manly qualities which fighting develops' - as fighting *thus* is a sex characteristic which she cannot share, the counterpart *some claim* of the maternal instinct which he cannot share, so it is an instinct which she cannot judge. The outsider therefore must leave him free to deal with this instinct by himself, because liberty of opinion must be respected, especially when it is based upon an instinct which is as foreign to her *as centuries of tradition and education can make it*. (pp. 194-95)

The italics are mine, and the quotation about manly qualities comes from *Antony (Viscount Knebworth)*, by the Earl of Lytton. Basing her argument on the questionable sexist claims of such "authorities," she goes on

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[46] Marder, pp. 158-59.

modestly to contradict their belief in the power of instinct by her emphasis on the determining influence of "tradition and education."

Woolf implies over and over again in Three Guineas that the apparently innate "masculine" and "feminine" qualities are created by the systems within which men and women have, until now, exclusively existed. Her general argument is that the causes of war lie within the patriarchal social system in which power derives from the possession and control of property. The service of Mammon (signified by the refrain: "Here we go round the mulberry tree - of Property") is glorified by the ideology of patriotism and loyalty to the institutions of the State. Women, who have always been "outsiders" in relation to the property-power nexus, are for the first time in history potentially free of their traditional dependence upon it through their fathers and husbands. Education and economic independence will not inevitably produce a generation of women willing and able to prevent war, but if they succeed in refusing the material and psychological rewards of the hierarchical power system they (and their like-minded brothers) may indeed effect a revolution in values, and "build a new and better world." Thus, she concludes, the three guineas- one to promote women's education, one to promote their employment in the professions, and one to promote the cause of peace - "are all given to the same cause, for the causes are the same and inseparable" (p. 261).

In philosophical terms, Woolf is both a materialist and an idealist. Her analysis of the status quo is thoroughly materialist as she traces the negative qualities of male domination and female powerlessness to their origins in historical reality. However the values she holds dear, the liberal credo of Liberty, Equality and Justice, appear to exist independently of material circumstances, to have been created by the universal and unifying human spirit in "the recurring dream that has

haunted the human mind since the beginning of time; the dream of peace, the dream of freedom" (p. 259). Therefore the transformation of human society must proceed from the consciousness outwards, not from structural changes in that society or, as Marxist theory proposes, from the dialectical interaction between structural and ideological changes. She contends that real changes can proceed only from the individual, that tyranny in the public world cannot be defeated without the abolition of tyranny in private life "for they are inseparably connected" (p. 259).

Her strategy for women, true to this form of idealism, is not political but psychological. Women may free themselves from the psychological dominance of the patriarchy by passively resisting its claims upon them and by promoting disinterested criticism of its institutions (pp. 204-205). They are already acting together as an informal "Outsiders' Society," she claims. They are not using the means available to men ("leagues, conferences, campaigns, great names . . .") but experimenting "with private means in private" (p. 206). They refuse to knit socks or make munitions for the war effort, they absent themselves from church, they decline to enter competitions or receive prizes. But even as she describes them, Woolf underlines the ineffectuality of these "experiments" by her defensive irony.

She is forced to admit that this invisible women's movement is being kept secret because even independent women are inhibited by a fear "which reduces our boasted freedom to a farce" (p. 219). The fear is their response to men's anger whenever the question of women's freedom is raised in public or in private. The diffident persona offers an analysis of "our fear and your anger," "these very ancient and obscure emotions . . . which the Professors have only lately brought to the surface and named 'infantile fixation,' 'Oedipus Complex,' and the rest" (p. 235). It was "the infantile fixation of the fathers," their disease of possessive jealousy, excused and protected by law and custom, that

opposed the nineteenth century feminist movement. Within fifty years it had triumphed: "it forced open the doors of the private house" (p. 250). Yet this was only the beginning of the women's struggle, Woolf points out. She characterizes the inter-war outburst of anti-feminism as the counter-attack of "the fathers in public, massed together in societies, in professions," where they were "even more subject to the fatal disease than the fathers in private" (p. 251). But her witty dissection of the fathers' current ideological attacks - the "biology is destiny" theory - is cut short by an angry outcry from the fathers themselves, when she turns on the radio to hear:

> 'Homes are the real places of the women. . . . The Government should give work to men. . . . Women must not rule over men. . . . There are two worlds, one for women, the other for men. . . . Let them learn to cook our dinners. . . . Women have failed. . . . They have failed. . . . They have failed. . . .' (p. 255)

The writer's buoyancy of tone is overwhelmed by the very anger and fear she is analysing - but here it is transformed into anger, her own anger. In a highly significant transition, she moves away from the clamour of this "private" conflict, back to the impending threat of war in Europe, and farther back to the tyrant Creon's victimization of Antigone for disobeying his authority. The connection between private and public tyranny is again insisted upon:

> It seems, Sir, as we listen to the voices of the past, as if we were looking at the photograph again, at the picture of dead bodies and ruined houses that the Spanish government sends us. . . . But it is not the same picture. . . . For as this letter has gone on, adding fact to fact, another picture has imposed itself upon the foreground. It is the figure of a man; some say, others deny, that he is Man himself, the quintessence of virility. . . . He is a man certainly. His eyes are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position, is tightly cased in a uniform. . . . His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator. (pp. 257-58)

After this, her concluding affirmation that tyranny can still be defeated by peaceful means, eloquent as it is, rings hollow. Women are powerless, potential victims; their invisible Outsiders' Society offers them no solidarity, no collective strength; each confronts the tyrant patriarch, as Antigone did Creon, alone and defenceless. The feeling of individual isolation and despair is overwhelming.

Despair must have been inevitable for the pacifist humanists of the 1930's. The battle against Fascism was already joined, as the Spanish War so horribly proved, and passive resistance was powerless against this Juggernaut, as the persecution of the Jews, communists and other resisters was already showing. Woolf, like other liberal humanists of her time, attempts to confront this threat with nothing but the high moral idealism by which her generation sought to purify the bitter experience of the First World War. As a woman speaking for women she can do little but rage against the taunts of those like H.G. Wells, who charged that "there has been no perceptible women's movement to resist the practical obliteration of their freedom by Fascists or Nazis" (p. 80): for if her analysis is right, women are indeed powerless to resist the tyranny which depends upon "these very ancient and obscure emotions," the tyrant's anger and the victim's fear. The possibility that the victims might respond with anger instead of fear, that resistance need not be passive, was anathema to her pacifist convictions. In other contexts she speaks of anger as if it were a contagious disease, to be avoided altogether rather than controlled and used.[47] As an individual whose personal history had caused the conflict of her own anger and fear to threaten her hold upon reality,

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[47] _A Room of One's Own_, p. 49.

it must have taken all her courage to confront and analyse the war's threat of universal tyranny which appears finally to have defeated her when she took her own life a few years later.

At the time Three Guineas was published, her diary entries record intensely conflicting feelings about having broken her silence on public issues, having given up her anonymity as a writer. She felt she was risking her reputation as an artist, but:

> I now feel entirely free. Why? Have committed myself, am afraid of nothing. Can do anything I like. No longer famous, no longer on a pedestal: no longer hawked in by societies: on my own, forever.
> (April 26th, 1938; A Writer's Diary p. 281)

She wanted desperately to have it taken seriously, but feared that her efforts were in vain:

> The book I wrote with such violent feeling to relieve that immense pressure will not dimple the surface. That is my fear. . . . [But] now I am quit of that poison and excitement. Nor is that all. For having spat it out, my mind is made up. I need never recur or repeat. I am an outsider. I can take my way: experiment with my own imagination in my own way.
> (May 20th, 1938; p. 282)

At the same time, with all her determination to go on experimenting, there are many references to the feeling that she was finished as a creative writer, references which multiply after the outbreak of the war. She felt the loss of an audience, of a sense of the future -- even of her own identity (pp. 324-25).

This sense of futility underlies Three Guineas. The separatism of the Outsiders' Society is presented as a way of coping with the intolerable present, drawing on the lessons learnt from past oppression; but there is little sense of future horizons, creative possibilities that women might explore. It is a vision of endless conflict, in effect a counsel of despair, which has more in common with the mood and preoccupations of Between the Acts, her last work, than with The Years, the novel she was writing when she began this essay.

*Three Guineas* is a far cry from the optimism of her earlier feminist essay, *A Room of One's Own*. In this, and in its fictional counterpart, *Orlando*, Woolf had directed her account of women's past oppression towards a vision of future harmony and reconciliation between the sexes. She had envisaged women gradually gaining access to all the spiritual riches of culture and public achievement, springing off from the material vantage-point of their newly-gained material independence. Ten years later her criticism of the patriarchy's unwillingness actually to grant women this independence extended to a radical questioning of those very benefits of education and participation in public life that she had so fervently welcomed before. This change in her position reflects a widespread reaction in ideology during the inter-war years to the changing position of women in English society.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# VIRGINIA WOOLF: INDEPENDENCE AND ISOLATION

## Experimental Fiction and the Female Experience

Virginia Woolf's feminist analysis of women's situation within the patriarchy is the formulation of a world-view implicit in all her fiction from The Voyage Out (1915) to Between the Acts (1941). Her artistic vision is feminist in the sense that it is angled by her critical consciousness of being female in a male world. In the early essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," she declared that the purpose of the novel was to express character, and through character, a true vision of life and human nature.[1] This seems to be a statement of the obvious, and yet it raises questions even more basic than those which she discusses in the essay. How, since there is a world of difference between the male and the female experience of life, is the woman writer to affirm her vision without merely defining it in opposition to the prevailing patriarchal ideology? For her, the "Woman Question" is not the occasion for polemical struggle, nor a sociological phenomenon to be studied, but a question about the meaning of her own life and the lives of other women. And how is the female character to be expressed in fiction, given that a woman experiences herself both as a free subject and as the object of observation and control by the male hegemony?

In her very first novel, Virginia Woolf shows the heroine's awakening to this dual consciousness of herself. As her coolly rational aunt explains to her the sexual facts of life, the young Victorian girl interrupts:

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[1] Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1966), I, 324-25.

> 'So that's why I can't walk alone!'
> By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for ever - her life that was the only chance she had - a thousand words and actions became plain to her.

"The only chance she had," her life consists of passive verbs, images of ignorance and imprisonment. And then, as the two women go on to talk about people and their individual differences, it seems to Rachel that she can also be a person on her own account:

> The vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind, flashed into Rachel's mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living.[2]

The simile distances the vision, intensifying the glamour of possibility: her life is absolute, authentic, free as the natural elements. But it is also relative, subordinated to the power of men, an imprisoned stream. How is she to reconcile the two visions? The question for Rachel is also the essential question for her creator, of how to see beyond the felt experience of limitation, of "femininity," without at the same time dismissing it as inauthentic in relation to the ideal possibility of free self-determination.

The novelist explores "feminine consciousness" as part of the human reality, but ultimate Reality can be perceived only by going beyond it.[3] That Reality, which was Virginia Woolf's touchstone, is the province of

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[2] The Voyage Out (London: Hogarth, 1929), pp. 91-92, 94-95. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[3] Sydney Janet Kaplan, Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel (Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 77. Kaplan makes the useful distinction between "feminine consciousness" as a defensive strategy for the female novelist, who cannot evade answering patriarchal ideology, and "female experience" for which there is no completely adequate fictional mode of expression.

the free or androgynous consciousness (as she defined it in A Room of One's Own) and as such always remains beyond the boundaries of the social world in which the novel is grounded, "everlasting" and "unmergeable." Human reality, "imprisoned" by the moulds of femininity and masculinity as defined and enforced in the social world, is nevertheless where the novelist must begin. I want to look at some of Virginia Woolf's experiments in fiction, particularly The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse and Between the Acts, as ways of breaking through those moulds and achieving the apparently impossible feat of expressing female consciousness free of patriarchal ideology.

In A Room of One's Own she attempted to define the ideal conditions for the creative imagination and to suggest the new possibilities for women's writing freed from the "strident sex-consciousness" of the age. She argues that it was sex-consciousness which limited the expression of Charlotte Brontë's genius. Writing novels is difficult enough, she points out, for the integrity of the work of art is constantly challenged by emotional judgements on the life it recreates, and women have been at a particular disadvantage here. Quoting from Chapter 12 of Jane Eyre, she proposes that Brontë had allowed anger to tamper with her integrity as a novelist:

> She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance. She remembered that she had been starved of her proper due of experience - she had been made to stagnate in a parsonage mending stockings when she wanted to wander free over the world. . . . But there were many more influences than anger tugging at her imagination and deflecting it from its path. . . . The portrait of Rochester is drawn in the dark. We feel the influence of fear in it; just as we constantly feel an acidity which is the result of oppression . . . , a rancour which contracts those books, splendid as they are, with a spasm of pain.[4]

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[4] A Room of One's Own (London: Hogarth, 1929), p. 110. All further references to this work appear in the text.

Anger, fear, rancour all impede the flow of her creative energy. Woolf traces these emotions to the novelist's awareness of the prevailing masculine values against which she knows her work will be judged: they reflect not just limitations on her personal life, but obstacles built into the social existence of the woman writer in patriarchal culture. Those obstacles still exist, but the women writing in 1928, with rooms and minds of their own, had a much better chance of ignoring them and determining to "hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking" (p. 112). Mary Carmichael, their prototype, had certain advantages over Charlotte Brontë:

> Men were no longer to her 'the opposing faction'; she need not waste her time railing against them; she need not climb on to the roof and ruin her peace of mind longing for travel, experience and a knowledge of the world and character that were denied her. Fear and hatred were almost gone, or traces of them showed only in a slight exaggeration of the joy of freedom, a tendency to the caustic and satirical, rather than to the romantic, in her treatment of the other sex. (p. 139)

This unfortunately premature portrait of the mind of a free woman is followed by the comment that she <u>also</u> "enjoyed some natural advantages of a high order." The description of her sensibility expands on the implications of "natural," suggesting the emergence of the true sexual/creative nature of woman:

> She had a sensibility that was very wide, eager and free. It responded to an almost imperceptible touch on it. It feasted like a plant newly stood in the air on every sight and sound that came its way. It ranged, too, very subtly and curiously, among almost unknown or unrecorded things; . . . . [She] wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself. (pp. 139-40)

Free of sex-consciousness, the woman becomes a sexual being, as it were, for the first time; and yet this mind is not "feminine" in any familiar sense of the term. It is free of patriarchal prescriptions on the proper nature of its sexuality - it is "wide, eager and free," not passive,

masochistic - or on the proper nature of its sex-role, its personality. Writing about Woolf's theory of the sexes, Winifred Holtby deplored the lack of some word more neutral than "sex" which, she said, "has been associated so closely with the amorous and procreative instinct" that it cannot conveniently be used to discuss sex (i.e. gender) roles.[5] But Woolf, I think, is playing with both meanings of the word when she writes about "sex-consciousness." She makes this clear when criticising the contemporary male writers like Kipling and Galsworthy. Crippled by sex-consciousness as they retaliate against the challenge to male superiority, they are merely asserting their virility:

> It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible. It is coming, it is gathering, it is about to burst on one's head, one begins saying long before the end. (p. 153)

It is not only, one might add, that this egotistical virility moves women to wonder - Woolf's imagery strongly suggests that it has something in common with premature ejaculation. It lacks "suggestive power. And when a book lacks suggestive power, however hard it hits the surface of the mind it cannot penetrate within" (p. 154).

A related issue is treated in the same vein of pointed mockery. Just as there is no suggestive power, no poetry in the writing of these male novelists, nor is there any romance in the relations between their characters. Their heroes are sexually aggressive - open, vigorous, quite indecent but, Woolf adds, "aware of the awful nature of the confession, [it] seems somehow dull." They cannot sing to their loves, as Tennyson had, "There has fallen a splendid tear from the passion-flower at the

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[5] *Virginia Woolf* (London: Wishart, 1932), pp. 178, 182.

gate." And there is no Christina Rossetti to respond with, "My heart is like a singing bird whose nest is in a water'd shoot" (p. 151) - for Mary Carmichael, we note, has "a tendency to the caustical and satirical, rather than to the romantic, in her treatment of the other sex" (p. 139).

Romantic passion is missing; love poetry is missing. The lines from Tennyson and Rossetti recall the Manx cat associated with them in the opening description of the luncheon party, where the narrator feels that something is missing from the atmosphere, some "murmur or current" of feeling between men and women that was there before the war. She decides that it cannot be sexual passion that is missing (like the tail of the Manx cat, a creature "rarer than one thinks") but that there is no harmony between the sexes, no music. Was it the war that killed romance? she wonders. "Certainly it was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. So ugly they looked . . . - so stupid" (p. 23). Perhaps romance was only an illusion, and if so, there is no need to regret its loss. By the end of the essay the answer to her question is implied. It was not simply the war that destroyed romance, but the whole revolution in relations between the sexes set in motion by the feminist challenge to the patriarchy.

The nostalgia for romance is only a playful undercurrent in _A Room_, perhaps an overflow from _Orlando_, which she had written just before completing this essay; certainly it never bubbles up in the same way in any of her serious novels. True to the analysis of patriarchal culture made in her two feminist essays, Woolf can only ever recapture the feeling of romantic love poetry and envisage androgyny as the ideal form of relation between the sexes in fantasy, in the perfect mutuality of the bisexual lovers, Orlando and Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine.

Nowhere in her fiction is the love-marriage celebrated as the way to authentic living, as in Lawrence's major novels, nor as the tragic human affirmation portrayed in Hardy's Jude the Obscure. The male novelists' tendency to revive a romantic ideal of intersexual love in response to the disruptions in traditional relationships brought about by women's emancipation is contradicted in Woolf's fiction. Love appears in many forms but it is never an heroic attempt to transcend social restraints. Her characters live on a more primitive level, battling for survival against death or obliteration in madness. They express not the ideal creative fusion of the sexes in a post-patriarchal world but the newly-emerged woman's intensified awareness of her vulnerability.

In Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves and The Years, the shadow cast by the Great War falls across the destinies of the characters. The War is both the image of death and the watershed in history, when everything changed. In her first and last novels, death is also central: in The Voyage Out as "the lash of a random unheeding flail," pointless and brutal,[6] and in Between the Acts as the death of English civilization which is threatened by the Second World War. In such a struggle for existence, "moments of being" are the highest value, the "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark," as Lily Briscoe realises.[7] Such moments are snatched from the oblivion of unconscious daily living; they are transitory, not absolute; isolated, not shared: "for it is a fact that there is no arm

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[6] The phrase is used of the deaths of her mother and Stella Duckworth in "A Sketch of the Past," in Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings of Virginia Woolf, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: The University Press, 1976), p. 117.

[7] To the Lighthouse (London: Hogarth, 1930), p. 249. All further references to this work appear in the text.

to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women" (A Room, pp. 171-72). And although it is love remembered that leads Lily or Clarissa Dalloway to such ecstatic moments of illumination, it is in each case the lost love of another woman, and not a continuing relation between man and woman, which gives rise to this affirmation of the value of life.

Critics who have paid some attention to Virginia Woolf's feminism, notably Joan Bennett, Bernard Blackstone and Herbert Marder,[8] have also tended to read her works as conventional novels in that they are concerned with love, marriage and community, and to search out a feminist point of view on these matters. This approach has been utilised most consciously by Marder, and his book Feminism and Art provided a valuable and timely reminder of how closely her fiction is embedded in the historical changes wrought in English social life during the period in which it is set. Such a view has limitations, however. The novels, when interpreted through character, situation and overt comment only, appear to affirm the centrality of conventional personal relations, while their critical aspect is discerned primarily in symbols of social life such as houses and money. Marder insists that feminism is essential to her conception of reality, and hence to the substance of her fiction; but it remains to be demonstrated that her feminist consciousness, as I have defined it, is essential to her conception of the art of the novelist.

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[8] Joan Bennett, Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist (Cambridge: The University Press, 1964); Bernard Blackstone, Virginia Woolf: A Commentary (London: Hogarth, 1949); Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

I have discussed the views about women and literature which Virginia Woolf expressed in A Room of One's Own, and which she dramatised in Orlando. In several general essays on the novel form and the future of prose fiction written at the same time, between 1927 and 1929, her reflections correspond in all essentials with these explicitly feminist insights. In "The Narrow Bridge of Art" and "Phases of Fiction," as well as in "Women and Fiction," the same three ideas about the way prose fiction must be developed in order to find out "the truth about human nature" emerge: it should be freed from personal and polemical uses, it should look beyond the psychological realism of personal intercourse, and it should be exploring the rhythms and sensations of the inner life of the emotions. These ideas are discernible in the earlier essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" as well as in "The Leaning Tower" much later, but it seems that the period between To the Lighthouse and The Waves was one in which Virginia Woolf thought a great deal about her role as a novelist, and as a female novelist in particular.

The title of "The Narrow Bridge of Art" comes from the following passage where the writer, admiring Sterne's ability to modulate between poetry and prose, admits that the aloofness which allows him to exploit wit and fantasy also precludes the more substantial earth-bound virtues of the novelist:

> For, unfortunately, it seems true that some renunciation is inevitable. You cannot cross the narrow bridge of art carrying all its tools in your hands. Some you must leave behind, or you will drop them in midstream or, what is worse, overbalance and be drowned yourself.[9]

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[9] "The Narrow Bridge of Art," Collected Essays, II, 227-28. Further references to this work appear in the text of the following paragraphs.

The problem, then, is to define clearly her aims as an imaginative writer and to select the "tools" most appropriate to these aims. She chooses to discard those of complete representation and direct comment on society, because the realist novel stands too close to life for its poetry to flow naturally with its prose and the reader feels "the jerk and the effort" of transition which "waken us from the depths of consent and belief" (p. 227). A new variety of the novel must evolve to encompass both "the exaltation of poetry," treating of "the relations of man to nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams," as well as "the ordinariness of prose," which is characterized as "the sneer, the contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life" (pp. 224-26).

With this expanded scope the novelists of the future, like the Elizabethan dramatists, will not be selfconscious or "afraid" but able to express freely "the full current of their minds," to "stand easily and naturally in a position where their powers have full play upon important things" (pp. 220-21). The concept of the free consciousness is the same as that described in A Room of One's Own, but here the emphasis is on the necessity for formal experimentation to allow the modern consciousness complete expression. To do this, the writer must "stand further back from life," get a "longer view," not because experimentation and impersonality are values in themselves but because fiction should be able to give, as poetry does, "the outline rather than the detail" of life and human nature (pp. 224-25). I suggest that this emphasis can be traced to the female artist's acute awareness that the ideology which determines our understanding of human nature is so deep-rooted and so pervasive that it can be shed only by distance and subverted only by doing violence to our normal perceptions.

Virginia Woolf approaches this position through her more specific objections to realist fiction in this essay:

> /U/nder the dominion of the novel we have scrutinized one part of the mind closely and left another unexplored. We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions towards such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death, and fate; we forget that we spend much time . . . alone; we are not entirely occupied in personal relations; all our energies are not absorbed in making our livings. The psychological novelist has been too prone to limit psychology to the psychology of personal intercourse; we long sometimes to escape from the incessant, the remorseless analysis of falling into love and falling out of love. . . . We long for some more impersonal relationship. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imaginations, for poetry. (p.225)

The insistent tone, the lofty gestures towards "some more impersonal relationship" than love, seem to betray nervousness about the radical nature of her dissatisfaction. For it is implied that if novelists persist in "scrutinizing" personal relations only, they will not discover the truth about human nature but only that part of it which is called into play within those narrow and distorting limits. Indeed, the constant statement of her novels that love is not "a woman's whole existence" is itself an act of rebellion against the revived and revised myth of romantic love which authenticated continuing patriarchal relations between the sexes. That this was her intention might be deduced from the following passage in Orlando, with its ironic reference to Lawrentian love:

> Love, the poet has said, is woman's whole existence. . . . Surely, since she is a woman, and a beautiful woman, . . . she will soon give over this pretence of writing and thinking and begin at least to think of a gamekeeper. . . . And then she will write him a little note . . . and make an assignation . . . -- all of which is, of course, the very stuff of life and the only possible subject for fiction . . . love -- as the male novelists define it -- and who, after all, speak with greater authority? -- has nothing whatever to do with kindness, fidelity, generosity, or poetry. Love is slipping off one's petticoat and -- But we all know what love is.[10]

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[10] Orlando: A Biography (London: Hogarth, 1933), pp. 241-42. All further references to this work appear in the text. James Naremore notes, with reference to this passage, that Lady Chatterley's Lover was distributed privately in England in 1928: The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 209.

The passage recalls several of Virginia Woolf's major points about women and fiction, which can now be related to her general argument about the development of the novel form. First, it may be observed that while her biographer is wondering what to make of it all, Orlando is in fact writing her successful poem, contrary to the belief that "women can't paint, women can't write" and its corollary that those who do devote themselves to such pursuits instead of to men are not authentic women. These are the two accusations which ring in the ears of Lily Briscoe as she works at her painting, a cameo study of the psychological impediments to creativity suffered by the woman artist. Orlando was Virginia Woolf's experiment in freely imagining how a woman might become a poet. The fantasy mode allows her to give this character the experience of life as both a man and a woman, an aristocrat's inheritance, and a miraculous marriage which gives her both love and independence. Orlando has no need, then, to accept the definition of herself as an alien in patriarchal culture, but as a creative mind is free to move" beyond the personal and political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve - of our destiny and the meaning of life."[11]

Second, while Orlando's biographer despairs of writing a "life" whose female subject renounces love and whose activities of thought and imagination are "of no importance whatsoever" (p. 241),[12] the novelist demonstrates the necessity for prose fiction to approach those "wider questions" directly. The narrative voice runs on, at this point, to

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[11] "Women and Fiction," Collected Essays, II, 147.

[12] This despair is reflected in the mock-index, which gives detailed reference to the events of Orlando's life until the crucial period of her creativity, which is marked only by the following brief entries: "declared a woman, 229; engagement, 225; marriage, 235; birth of her first son, 266."

ask "What is life?" and the prose takes on a peculiar doggerel quality:

> Let us go, then, exploring, this summer morning, when all are adoring the plum blossom and the bee. And humming and hawing, let us ask of the starling (who is a more sociable bird than the lark) what he may think on the brink of the dust-bin, whence he picks among the sticks combings of scullion's hair. What's life, we ask. . . . (p. 243)

Here is a particularly jerky transition from prose to "poetry," a purple patch that offends by its patchiness as well as by its mock-purple.[13] But the offence is surely deliberate, a comment on the biographer's inadequate conception of his task. A similar passage some pages later also has an ulterior motive, while it avoids describing the birth of Orlando's child:

> Hail! natural desire! . . . and pleasure of all sorts, flowers and wine, though one fades and the other intoxicates; and half-crown tickets out of London on Sundays, and singing in a dark chapel hymns about death, and anything, anything that interrupts and confounds the tapping of typewriters and filing of letters and forging of links and chains, binding the Empire together. . . . Hail, happiness! kingfisher flashing from bank to bank, and all fulfilment of natural desire, whether it is what the male novelist says it is; or prayer; or denial; hail! in whatever form it comes, and may there be more forms, and stranger. (pp. 264-65)

As a comment on the modern consciousness, this passage has its place in the book's literary-critical satire; but the reckless stylistic impropriety of such poetic flights only underlines their separation from the prosaic sensibility of the biographer.

In her serious fiction, however, Virginia Woolf succeeded in developing an authorial stance which allowed her prose to express the poetry of the inner life as well as "the sneer, the contrast, the question." She had not the poetic temperament ascribed to Orlando who, throughout

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[13] With reference to the novel, Woolf wrote: "The objection to the purple patch, however, is not that it is purple, but that it is a patch" ("The Narrow Bridge of Art," p. 226).

the centuries, retains "the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons" (p. 214). The enduring qualities of Orlando's mind require no direct intercourse with "the spirit of the age" to find their true expression. "By putting on a ring and finding a man on a moor, by loving nature and being no satirist, cynic or psychologist" she conducts a successful transaction with the Victorian spirit, so that "she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself" (pp. 239-40). The poetry of Virginia Woolf's novels, we reflect, is a far more difficult and chancy achievement, depending as it does on a critical spirit not wished upon the more fortunate Orlando. The novelist, who is also a satirist and psychologist, must strike a balance between two opposing powers, the feeling of life itself ("the slow growth and development of feeling, . . . many lives and . . . their unions") and the design and order of art which can control as well as excite human sympathy.[14]

Believing as she did that it was the business of the novel to create, <u>through character</u>, a true vision of human nature, she had by this time invented such a method of controlling sympathy by subduing the authorial voice and expressing a multiple consciousness through all the characters, major and minor, in the novel. Without an omniscient narrator observing and judging their responses, all the characters have their own authentic subjectivity. An historically significant range of female and male types are brought into conflict, and their socially-determined relations constitute the "prose" of her fiction, "the closeness and complexity of life"; but their inner lives, their dreams and

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14 "Phases of Fiction," <u>Collected Essays</u>, II, 101.

imaginations, constitute its poetry. When the writer is obliged to speak through the consciousness of the patriarch, the womanly woman, the odd woman, the confident young man and so on, she reveals the humanity of each, and can transform a cast of potential oppressors and victims into a counterpoint of voices whose music may be atonal or harmonious from time to time, but which always forms a complex whole. Thus the feminist writer can escape the toils of polemic, the impediment of "sex-consciousness," as she identified it in A Room of One's Own, without denying her critical spirit.

She had been acutely aware from the beginning of her career as a novelist that she needed to experiment to find forms for the things she wanted to say. In The Voyage Out Terence Hewet, the young writer, says that he wants to write about "Silence, . . . the things people don't say" (p. 262), and about "the curious silent unrepresented life" of women (p. 258). It is a significant conjunction of aims, introducing what was to be a central and long-standing preoccupation of Virginia Woolf's own. Later, in A Room of One's Own (pp. 134-35), she describes the task of the woman writer as that of recording the "infinitely obscure" lives of women, meaning by this phrase both the cultural invisibility of women's daily existence and also the unknown quality of their inner lives of feeling and imagination. In both contexts this notion of the writer's task as the recorder of "obscure lives" is related to the historical significance of women's emancipation. But Virginia Woolf was more interested in the transition through which the majority of women were living than in the new and liberated social relations which she then believed to be imminent, and this backward glance may be seen to account in part for the elegaic element in To the Lighthouse, the second of the novels discussed in this chapter. The third of these, Between the Acts, was written in the shadow of World War

II, and there the elegiac note gives place to something more akin to a prophecy of doom. The woman artist, represented by Miss Latrobe and her historical pageant, now undertakes bolder and riskier experiments in response to crisis. Successful transactions with the spirit of the age are no longer possible: she can speak to it momentarily, but is more than ever an outsider, in the sense this term is given in Three Guineas. In the discussion which follows, these three novels are treated as records of successive stages in the author's exploration of the possibilities for freedom and fulfilment in women's lives in her time.

The Voyage Out

The novel ends with a glimpse of the small community of English visitors in a South American town mourning the death of the heroine, a young girl whose "voyage out" into life seemed barely to have begun. It opens with an almost Dickensian juxtaposition of intimations of disaster (Helen Ambrose's grief at leaving her children) and comedy of manners (the first meeting of the ship Euphrosyne's passengers). There is little to hint in this beginning that the novel's tone will modulate through the pathos of death and grief to a final vision of reconciliation between the natural and the social world that is reminiscent of Shakespeare's late romances. The mixture of fictional modes in this first novel indicates the strain of finding adequate representation for the issues which Virginia Woolf wanted to explore in it.

In nineteenth-century novels dealing with the moral and emotional education of a youthful subject the mode is predominantly romantic, tempered by an appropriate irony, and the subjects often female, figures peculiarly expressive, in patriarchal culture, of the inner self with its hidden motives and feelings and of the limits set to expanding

human consciousness by the imperious demands of social existence. But Virginia Woolf makes it clear from the outset that she does not conceive of her young girl wakening to the possibilities of life quite in the same manner as her predecessors. Although she described her heroine as one of those "fine ladies, ingenuous young ladies, with Meredithian blood in them,"[15] Rachel Vinrace is by no means an exceptionally fine spirit like James' Isobel Archer, no latter-day Saint Theresa like George Eliot's Dorothea. Indeed, she is introduced into the novel in an anti-romantic light. Her rather insipid looks and hesitant manner strike Helen, her aunt, unfavourably: "how clear it was that she would be vacillating, emotional, and when you said something to her it would make no more lasting impression than the stroke of a stick upon water" (p. 15). Helen is intelligent and discriminating, and although we are shown that the harshness of her judgement stems from a common prejudice against her own sex, when Rachel stammers that she is "going out to t-t-triumph in the wind," in unconscious parody of her Wuthering Heights heroine, "Mrs. Ambrose's worst suspicions were confirmed" (p. 18) -- and, we are bound to feel, justified.

In the next chapter, however, the narrative moves closer to Rachel, showing her to be an ordinary Victorian girl, not dull but uneducated and emotionally immature. Her mind has been confused rather than developed by the eccentric formal education considered adequate for middle-class girls, and her experience of life limited by the "excessive care" of her physical and moral upbringing (p. 32). The proper education of Rachel, then, becomes the central thread of the narrative. And if

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[15] Letter to Vanessa Bell, August 1908, in The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1888-1912, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Hogarth, 1975), p. 343.

Helen's were the point of view of the novel, we might expect an urbanely comic variation on this theme, for it is her belief that ignorance of sex is the main barrier to women's becoming "reasonable human beings." How are they to be educated? she asks in a letter to a friend:

> '. . . The present method seems to me abominable. This girl, though twenty-four, had never heard that men desired women, and, until I explained it, did not know how children were born. Her ignorance upon other matters as important' (here Mrs. Ambrose's letter may not be quoted) . . .' was complete. It seems to me not merely foolish but criminal to bring people up like that. Let alone the suffering to them, it explains why women are what they are - the wonder is they're no worse. I have taken it upon myself to enlighten her. . . .' (p. 110)

Helen prescribes free and open discussion (of subjects which, with nice irony, cannot be named in the novel) as the necessary counter-balance to the mystique of sex which she fears will grow profusely in the carefully-cultivated ignorance of the girl's mind. Her fears seem quite justified, as Rachel first encounters male sexuality in Mr. Dalloway's dark hints that love ("I don't use the word in the conventional sense. I use it as young men use it . . .") is one of life's two great "revelations" (p. 75), and in his acting out the role of the man of honour rendered helpless - and dangerous - by the passion she has inspired (pp. 84-85). Helen deems it wise to meet this kind of melodrama by disparaging the importance of sex. By her account passion is something which only men feel; and, while it is "natural" for women to respond, they should keep it in "proportion." "It's like noticing the noises people make when they eat, or men spitting; or, in short, any small thing that gets on one's nerves," she concludes (pp. 90-91). If this is a rational view of sex, it is little comfort to Rachel, who still wants to know why there are prostitutes in Piccadilly, why her life must be "hedged-in" to protect her from these "brutes" of men - and why, despite all this sordidness, she liked Dalloway and liked being kissed.

Helen tells her to read modern fiction to broaden her mind, so Rachel consumes first A Doll's House and then a novel which achieves its purpose of distributing "the guilt of a woman's downfall upon the right shoulders," much to the girl's discomfort (p. 144). Because of her inexperience she simply cannot discriminate between the two. When she becomes obsessed with Terence Hewet,

> In her curious condition of unanalysed sensations she was incapable of making a plan which should have any effect upon her state of mind. . . . [N]o one had ever been in love with Rachel, and she had never been in love with anyone. Moreover, none of the books she read, from Wuthering Heights to Man and Superman, and the plays of Ibsen, suggested from their analysis of love that what their heroines felt was what she was feeling now. (p. 272)

The greatest modern portrayals of romantic love are no help. She has to learn what love is by living through her "unanalysed sensations" about Hewet, just as her eyes are opened to human pettiness by her own observation of the falsity of religious observance during the service at the hotel, and not by the volume of Balzac chosen at random from her uncle's library.

Books fail her because Rachel does not yet recognise herself as playing an active part in the life which they portray, a life which seems more real than her own, the province of the men who seem to her so godlike - Dalloway, Hewet, and St. John Hirst. To her, reading Who's Who is equivalent to knowing those whose lives are described there: she treats books as if they were people and the people she meets as having the authority of books - and Helen "thought that there must be something wrong in this confusion between politics and kissing politicians" (p. 94). Hirst lends her Gibbon's Decline and Fall to test whether her immaturity is due to lack of training or "natural incapacity," he tells her (p. 181); but on reading the first passage from it, "such was her excitement at the possibilities of knowledge now opening before her that she ceased to read . . ." and she drifts off into a trance.

The origin of her exaltation appears to be the two young men, but

> any clear analysis of them was impossible owing to the haze of wonder in which they were enveloped. She could not reason about them as about people whose feelings went by the same rule as her own did, and her mind dwelt on them with a kind of physical pleasure such as is caused by the contemplation of bright things hanging in the sun. From them all life seemed to radiate; the very words of books were steeped in radiance. (p. 206)

Just as she had confused "politics and kissing politicians," so now she confuses knowledge with the bearers of knowledge. She is unable to analyse them as beings like herself because they are only projections of her own desire for enlightenment. In this state of erotic fusion with the world, she is incapable of defining herself and her relations with others in the way she had foreseen in conversation with Helen, when "the vision of her own personality, of herself as . . . different from anything else, unmergeable . . . flashed into Rachel's mind" (pp. 94-95).

It is little wonder that Helen fails to impress upon her charge her own rational view of life. When she "takes on" the task of Rachel's education, this somewhat Jamesian relationship reveals dangers not anticipated at first when she wrote to her friend: "My brother-in-law really deserved a catastrophe -- which he won't get" (p. 110). The earliest intimation of catastrophe associated with Rachel comes from an image grotesquely appropriate to the theme of a sheltered young girl's awakening to life and her vulnerability to its forces. In an awkward pause in the after-dinner conversation aboard the Euphrosyne, Mr. Pepper begins a discourse on "the great white monsters of the lower waters":

> Mr. Pepper went on to describe the white, hairless, blind monsters lying curled on the ridges of sand at the bottom of the sea, which would explode if you brought them to the surface, their sides bursting asunder and scattering entrails to the winds when released from pressure. . . . (p. 18)

The "blind monsters" brought to the surface suggest the sleeping girl, her eyes "unreflecting as water" (p. 16), whose exposure to the rarefied waters of social life and the reflective life of the mind results, inexplicably, in a destructive implosion of her life-energies. Rachel may also be associated with another image of vulnerability, that of the ship on her maiden voyage, "moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources" alone on a sea which "might give her death or some unexampled joy" (p. 29). This image is reinforced by Mr. Pepper's quotation of the lines from Antigone in praise of human mastery of the natural world, of the wonder of man who "even crosses the . . . all-engulfing deeps" (p. 46) -- but the Chorus is forced to admit that human power does not extend over death.[16] The irony of the passage is clearly established, and yet the dangers of hubris seem less appropriate to Rachel's enterprise than the primitive image of creatures of the deep emerging to the surface of life.

In A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf was also to employ such an image to represent the obscure passionate life of woman, now emerging from "under the shadow of the rock" to reach out for "a piece of strange food - knowledge, adventure, art" (p. 127). The underwater image is used with more consciousness of its psychoanalytic association with sexuality when she tries to explain why it was so difficult to "tell the truth about my own experiences as a body": when her imagination rushed away seeking "the pools, the depths . . . where the largest fish slumber" it came smashing up against the rock of male disapproval of women speaking about physical passion.[17]

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[16] My colleague Margaret Finnis kindly identified this passage and translated it from the Greek for me.

[17] "Professions for Women," Collected Essays, II, 287-88.

Rachel's sexual awakening and her coming to consciousness of herself as a unique personality occur simultaneously, but the two processes pull her in opposing directions. While she is for the first time an active subject in the social world, understanding and judging for herself, her individuality seems at the same time to be threatened by love, as she experiences it with Hewet, and by social relations (she is dissatisfied, arrogantly critical of the shortcomings of others, shrinking from the hotel guests whose desire to congratulate the couple on their engagement seems to her to be "prying"). But just before she falls ill, Rachel experiences a moment of reconciliation when the blind struggle of living seems to fall into a pattern. Sitting in the hotel, in a trancelike state of heightened perception,

> She felt herself amazingly secure . . . and able to review . . . the entire past, tenderly and humorously, as if she had been turning in a fog for a long time, and could now see exactly where she had turned. . . . For the moment she was as detached and disinterested as if she had no longer any lot in life, and she thought that she could now accept anything that came to her without being perplexed by the form in which it appeared. . . . The world was in truth so large, so hospitable, and after all it was so simple. 'Love,' St. John had said, 'that seems to explain it all.' Yes, but it was not the love of man for woman, of Terence for Rachel. Although they sat so close together, they had ceased to be little separate bodies; they had ceased to struggle and desire one another. There seemed to be peace between them. It might be love, but it was not the love of man for woman. . . . So . . . although she was going to marry him and to live with him . . . and to quarrel, and to be so close to him, she was independent of him; she was independent of everything else. Nevertheless . . . it was love that made her understand this, for she had never felt this independence, this calm, and this certainty until she fell in love with him, and perhaps this too was love. She wanted nothing else.
> (pp. 384-86)

With this mood of reconciliation to the ways of the world, the romantic comedy of Rachel's education seems to have been played out, yet her reverie registers negative elements. The love that "seems to explain everything" is <u>caritas</u>, and in its impersonal contemplation the struggle and desire of <u>eros</u> becomes remote and unreal. As she watches the hotel

guests pass through the room in "graceful" and "inevitable" procession, silent but approachable, she recalls the night of the almost-Dionysian dance when these same people, "little red, excited faces, always moving," had seemed to her "so animated that they did not seem in the least like real people, nor did you feel that you could talk to them" (p. 384). The sense of having transcended the uncertainty and effort of passion is accompanied by that of detachment from the human lot. She "wanted nothing else," and the verb is potent in both its senses of lacking and desiring: she feels complete but is also passive now, in contemplation of the human procession through life to death.

Does this withdrawal prefigure her death, explain its meaning? James Hafley suggests that Rachel was "wrong" to have allowed love to lead her to reject everything outside herself, but his formulation of cause and effect implies, misleadingly, that a measure of choice was possible.[18] Other critics have given a realist interpretation of her death as an evasion of the oppressiveness of marriage,[19] and yet the explicit criticism of marriage in the novel is Terence's, a protest against the dullness and smugness it fosters that evokes no overt response from Rachel (and the fact that Evelyn Murgatroyd voices similar views also undercuts their seriousness). Harvena Richter sees Rachel's death as a release from "the fulfilling of the fleshly self from which she shrank earlier,"[20] although the text suggests her initiation into its mysteries in the forest scene with Terence (ch. 20). This point

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[18] The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), pp. 17-18.

[19] Blackstone, pp. 29-30 and Marder, pp. 52-53.

[20] Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 124.

is made in James Naremore's sensitive analysis of the scene, in which he demonstrates the correlation between sex and death stressed in the imagery of the descriptive passages, in Rachel's imagination, and even in the events throughout the novel.[21]

The meaning of Rachel's final withdrawal into death is, I suggest, defined in the text itself, in the conflict between her "voyage out" as an individual and the constraints upon her sexuality. The contradiction between the subjective freedom and the subjected status of the young woman is introduced early; but the irony which disrupts the novel's comic patterning is that no sooner has the heroine reached a sure sense of her individuality through the experience of love than the social consequences of that love - marriage and motherhood - threaten to reduce her to the anonymity of carrying "the burden of the new generation" (p. 388).

The phrase refers to the attitude of Miss Allen to the young lovers when she interrupts Rachel's reverie quoted above, and this prospect of their future is the central theme of the subsequent account of Mrs. Thornbury's tea-party in their honour. Looking at their hostess, Rachel thinks she is like nature itself: "this long life and all these children had left her very smooth; they seemed to have rubbed away the marks of individuality, and to have left only what was old and maternal" (p. 390). When Mrs. Thornbury chatters enthusiastically about the new possibilities open to young women to "go out and do things" as well as being mothers, both Rachel and the other engaged girl feel self-conscious: "they did not like to be included in the same lot" (p. 391). The two girls seem to their restless contemporary, Evelyn, to be "slow," weighed down by their attachments, "and for the sake of this one man they had renounced all other men, and movement, and the real things of life" (p. 392).

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[21] Naremore, p. 39.

It is in this context that Rachel's conception of human lives as "only a light passing over the surface and vanishing" (p. 145) is recalled, as the company hear "far off the low murmur of the sea, as the waves quietly broke and . . . withdrew to break again" and see the light fall in "soft crescents and diamonds of sunshine upon the plates and the tablecloth" (p. 394). The images of river and sea are now fully developed. The latter, with its tides and depths, signifies the common life of the unconscious, source of dreams; but the river is the dynamic force of physical life, which seems to Rachel in the jungle "terrible," "senseless and churning." To Helen, too, the river is the image of a chaotic and cruel life force, rushing away with precious individual lives (p. 270). On both occasions when Helen has this apprehension it is expressed in a fear for her children's safety -- when she first suspects that Rachel is in love (pp. 269-70) and then when this suspicion is confirmed on the river journey (pp. 249-50). Fearing for Rachel, fearing for her children, and yet outwardly calm and reconciled to her lot in life, Helen shows what goes into the making of the ancient maternal image evoked by Mrs. Thornbury's "silvery smoothness," "like a river brimming in the moonlight" (p. 390).

Helen "dominates the book like a presiding goddess," prescient but impotent, for she is caught up by her maternity in the stream of life, at its mercy.[22] In contrast, Rachel's virginity symbolizes the alternative relation of the woman to Fate. She is associated with Sabrina in Milton's "Comus," the chaste nymph, independent of men, who has control over the stream of life ("with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream," p. 398) and who is the defender of virgins' honour or

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[22] Holtby, pp. 64-65.

integrity. The novel, if not the poem, clearly associates virginity with the independent self rather than with the conventional feminine virtues of sexual innocence and chastity.[23]

Rachel is linked with Sabrina not only by Terence's reading "Comus" to her on the day she falls ill and in the game where she claims to be a mermaid, evading his mock-pursuit,[24] but also much earlier when on their first meeting she refuses to shake hands with him because hers are wet, like Sabrina's "chaste palms moist and cold." This same scene also links her with Narcissus, for Terence sees her "kneeling by the stream lapping water out of her palms" (p. 148). An examination of the relevance of the Narcissus myth to Rachel's states of consciousness reveals significant differences among those trance-like states of withdrawal which all suggest a desire for loss of self in death.[25]

As Robert Graves tells the story of Narcissus, at his birth Tiresias promised him a long life "provided that he never knew himself"; but although pursued by many lovers he remained untouched by desire until the day when, bending to drink at a pool, he saw his own image reflected there and fell in love with it.[26] In the psychoanalytic interpretation of this legend Narcissus represents a stage of human development, the beginning of ego-formation by means of identification. The infant enters into a "primary identification" with the human form

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[23] Rachel's likeness to the ship on its voyage out (noted above) also links her with Euphrosyne ("the well-disposed"), one of three daughters of Venus and Bacchus mentioned in Milton's "L'Allegro" (ll. 11-16), an allusion more appropriate to the comic and festive aspects of the novel.

[24] Richter, p. 124.

[25] Naremore, chapter 3 passim.

[26] The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), I, 286-88.

in the perfect image (that is, a coordinated whole) which it perceives in the mirror. Narcissus is arrested in self-love at this stage, unable to desire the other because he has not discovered its difference from himself - the discovery which would define his own subjectivity. Since he never constitutes himself as a human subject, he remains incapable of entering into inter-subjective relations with others.[27]

In a quite realistic sense Rachel, the Victorian young lady, is an infant in the world of adult social and sexual relations which she enters at the age of twenty-four. She does not understand others' actions because she cannot yet recognise herself in them, hence the combination of idealistic awe and arrogant dismissal of others that marks her behaviour. Unable to confront the apparent difference between her feelings and those of others, she prefers to regard them as symbols, "featureless but dignified, . . . and beautiful often as people upon the stage are beautiful." This realisation is the occasion of her first trance-like state, when she "subsides" into unconscious passivity, symbolically renouncing her active subjectivity (p. 35).

The psychological state represented by Narcissus involves the withdrawal of desire from the world of objects and others back to the self in its primary form. Freud pointed out that this state occurs in the first stage of infantile ego-formation, and also, interestingly, in illness, and in romantic love (which involves the idealization of the loved object as part of oneself).[28] Such states in which the social

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[27] Following Juliet Mitchell's exposition of Freud in Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 39-40 and pp. 386-87.

[28] Mitchell, pp. 33-35.

being completely loses consciousness of itself obviously appealed to Virginia Woolf, and in her novels they appear as equivalents of that state of free consciousness which she felt was essential to the creative process. In this novel, however, Rachel's experiences of withdrawal are key points in her development but are invariably accompanied by intimations of danger, perhaps because the watchful self is in abeyance. At the end of the scene just referred to, Helen looks in at Rachel lying asleep and "unprotected she looked somehow like a victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey" (p. 35). When Rachel, reading Gibbon, begins to wonder if she might be in love, she is dazed and "awed by the discovery of a terrible possibility in life" (p. 207). Again she senses something "terrible" during the walk in the forest with Terence when they declare their love for each other, dreamily acquiescent and echoing each other's words (p. 332). On another occasion the lovers' magic circle of self-containment is violently broken by Helen's greeting: "A hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel's shoulder; it might have been a bolt from heaven. She fell beneath it . . ." (p. 347).

This dreamy state of oneness between the lovers is shown to be an illusion when, after they have quarrelled and made up again, they look into the mirror together and "it chilled them to see themselves in the glass, for instead of being vast and indivisible they were really very small and separate" (p. 371). It is only as separate subjectivities that they can desire one another -- and can paradoxically, desire an ideal, all-encompassing love which would dissolve their separateness. Finally in her illness Rachel withdraws completely from Terence's reach: "she was completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated alone with her body" (pp. 402-403). Only at the moment of her death can he feel that they have attained that state of perfect unity beyond struggle and desire "which had been impossible while they lived" (p. 431).

The death of Rachel carries both the pathos of an arbitrary blow from Fate and also something of the tragic weight of inevitability. The tension between these two modes in the fiction is related to the conflicting visions of her life with which the protagonist is confronted, on the one hand as the subject of her own destiny and on the other as subject to the inexorable natural and social laws of the "common life." The division is transcended at the very end of the novel by St. John's experience of the pattern of life perceived, as Rachel had momentarily perceived it, through a compassionate, impersonal love. But the brief emergence of the woman as individual is submerged in this reconciling vision.

## To the Lighthouse

I have drawn attention to the symbolic nature of the action in The Voyage Out: the Victorian girl developing her individual identity in relation to the world of social relations and to the primitive natural forces of generation and death. It is a significant action which represents on the level of realism an historic change in human relations and upon which symbolic and mythical perspectives are simultaneously brought to bear. As such, it might be termed an allegory. The term has unwelcome connotations, but it will serve to indicate the element common to this first novel and to To the Lighthouse which makes the incidents seem "somehow emblematic," "carefully selected and endowed with a mysterious significance."[29] The meaning of these incidents becomes rather less mysterious when they are regarded as events in the "obscure life of women," of which Virginia Woolf is the historian.

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[29] Naremore, p. 133, notes the phenomenon of significant incidents but rejects the term "allegorical."

In To the Lighthouse the author represents allegorically, in Lily Briscoe's relations with the Ramsays, the emergence of the independent woman from the Victorian family. Lily has broken with the simple certainties of Mrs. Ramsay's belief in marriage and the family. That belief itself seems to die with her, for after the ten-year interval of war and death in "Time Passes" the family is fragmented and there is no-one to continue in the mother's place. "They perished, each alone" is the motto of the final section, "The Lighthouse," and yet it is here that new relations of sympathy between the characters are initiated. In her painting Lily works towards a moment of vision which transforms into a positive gesture her denial of marriage's necessity. But all this is achieved by working through the experience of grief and loss: the past will not allow itself to be shed like a snake's skin. Virginia Woolf lightheartedly claimed that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed,"[30] and she gave herself free rein in Orlando to imagine it happening so suddenly that the first female poet burst miraculously upon the world. But in To the Lighthouse she shows the pain and loss involved in such a transition for those whose destiny it was to live through it.

Such an allegory had, of course, an immense personal significance for her, and writing it had the effect of undergoing psychoanalysis, as she recalled in her diary on 28 November 1928:

> Father's birthday. He would have been 96, 96, yes, today . . . but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. . . . No writing, no books; - inconceivable.
> I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing the Lighthouse laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true - that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; and writing of them was a necessary act.)[31]

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[30] "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Collected Essays, I, 320.

[31] A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (1953; rpt. New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 1973), p. 135. All further references to this work appear in the text.

Many readers have recognised in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay portraits of Leslie and Julia Stephen. Virginia Woolf's memory of her mother vividly recalls Mrs. Ramsay's character and the significance she is given as a presence in the novel: she was "very quick; very definite; very upright; and behind the active, the sad, the silent. And of course she was central." The child lived "so completely in her atmosphere that one never got far enough away from her to see her as a person" and this atmosphere or presence was so pervasive because she had to extend herself to so many people - her husband, her two families of children, her household. She herself was "the common life of the family, very merry, very stirring, crowded with people" - and for this reason, no child could have her to herself, intimately.[32] Lily Briscoe's position as a kind of god-child to Mrs. Ramsay, half-way between her generation and the "brood" of Ramsay children, establishes the distance necessary for the author finally to see her mother "as a person" -- and, incidentally, to "have her to herself" for that brief and ambiguous moment when, sitting on the floor with her arms clasped around Mrs. Ramsay's knees, Lily wonders whether love could make her one with the object of her adoration; but Mrs. Ramsay is oblivious: "Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing! as she leaned her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (pp. 82-83).

It is part of the distancing effect of the novel that the remembered characters of her mother and father as they are portrayed in the Ramsays have significant affinities with the characteristic (not to say caricatured) Victorian female and male figures which are touchstones in Virginia Woolf's feminist essays on the patriarchal relations of the sexes. Not only do they represent historically the middle-class couple -

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[32] "A Sketch of the Past" in Moments of Being, pp. 83-84.

she the amateur social worker, of untrained mind and highly developed sympathies, he the intellectual (both a rationalist and a Calvinist) humanized by his domestic relations - but they are also the Angel in the House and the patriarchal hero whom she is created to serve. Mr. Ramsay's desire for fame is gently mocked by being associated with romanticized heroes of the Empire, heroes of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and those with "qualities that would have saved a ship's company exposed on a broiling sea with six biscuits and a flask of water" (p. 57). And, asks the wickedly sympathetic narrator:

> Who shall blame the leader of the doomed expedition, if, having adventured to the uttermost, and used his strength wholly to the last ounce and fallen asleep not much caring if he wakes or not, he now perceives . . . that he lives, . . . but requires sympathy, and whisky, and someone to tell the story of his suffering to at once? . . . Who will not secretly rejoice when the hero puts his armour off, and halts by the window and gazes at his wife and son? . . . (p. 60)

Is this not the same man, one might ask, as the one described in A Room of One's Own (p. 53) who has raised a civilization out of swamp and jungle through his heroic and violent action, empowered by the magnified vision of himself in the mirror of woman's regard? And Mrs. Ramsay, "so boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by" (p. 63), is the woman providing such a mirror. This woman is the Angel in the House, the flower of the Victorian domestic retreat, and in the author's satirical description of her, of the domineering aspect of her sympathy and the deceptions it involves, the figure of Mrs. Ramsay can be seen, writ grotesquely large:[33]

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[33] The parallel between Mrs. Ramsay and the Angel (but not that between Mr. Ramsay and the hero of Empire) is discussed in Phyllis Rose's stimulating essay, "Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Woolf," Women's Studies, I, (1973), 199-216.

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it - in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.[34]

The Angel's tyranny is subtler than that of the Empire-builder, but it is tyranny nonetheless. Its effect, in Mrs. Ramsay, is to deny the validity of Lily's independence and force her into imitating this self-sacrificial role. In this incident, the image which expresses her emotional blackmailing of Lily has the same threat of imminent disaster as her husband's appeals to her:

> 'I am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire. Unless you apply some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man there, life will run upon the rocks. . . . My nerves are taut as fiddle strings. Another touch and they will snap' - when Mrs. Ramsay said all this, as the glance in her eyes said it, of course for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment - what happens if one is not nice to that young man there - and be nice. (p. 143)

In order for "experiment" and creativity to continue, the Angel must certainly be "killed," as the young writer Virginia Woolf had to do, for "had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing."[35] But the Angel is not contained only in Mrs. Ramsay: as the creation of the male need for sympathy, she comes to life a little in every woman. Lily, confronted with Mr. Ramsay's demanding grief after his wife's death, feels that "a woman, she had provoked this horror; a woman, she should have known how to deal with it. It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb"

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[34] "Professions for Women," Collected Essays, II, 285.

[35] "Professions for Women," p. 286.

(p. 236). Desperate to end this long moment of confrontation between them, she praises his boots, and immediately contact is established of a companionable kind, without the melodrama of sexual role-playing: "Mr. Ramsay smiled. His pall, his draperies, his infirmities fell from him. Ah yes, he said, holding his foot up for her to look at, they were first-rate boots" (pp. 237-38). He seems to her now a figure of pathos, and suddenly she is "tormented with sympathy for him" (p. 238). Just as the Angel is only one element in Mrs. Ramsay's makeup, so too the Tyrant is only one face of her husband; but the one false role evokes the other, and nurtures it.

What the novel does is to show the lived reality of the masculine and feminine stereotypes of Victorian patriarchy. But the more deeply the lived experience is felt through the fiction, the more natural and universal these roles appear, and so it is hardly surprising that critics have represented these two figures as the eternally opposed sexual archetypes (whether or not they perceive the implied criticism of the Great Mother in Mrs. Ramsay). The very fact that there has been such a heated debate about Mrs. Ramsay's virtues and Mr. Ramsay's vices indicates a high level of ideological content in their portraits.[36] Virginia Woolf was as aware of this as she was of their autobiographical significance for her, but it is clear that she was not merely reinforcing the sexist stereotypes, celebrating an absolute masculine-feminine dualism. Neither character is a complete human being, neither

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[36] Mrs. Ramsay is characterized as a castrating matriarch by Glenn Pedersen, "Vision in To the Lighthouse," PMLA, 73 (December 1958), 585-600. But Herbert Marder sees her as the "ideal personality," "the androgynous artist in life," p. 128. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, in Towards Androgyny: Aspects of Male and Female in Literature (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973) comments wryly that "one criticizes Mrs. Ramsay at one's peril," but argues that "sentiment and misplaced biographical information" have prevented readers from discovering her to be "as one-sided and life-denying as her husband," p. 155.

is even trustworthy at the level of human relations - and both are distanced historically in the novel. A consideration of Lily's point of view is crucial here, for it is she who draws together in her painting (her vision) all the reflections on their relationship, and who celebrates it in an <u>elegy</u> to its passing away.

The Ramsays take on the magnitude of gods when seen through the eyes of love. Lily cannot look at them directly, neither Mr. Ramsay striding towards her in the garden nor Mrs. Ramsay absorbed in her own reflections on marriage while Lily clings to her knees; she had to look away, "for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays":

> Directly one looked up and saw them, what she called 'being in love' flooded them. They became part of that unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love. The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them. (p. 76)

On another occasion, however, her perspective changes and she sees them "in the <u>failing light</u>" and looking "sharp-edged and ethereal and <u>divided by great distances</u>" (p. 115, my emphasis). They are no longer the god-like projections of a child's adoration and awe, but are now perceived by one capable of separating the symbolic from the actual, as a distinct dimension of perception. She sees them as the symbolic human couple:

> So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball. That is what Mrs. Ramsay tried to tell me the other night, she thought. . . . And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, . . . descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk, standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became . . . Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches. (pp. 114-115)

Much later, another perspective on them is shown. Lily reminds herself that it would be a mistake, when remembering them together, to simplify their relationship into a "monotony of bliss," but she recalls their quarrels and reconciliations in an intensely romantic light:

> At length, . . . he would say her name, once only, for all the world like a wolf barking in the snow but still she held back; and he would say it once more, and this time something in the tone would rouse her, and she would go to him. . . . Such a dignity was theirs in this relationship that, turning away, she and Paul and Minta would hide their curiosity and their discomfort, and begin picking flowers, throwing balls, chattering. . . .
> (p. 307)

A thread of nostalgia for the romantic devotion of traditional marriage is woven into all Lily's reflections on the Ramsays. It appears again in A Room of One's Own in the narrator's mock-serious regret at the lost glamour of "luncheon parties before the war" when men and women, she imagines, hummed love poetry to each other (p. 19). That the novelist was aware of this nostalgic tendency is suggested by the comment in A Writer's Diary that she expected the stock criticisms of To the Lighthouse might be that it was "sentimental" and "Victorian" (p. 98). But because she has captured the sense of all the scenes in the novel happening simultaneously, the nostalgia is balanced by her revelation of the Ramsays as they "really" were to themselves, of the doubts, revulsions and terrors, unspoken even between the characters, that go on beneath the surface of such a marriage.

As a daughter-figure as well as a devotee, Lily has conflicting responses to the almost-mythical Mother and Father, responses which are an important mediation of their meaning in the novel. In this position, her attitudes to the Ramsays involve a greater degree of conscious emulation or rejection than the unreflecting responses of their actual children. Compared to James's fierce hatred of his father, Lily's fear of Mr. Ramsay's narrowness and tyranny is modified by her admiration for his sincerity, his simplicity: "/I/n her opinion one liked Mr. Ramsay all the better for thinking that if his little finger ached the whole world must come to an end . . . his little dodges deceived nobody" (p. 75). Much later she manages to stand up to his domination; but in this final section of the novel it must be his own children who

enact that acceptance by which the Tyrant Father, himself reconciled to his loss, becomes both a person whom they can freely love, and a symbol of human courage in the face of death. But their memories of ten years ago are fragmented, as Lily's are not, and it is only the "god-daughter" who is capable finally of redeeming the Mother by accepting her both as a person, flawed and lost, and as a symbol of unifying love:

> 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she cried, feeling the old horror come back - to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. Mrs Ramsay - it was part of her perfect goodness to Lily - sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat. (p. 310)

Paradoxically, this appearance of the ghost exorcises Lily of the painfully diffuse presence that has been haunting her, and returns to her the human object of her love.

Before this can happen, however, Lily struggles to clarify her perception of Mrs. Ramsay by ridding it of religious awe. Her memory of Mrs. Ramsay's beauty, her gift of "the perfection of the moment" (p. 265), is countered by the memory of "this mania of hers for marriage" (p. 270). Lily reflects with some satisfaction that the marriage of Paul and Minta which Mrs. Ramsay had arranged has not been a success in the conventional way, though they have become "excellent friends," and that she herself is still painting and "had never married anybody, not even William Bankes":

> But the dead, thought Lily. . . . They are at our mercy. Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. . . . And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes. They're happy like that; I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely. . . . For a moment Lily . . . triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay. . . . (p. 269)

But it can only be a momentary triumph, for the painting demands that the artist recapture the whole truth of her feeling for Mrs. Ramsay, purify both the admiration and the rejection so that she can create the thing itself and not her own or anyone else's projections upon it. She wants to paint the beauty of mother and son but, she remembers explaining to William Bankes, she will not treat the subject as Raphael had, "divinely." "She explained how it was not irreverence: how a light there needed a shadow there and so on" (p. 271).

Through the activity of painting, Lily recreates the lost object of her love and overcomes the obsession that stands in the way of her independence. It is an obsession reflected in both the passages quoted above, a complex of the need to justify herself to Mrs. Ramsay and the desire to merge herself completely with the loved Mother and thus to escape her judgement. Lily is always struggling to love Mrs. Ramsay without emulating her, and it is only at the very last that her own vision is freed and expressed. At this climactic moment, she draws a line in the centre of the picture, signifying finality, perhaps ruling off the past from the present: "It was done; it was finished" (p. 320). The community created by Mrs. Ramsay has passed, and so has that way of life marked by marriage in the name of that passion which she, goddess-like, celebrated at her dinner-table, triumphing in its power ("bearing in its bosom the seeds of death") and yet mocking its human agents ("these lovers . . . entering into illusion glittering eyed," p. 156). The makings of a new kind of human community are suggested, I think, in the way Lily shares with Mr. Carmichael the moment of relief and release when they both realise the boat has landed: "They had not needed to speak . . . he had answered her without her asking him anything." His Neptune-like pose seems to promise a new dispensation to succeed that of procreation and death, of which the Mother was the presiding power -- and Mr. Carmichael never did succumb to her seductiveness:

> He stood there spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly, compassionately, their final destiny. Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels. . . . (p. 319)

The rule of the poet-philosopher, it is suggested, will be crowned with flowers rather than fire (the image of passion); it will approach death with compassion, rather than desire and fear.

These, however, are only hints, and last-minute ones at that, which have little power to outweigh the immense presence of Mrs. Ramsay in the novel. The world without her is undeniably impoverished. So potent are the emblematic values created by Virginia Woolf's lyrical style that Mrs. Ramsay's death seems to signify not simply the passing of time but the death of everything she has come to represent: warmth, passion, fecundity. Similarly in The Voyage Out Rachel's death is not just the passing of one tiny individuality into the stream of the common life, as in St. John's final vision, but implies the defeat of her symbolic struggle, the impossibility of individual autonomy for a woman. Lily Briscoe survives, the independent woman, the artist; but it is her exhaustion that strikes us in the end. It suggests not only relief from the effort of finishing her painting but also the utter draining of energy that has been demanded by her summoning up and mastering the past which has been oppressing her; and she is left with nothing but her painting. The classic plight of the artist who has to burn herself up in the service of her art has become identified with the plight of the woman rebelling against femininity, who is compelled to destroy that major element in her own personality. Such destruction seemed to Virginia Woolf to be the necessary cost of achieving that free state of consciousness which she called the androgynous mind.[37]

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[37] Elaine Showalter in "Killing the Angel in the House," Antioch (cont.)

Between the Acts

The survival of the past in the present (haunting and oppressive but emotionally rich), the dangerous power of sexual love, and the impoverished independence of the woman artist, are themes which do not recur in this cluster until Virginia Woolf's last novel, which was published posthumously in 1941. When she finished it in November, 1940, she noted in her diary:

> I am a little triumphant about the book. I think it's an interesting attempt at a new method. I think it's more quintessential than the others. More milk skimmed off. A richer pat [of butter] . . . .
> (A Writer's Diary, p. 345)

This metaphor occurs also when she reflects that the biographies of great writers bear little impress of a personality: they are "colourless," like "skimmed milk;" they have "distilled everything into their books."[38] It is the distillation of experience into art which impoverishes the personality of the artist in To the Lighthouse, and there is something of the same anonymity about Bernard in The Waves. In the figure of the female artist in Between the Acts, Miss La Trobe, this impersonality is her distinguishing characteristic. She is also, like Lily, an artist who recreates the past, and a celibate one, in the sense that she lives independently of men.

Miss La Trobe creates the historical pageant performed in the grounds of Pointz Hall at midsummer to raise money for the village

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Review, 32 (1972-73), 341, argues that the concept of androgyny represents an escape from confrontation with "femininity," by which she seems to mean not the ideological concept but female experience itself. Many critics have deplored Woolf's avoidance of physical sexuality in her novels but, as Rose points out, the maternal figure seems to represent the only concept of female sexuality she had ("Mrs Ramsay and Mrs Woolf," p. 209).

[38] "Personalities" in Collected Essays, II, 276.

church. It is performed by the villagers to an audience of the local gentry, but the artist belongs to neither group. The collective voice (with which the novelist was experimenting as a means of narrative continuity) initially tells what little is known about her: speculation about her origins ("With that name she wasn't presumably pure English"), rumours about her past (she had shared her cottage with an actress and "they had quarrelled"), doubts about her social status (she "used rather strong language - perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady?"). "At any rate, she had a passion for getting things up," the voice concludes, dismissing her as a personality.[39]

While the pageant goes on, she experiences moments of despair and triumph as she watches the audience's response. For a moment only she had "made them see," and "a vision imparted was relief from agony" (p. 117); at other times "illusion fails" and "panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind" (p. 210). When the pageant is over she remains hidden behind the bushes while speeches are made and the audience disperses. Lonely and unhappy, she seeks out "shelter; voices; oblivion" in the public bar, and, sitting there alone, begins to imagine her next play. On the way there, one of the women from the cottages passes her without acknowledgement: "She was an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind. Yet she had scribbled in the margin of her manuscript: 'I am the slave of my audience'," (p. 247). She is isolated and yet bound to her audience, to the common life which signifies both "shelter" and "oblivion" for her. Again, the plight of the artist is identified with that of the independent woman.

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[39] Between the Acts, (London: Hogarth, 1941), p. 72. All further references to this work appear in the text.

The novel's image of the common life is the lily pool, where "water, for hundreds of years, had silted down into the hollow, and lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud" and where fish swim, "glazed in their self-centred world" (pp. 54-55). The fish provide the occasion for an argument between old Bart Oliver and his sister Lucy about human nature, as they stand by the pool after the pageant. To her they signify faith and beauty, while he sceptically maintains that their trustfulness is merely greed, their beauty simply serves the instinct of sex (p. 240). Lucy has a visionary faith, but Bart "carries the torch of reason" and doubts the permanence of harmony, "for she belonged to the unifiers; he to the separatists" (p. 140). But they both observe, rather than immerse themselves in, the pool. Miss La Trobe, on the other hand, is associated with the carp which inhabits the farthest depths of the pool and seldom comes to the surface: old Bart thinks that what she probably wants now, after the performance, "like that carp . . . was darkness in the mud; a whisky and soda at the pub; and coarse words descending like maggots through the waters." (pp. 237-38). And this odd image is picked up again as she sits in the pub, drinking and listening:

> Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning - wonderful words. (pp. 247-48)

The fish-world also provides images for the life of the young couple, Isa and Giles Oliver. Giles feels himself imprisoned by family responsibilities: "the conglomeration of things . . . held you fast, like a fish in water" (p. 59), while Isa recalls falling in love with him as being caught like one of the salmon they were fishing for (p. 60). If the pool represents the generative power of life in which human beings become immersed, then the artist, like the carp, inhabits the same muddy waters but can rise to the surface on occasion. She can make

people "see," can make things happen. Significantly, the new play which comes to her in the pub is the final reduction of her historical pageant, a symbolic drama of male and female bound together in love and enmity. Living out this submerged life in her imagination, she is free to transcend it momentarily, to form it into art.

The image of Miss La Trobe's creative activity has distinct similarities with the water images in To the Lighthouse. When Lily is preparing to paint, her mind "kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting . . ." (p. 246). The deep pool of the mind is a consistent image throughout Virginia Woolf's writing, and the fountain recalls Mrs. Ramsay's outflow of sympathy in response to her husband's demanding sterility (p. 62). But unlike her, Lily never experiences the mind's total withdrawal into a "wedge of darkness" and its return in ecstasy to consciousness (pp. 99-102). The artist is concerned with the pattern and meaning of things, while the maternal woman is portrayed as susceptible above all to sensation. Bernard, in The Waves, experiences the same oscillation between withdrawal and the call to active living as Mrs. Ramsay (and Rachel Vinrace, for that matter), but they are portraits of the artistic temperament, perhaps. Lily and Miss La Trobe show the artist as Maker. Theywork compulsively, experiencing both triumph and despair, although their achievement will go unrecognised by the world: "It would be hung in attics," Lily thought (p. 320); "Her gift meant nothing," Miss La Trobe felt after the pageant was over (p. 244). Their impersonality is a feature of their whole lives, not a momentary "unmooring" from a private being, like Bernard's or Mrs. Ramsay's.

This distinction between the artist as Maker and the artistic temperament is important because my implicit debate in the passage

above is with Naremore's conclusion that the tension in Virginia Woolf's work between a "creation" of the world and an "embrace" of it is a masculine-feminine opposition, overbalanced in favour of the dreamy, erotic and poetic feminine sensibility.[40] I suggest that there is a third possibility, a third temperament, which transcends this dualism and in which neither masculine nor feminine elements are identifiable, as shown in Virginia Woolf's portraits of the woman artist. They are more memorable in their moments of renunciation and failure than in moments of illumination, and their struggle to achieve freedom of consciousness is continuous. Certainly the feminine poetic sensibility of Isa in Between the Acts is attractive, more attractive than the masculine scepticism of Bart Oliver, but that is part of its function as "femininity" in a patriarchal culture. Isa's poems (which she keeps in her head or in an account book, in case her husband "suspected") are charming in the same way as the love poetry remembered nostalgically in A Room of One's Own: "one responds easily, familiarly, without troubling to check the feeling, or to compare it with any other that one has now" (p. 22). For Isa, the dreamy "embrace" of the world is attractive psychologically as relief from the ego's struggle to assert itself in the face of conflicting desires and demands. This experience of life is undeniably authentic, "real" (in Virginia Woolf's sense); but in her fiction it ultimately involves the embrace with death, for on the natural dimension femininity means fecundity and immersion in the cycle of birth, procreation and death.

What I have referred to, with unavoidable melodrama, as "the dangerous power of sexual love" is something of which only the female

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[40] Naremore, pp. 217-18 and p. 245.

characters in these novels seem to be aware. Through Rachel and Helen and the "terrible river" in The Voyage Out it is related most explicitly to the loss of individual existence in the life-force. More subtly, in To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay demonstrates self-effacement on several levels of being (social, emotional and spiritual), while celebrating the ambiguous power of love and death; Lily, recognising this, draws back from her own experience of passion and takes action on another plane, that of art: "She would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody" (p. 271). For the men in both these novels, marriage contains no such existential threat: Terence is only doubtful about its reactionary social function, and Mr. Ramsay wonders whether it has retarded his career. For both of them, unity is an experience which only follows the death of the women they have loved, an outcome of their grief. But the female characters view love and marriage with romantic fatalism, as something beautiful but ultimately destructive.

In Between the Acts the fatalism is still there, but the romance of marriage is gone. As she had done in The Years, the novelist gives a much clearer definition of the social and historical function of the middle-class family, stressing its pride of inheritance and self-satisfied privacy. The family at Pointz Hall is England's backbone, a truly patriarchal family with a portrait of an ancestor accompanied by horse and dog, old Bart retired from the colonial service, and his son a stockbroker in the City. Although his sister, showing a visitor the house, brushes family history aside as she points to the bookshelf, saying "Here are the poets from whom we descend by way of the mind" (p. 85), Bart has no time for feminine sentimentalities. In his scheme of values, the life of the mind, so far as he recognises it at all, comes a good second to his own flesh and blood son:

> Arms akimbo, he stood in front of his country gentleman's library. Garibaldi; Wellington; Irrigation Officers' Reports; and Hibbert on the Diseases of the Horse. A great harvest the mind had reaped; but for all this, compared with his son, he did not care one damn. . . . The door trembled and stood half open. That was Lucy's way of coming in - as if she did not know what she would find. . . . Was it that she had no body? Up in the clouds, like an air ball, her mind touched ground now and then with a shock of surprise. There was nothing in her to weight a man like Giles to the earth. (pp. 138-39)

The women in such a family are outsiders, even if Lucy is his sister and Isa the daughter of a knight and mother of his grandson. Their purpose is to weight their men to the earth and keep it fruitful.

Isa's awareness of this is reflected in her poem about being "burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories, possessions" (p. 182) and in her ambivalent feelings towards her husband and family. When Bart teases her about her son being a coward, she smothers her indignation, for "she loathed the domestic, the possessive; the maternal" (pp. 25-26). But looking at Giles and saying to herself, "'He is my husband, . . . the father of my children,'" she feels pride and affection, and mentally notes that "it worked, that old cliché" (p. 60). And her infatuation with "the ravaged, the silent, the romantic gentleman farmer," Haines (p. 19) threatens the stability of their marriage no more than do Giles's infidelities with women like Mrs. Manresa, the voluptuous "wild child of nature." Nevertheless there is an affinity between Isa and the epicene William Dodge, for, she feels, they were both "conspirators, seekers after hidden faces" (p. 136).

The marriage bond between Giles and Isa is one of strong feeling, as much hate as love, and it is presented as inevitable, irreducible. Throughout the day they have ignored one another; in the evening she watches him and his father, dressed for dinner:

> They sat down, ennobled both of them by the setting sun. . . . Giles now wore the black coat and white tie of the professional classes. . . . 'Our representative, our spokesman,' she sneered. Yet he was extraordinarily handsome. 'The father of my children, whom I love and hate.' Love and hate -- how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes. . . . (pp. 251-52)

This glimpse of the marriage relation as a primitive natural bond anticipates the final scene of the book, where the couple at Pointz Hall begin to act out the substance of Miss La Trobe's new play, with its setting of "the high ground at midnight" and "two scarcely perceptible figures" (p. 248):

> Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night. . . . The house had lost its shelter. It was night before the roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.
>
> Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (p. 256)

The archetypal quality of this vision is quite deliberately contrived, and it seems to deny Isa's wish for "a new plot," suggesting, too, that even if "the author came out from the bushes" it would make no difference. This ancient drama would still go on. Despite the book's fine impressionistic sketch of the patriarchal social structure within which Isa and Giles struggle with each other, this strong final scene, drawing as it does on the recurrent prehistoric images from Lucy Swithin's "Outline of History," undeniably suggests a sombre fatalism about the future. The coming act may continue human life in the cycle of procreation, birth and death, but it symbolizes the negation of history, of human consciousness. I find this scene to be a profoundly ambiguous statement about the value of human sexuality. It is the basis of existence, and in that sense the marriage of male and female is "ultimate relationship," as Marder puts it; but this is not the romantic affirmation

which he claims for the novel.[41] For if all human activity is reduced to this conflict of love and hate, the idea of history presented in the pageant as the continuous effort to make sense of life is shown to have been an illusion.

Miss La Trobe's pageant presents English history from the outsider's point of view, through changing relations between the sexes and the generations, leaving out kings and queens and builders of Empire. After the preliminary scenes involving Anglo-Saxon villagers and Canterbury pilgrims, there follow three versions of the same play about human relations, which can be read as parodies of Shakespeare, Congreve and Gilbert and Sullivan.[42] Costumes, manners and language change, but the issues remain the same; and Isa decides that confusions of plot do not matter: "The plot was only there to beget emotion. There were only two emotions: love, and hate" (p. 109).

To show that basic emotions do not essentially change is not exactly the denial of history that William Dodge accuses Lucy Swithin of, when she declares her disbelief that such people as "the Victorians" ever existed, that they were only people like themselves dressed differently (p. 203). But her "one-making" is an affirmation of faith in the ultimate harmony of all things, not a statement of fact; and at the same moment Mrs. Lynn Jones is reflecting that had time met no resistance, the Victorian home as she remembers it would have remained: "What she meant was, change had to come, unless things were perfect" (p. 203). Resistance, antagonism, are what produce change and consequently a different experience of life from generation to generation. And so discord is always the voice of the present time, like the music

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41 Marder, p. 60.

42 Naremore, p. 233.

which puts the audience on edge before subjecting them to the spectacle of themselves reflected in mirrors, the final "act" of the pageant:

> What a cackle, a cacophony! Nothing ended. So abrupt. And corrupt. . . . What is her game? To disrupt? Jog and trot? Jerk and smirk? . . . O the irreverence of the generation which is only momentarily - thanks be - 'the young.' The young, who can't make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole. . . . (pp. 213-14)

Finally, when the artist has thoroughly discountenanced her audience into confronting themselves in present time, comes the voice from the bushes, enumerating human failings, asking "how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by . . . orts, scraps, and fragments like ourselves?" (p. 219). But the anonymous voice affirms, too, that "there is something to be said" for kindness, fidelity, integrity, love of beauty; and music affirms that the "scraps, orts and fragments" are all parts of one whole:

> Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began. . . . Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. . . . [N]ot the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: . . . they crashed; solved; united. (pp. 220-21)

In "A Sketch of the Past" Virginia Woolf had explained her sense of "being" as that order of reality which is always present but "hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life;" it is a work of art of which human beings are the parts: "we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself."[43] But in her last evocation of the music of this Platonic Reality, the martial imagery seems to signify a new acceptance of conflict as basic to the pattern. All are "enlisted" in a more

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[43] In *Moments of Being*, p. 72.

active, controlling relation between the tumultuous depths and "the melody of surface sound."

This active vision, which corresponds to the Artist's experimental and imperfect efforts to reveal it to her audience, seems to be denied by the reductive fatalism of the final scene. Against that archaic sexual struggle and embrace, the march of history appears merely a pageant, never comprehended by the audience who cannot, then, feel responsible for their actions as historical subjects. As they disperse after the Rector's speech, chattering among themselves, it is evident that Miss La Trobe's polemics have failed, even though she has touched them momentarily. It was "only a village play" (p. 231).

The approaching war hangs like a shadow over the day: aeroplanes fly past in formation; scraps of conversation are overheard about the Dictator in Italy, the fate of the Jews (p. 145), and the possibility of invasion (p. 232); Giles seethes with impotent rage at the "old fogies who sat and looked at views . . . when the whole of Europe - over there - was bristling . . . with guns, poised with planes" (p. 66); Isa and William feel "the doom of sudden death hanging over us" (p. 136); and she has an intimation of Armageddon: "Now comes the lightning . . . from the stone blue sky. The thongs are burst that the dead tied. Loosed are our possessions" (p. 183).

Isa is particularly susceptible to the sensation described by Marx: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[44] There is a macabre sense of liberation in the prospect of the past's destruction. She and Giles, children of the twentieth century, are both fascinated and repelled by violence: Isa

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[44] "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in The Marx and Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 437.

is haunted by a newspaper report of a rape, which seems violently to break through the pattern of repetition in her life (pp. 29-30); he sees a snake choked with a toad in its mouth, a "birth the wrong way round -- a monstrous inversion," which, in his revulsion, he must destroy (p. 119). The older people have some faith in continuity, still "retreating and advancing," as William puts it (p. 136); but it is not surprising that the sense of imminent catastrophè, an ambiguous liberation, should finally dominate Between the Acts as it dominated Virginia Woolf's consciousness at the time.

In June, 1940, she wrote, as she was completing the book (referred to as "Pointz Hall," P.H.):

> I feel oughtn't I to finish off P.H.: oughtn't I to finish off something by way of an end? The end gives its vividness, even its gaiety and recklessness to the random daily life.
> . . . Further, the war - our waiting while the knives sharpen for the operation - has taken away the outer walls of security. No echo comes back. I have . . . little sense of a public. . . . Those familiar circumvolutions - those standards - which have for so many years given back an echo and so thickened my identity are all wide and wild as the desert now.
> (A Writer's Diary, pp. 324-25).

A sense of gaiety and recklessness is created in the book itself by the extraordinary speed and the violent incongruity of shifts from pageant to real life, from scene to scene and voice to voice. These shifts have the "dramatic" effect she tried vainly to get in The Years, of contraction and contrast between intensity and relaxation. The novelist who, true to her conception of her role as an experimenter, "broke moulds" with each new book, now breaks the conventions of consistency and construction with apparent randomness.[45] "Those familiar circumvolutions" are no

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[45] Naremore speaks of a "conscious faulting of structure, a questioning of the power of 'significant form' . . . ," p. 236. Ann Y. Wilkinson argues that dramatic juxtaposition is itself "The Principle of Unity in Between the Acts," in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Claire Sprague (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 145-54.

longer necessary, now that, with destruction imminent, she is granted at last that freedom of consciousness which she had always sought. Without an audience she is freed from the inhibiting awareness of others' judgements:

> . . . the idea came to me that why I dislike, and like, so many things idiosyncratically now, is because of my growing detachment from the hierarchy, the patriarchy. When Desmond praises East Coker, and I am jealous, I walk over the marsh saying, I am I: and must follow that furrow, not copy another. That is the only justification for my writing, living.
> (A Writer's Diary, pp. 346-47)

The thinned sense of identity which she mentioned earlier must also have been a sharpened one. She has moved beyond the need to take up any identifiable stance at all, even that of the Outsider, to which she felt she had irrevocably committed herself with the publication of Three Guineas. There is clearly a connexion between this perception and the impersonality of the woman artist as portrayed in Miss La Trobe; and her next book was to have been called "Anon," she wrote, noting: "I think of taking up my mountain top - that persistent vision - as a starting point" (A Writer's Diary, pp. 345-46). The distanced perspective (like the last scene of Between the Acts), the reduced yet sharpened sense of identity, suggest an ambiguous state of being, both cut loose and threatened by oblivion. Certainly it qualifies the absoluteness of that creative freedom she had so consistently imagined as possible for the writer who could detach her mind from personal and political responses to patriarchal ideology.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## CHRISTINA STEAD'S QUESTING HEROINES

Christina Stead is an Australian who has written and published in Britain and the United States. Her novels belong definitively to none of these national cultures, either in their social preoccupations or in their literary forms (which is, perhaps, the major reason for the critical neglect of her achievement to date). Nevertheless, in all three cultures, Australian, British and American, the experience of women in relation to the marriage-family institution has essential elements in common. And this is where Christina Stead locates her psychological dramas in the four novels discussed here: _The Man Who Loved Children_ (1940), _For Love Alone_ (1944), _Letty Fox: Her Luck_ (1946) and _Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)_ (1976).

Like D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, Stead focusses her radically critical vision of bourgeois social relations in this century on the relations between the sexes. That vision is, however, informed by a toughly optimistic Marxist perspective which saves her from the despair to which they both succumbed of the prospects for social liberation. Most of her novels are set in the turbulent decades of the thirties and forties in the great cities of the capitalist world -- London, Paris, New York, Washington -- where the public realm of political and commercial power is unobtrusively present as the larger drama against which the characters' personal conflicts stand out in high relief. They are members of the _petite bourgeoisie_, obscure people without wealth or influence, whose needs and aspirations are manifestly both moulded and frustrated by the social institutions of economic and sexual oppression. Within the narrow confines of their personal relationships their passions create a "rough and tumble of need, egotism and love" which constantly spills out of the "difficult social web" spun to contain them. These

phrases from For Love Alone[1] point to a vision of the social dynamic that is discernible in all her fiction, with its powerful sense of wasted lives, of human energy burning itself up. People walk, talk, gesture repetitively and compulsively: they are the dispossessed, as cramped in spirit as they are poor in the world's goods. Poverty in this double sense was the subject of her first novel, Seven Poor Men of Sydney, and remains, I think, her central preoccupation. It is the repressive psychological and ideological effects of capitalism, rather than economic exploitation itself, which concern her most.[2]

Poverty, ignorance and repression, then, weave the constraining web in which human flies struggle for survival. Inevitably, as Teresa sees, "we prey upon each other, but we don't want to" (For Love Alone, p. 219), for there is never enough of the world's goods, material and spiritual, to go around. The competitive struggle endemic to capitalist relations takes the form of hand-to-hand combat in the closest relationships of all, the familial and sexual bonds between individuals. So close and so all-consuming are they, indeed, that the participants are at a loss to distinguish between desire and need, altruism and egotism, reciprocity and exploitation.

Her characters reach no final illumination about themselves and their world, and each of these novels ends with a reminder that the violent struggle for psychic survival continues unabated. Only in

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[1] For Love Alone (Sydney: Angus and Robertson-Pacific, 1969), pp. 498 and 254. Further references to this edition appear in the text.

[2] Terry Sturm, however, feels that it is "the theme of economic exploitation" which gives her novels "their distinctively Marxist character": "Christina Stead's New Realism," in Cunning Exiles: Studies of Modern Prose Writers, ed. Don Anderson and Stephen Knight (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974), p. 9.

The Man Who Loved Children, where the marital battle is halted by Henny's death although Sam's massive egotism remains unshaken, is the final note a hopeful one, as the adolescent Louisa leaves home behind her and sets out alone. Although Teresa's faith in love seems to have been vindicated, For Love Alone ends with her looking back in dismay at her destructive relationship with Jonathan: "It's dreadful to think that it will go on being repeated for ever, he - and me! What's there to stop it?" (p. 502). Letty Fox finds the compromise in marriage which she has decided upon but the frenzied social world of the novel is left unchanged; Eleanor Herbert never even allows herself to admit what compromises she has made: "I kept to the rules, but the rules didn't keep me."[3] In each case there is a sense of finality in the rhythm of the book, but its human analogue is only the momentary exhaustion of energy. There are neither the moral resolutions of accommodation to the given social structure characteristic of the nineteenth-century realist novel, nor the symbolic resolutions, which tend to detach human conflict from its material reality and make it metaphysical, common to many modernist works of fiction.

Stead's irony, which reveals by dramatic means precise degrees of self-delusion and social oppression, grants to the characters a vitality that carries them through the novel and back into the actual life from which they came, a validity both as realistic social portraits and as imaginative creations. Her "new realism," as Terry Sturm defines it, rejects the assumptions common to both bourgeois and socialist realism, that there is "an irreconcilable conflict between personal and public (or political) realms of behaviour, between reality

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[3] Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife) (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 308. Further references to this edition appear in the text.

and ideology, both in life and in art." He points out the exploratory nature of the realism implied in Christina Stead's description of her method:

> Sometimes I start with a situation, sometimes with a personality. I never question or argue. I'm a psychological writer, and my drama is the drama of the person. The start of a story is like a love affair, exactly. It's like a stone hitting you. You can't argue with it. I wait and wait for the drama to develop. I watch the characters and the situation move and don't interfere. . . . I write a lot of schemata, but don't adhere to them. . . . The story inevitably goes its own way.[4]

The novels are in this sense open-ended: they neither explain nor schematize. The characters, however, do this incessantly. Christina Stead has the capacity for "creative identification with her characters . . . allowing them compulsively to talk, and express themselves and their confusions, contradictions and insincerities."[5] Talk is as much the direct expression of their mental life as is silent reflection, and in this expression they reveal at once their idiosyncratic individualities and their entanglement in the social web, as they articulate their desires and needs in the common language which carries the ideologies of their culture. Because the relation between the conscious and the unconscious mind is a fluid one, such ideas make their appearance as fantasy, rationalization or prejudice rather than as rationally formulated attitudes. Drawing attention to this, Terry Sturm points out that "ideology is part of the texture of characters' individual lives, inseparable from their experience and from the way they respond and react

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[4] Sturm, pp. 11-12, quoting from "Christina Stead in Washington Square," interview by Jonah Raskin, London Magazine, February 1970, p. 75.

[5] Michael Wilding, rev. of Christina Stead, by R.G. Geering, Australian Literary Studies, 4 (1970), 415-16.

to events."[6] I should like to push this statement further, arguing that ideology forms the texture of characters' mental lives, and to show how Christina Stead dramatizes this mental life in ways which reveal the truths as well as the mystifications of, in particular, ideologies of sex, love and marriage current during the period in which the novels are set.

The Man Who Loved Children

The struggle for survival among human beings is epitomized in a suitably biological metaphor in this novel about the family of Samuel Pollit, naturalist. He suggests to his daughter, Louisa, that she prepare "a Natural History of Spa House, . . . and you can put in the human beasts, too, . . . or human ecology."[7] The image of the human family's ecological system is a marine one. At a party to celebrate Sam's return from Malaya the Pollit clan is described as "circulating slowly in groups like creatures swimming in an aquarium" (p. 287). The children, confronted by their parents quarrelling like fighting fish, "seemed to take not the slightest interest in the obscene drama played daily in their eyes and ears, but, like little fish scuttling . . . would disappear mentally and physically into the open air" (p. 337). The metaphor is not a complete analogy, however, as the references to the open air and the aquarium confirm: the family system artificially confines "human beasts" in conditions of scarcity, and the wider society's

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[6] Sturm, p. 13.

[7] The Man Who Loved Children (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 358. Further references to this edition appear in the text.

influence upon its members is always in evidence.[8] In the fatal battle between the parents, the strength of the male clearly derives from his access to economic, legal and ideological power (as breadwinner, husband, and scientist), while the biological weakness of the female (prematurely aged by incessant childbearing) is further undermined by her poverty, her fear of the law's reprisals against erring wives, and her inability to combat her husband's theories with anything but personal attack, "the heckler's response to Sam's pompous platform oratory."[9] Henny, before her death, is imaged in the dead marlin which Sam intends to experiment upon as a source for household oils, to "make the luxurious sportsmanlike spearfish work for mankind" (p. 413) - a utilitarian motive with some spiteful intent, similar to his attitude to Henny's inherited wealth. The marlin, when caught, "looked exhausted from its battle for life; there was a gaping wound in its deepest part" (p. 466); and Henny's last words are: "My womb is torn to pieces with you. . . . Damn you all!" (pp. 504-505).

Henny sees life as "a series of piracies of all powers" and feels an affinity with the mice in the house which, like her, were just "trying to get by"; but she is obliged to drive them out because, in her words, "she had to live with a man who fancied himself a public character and a moralist of a very saintly type" (p. 50). Sam, on the other hand, has a scientific idea of life as harmony, which neatly rationalizes his oppressive relation to his wife and at the same time

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[8] The metaphor is pointed out, and its universal significance stressed, by Dorothy Green, "The Man Who Loved Children: Storm in a Tea-cup," in The Australian Experience: Critical Essays on the Australian Novel, ed. W.S. Ramson (Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 174-208.

[9] Sturm, p. 19.

denies the possibility of intra-species conflict. Lecturing the children on international peace, he explains:

> 'We are all, so important to ourselves, only members of a species. The species must be our concern. But we are not animals: species must not fight species for mutual extermination. We are men; we must get together for the good of the genus, indeed of the natural order, so to speak.' He smiled a broad, public meeting smile. (p. 84)

He goes on to propose (and not only to tease the sceptical older children) the extermination of the unfit by voluntary euthanasia, for "people would be taught, and would be anxious to produce the new man and with him the new state of man's social perfection" (p. 85). The murderous innocence expressed in this "nice American's" humanitarian rhetoric is matched by the way he uses his Artemus Ward imitations to humiliate the children, a "grown-up child" himself.[10] Sam's two roles as Law-Giver and as King of the Kids are not as incompatible as they might seem, for both his ways of speaking, the idealistic and the humorous, create realities in which he alone wields the power; both are modes of domination. He is introduced to the reader at his moment of triumph, congratulating himself on his appointment to the Smithsonian Institute's anthropological mission to the Pacific:

> 'Going to glory,' said Sam: I've come a long way, a long, long, way, Brother. Eight thousand a year and expenses - and even Tohoga House, in Georgetown, D.C., lovely suburb of the nation's capital; and the children of poor Sam Pollit, bricklayer's son, who left school at twelve, are going to university soon, under the flashing colonnades of America's greatest city, in the heart of the democratic Athens, much greater than any miserable Athens of the dirt-grubbers of antiquity, yes - I feel sober, at rest. The old heart doesn't flutter; I must be careful not to rest on my laurels now - haste not, rest not! I feel free!' Sam began to wonder at himself; why did he feel free? He had always been free, a free man, a free mind, a free-thinker. 'By Gemini,' he thought, taking a great breath, 'this is how men feel who take advantage of their power.' (p. 54)

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[10] Christina Stead, Raskin interview, quoted in Sturm, p. 18.

Reality seems to confirm his constitutional optimism, his success validating the American dream passed on to him by his mother "who came from the good old days when mothers dreamed of their sons' being President." His dream of power is, he thinks, innocent of personal vanity, devoted to the service of mankind - and his thoughts drift on to that other dream of power, his relations with women:

> 'Another thing,' said Sam to himself, 'is that going away now, Madeleine and I will have time to use our heads, get things straight: the love that harms another is not love - but what desires beset a man! . . We must not be carried away. We each have too much to lose.' He strode on, 'Forget, forget!' He struggled to remember something else, something cheerful. . . . There was a young creature there, timid, serious, big-eyed. . . . What an innocent, attentive face! It positively flamed with admiration; and the child-woman's name was Gillian. . . .'
>
> 'By Gee,' he exclaimed half-aloud, 'I am excited! A pity to come home to a sleeping house, and what's not asleep is the devil incarnate; but we're a cheerful bunch, the Pollits are a cheerful bunch. . . .' (p. 55)

The grouping of female figures is symptomatic of the patriarchal power he embodies: the temptation of passionate love, which must be repressed for "we have too much to lose"; the child-woman's adoration of his knowledge and power; and the "devil incarnate," the mother of his children, who hates him but whom he cannot afford to let go.

Henny is the "old-fashioned woman" to Sam's go-ahead man of power. Their marriage is a subtle indicator of woman's place in capitalist class-structure. Her wealthy father, "a self-made man who loved struggling talent, picked out.. . . Samuel Pollit and made him son-in-law and advanced him" (p. 208). Henny has been educated in the _grand-bourgeois_ manner to the expectation of a wealthy marriage, servants, and the social life for which her ladylike accomplishments were intended, and had the Collyer millions survived and Sam succeeded, she could have become an ornament of Washington society. Such is the economic class relation between mercantile capital and the growth of the professional class. She is "old-fashioned," too, in the sense that she is confined

not only by poverty and child-bearing but by a whole conditioned mental set to live out her life in the small space of her home, and die in it when her strength is exhausted:

> Henny had never lived in an apartment. She was an old-fashioned woman. She had the calm air of frequentation; she belonged to this house and it to her. Though she was a prisoner in it, she possessed it. She and it were her marriage. She was in-dwelling in every board and stone of it: every fold in the curtains had a meaning (perhaps they were so folded to hide a darn or stain); every room was a phial of revelation to be poured out some feverish night in the secret laboratories of her decisions, full of living cancers of insult, leprosies of disillusion, abscesses of grudge, gangrene of nevermore, quintan fevers of divorce, and all the proliferating miseries, the running sores and thick scabs, for which (and not for its heavenly joys) the flesh of marriage is so heavily veiled and conventually interned. (p. 45)

Her marriage is a disease, her home a prison, her experience a storm in a teacup (p. 45). She does not regard her environment, as the man does, as something to be acted upon and changed: all her vital activity goes on in her imagination. Life is a "rotten deal" and that rot has a powerful fascination for her, which she communicates to the children:

> What a dreary stodgy world of adults the children saw when they went out! And what a moral, high-minded world their father saw! But for Henny there was a wonderful particular world, and when they went with her they saw it: they saw the fish eyes, the crocodile grins, the hair like a birch broom, the mean men crawling with maggots, and the children restless as an eel, that she saw. (p. 47)

This grotesque vision is Henny's hallmark, and in this she represents the underworld of women, the back-alleys of life over which Sam floats oblivious in his "golden cloud" (p. 165):

> For it was not Henny alone who went through this inferno, but every woman, especially, for example, Mrs Wilson, the woman who came to wash every Monday. Mrs Wilson, too, 'big as she was, big as an ox,' was insulted by great big brutes of workmen, with sweaty armpits, who gave her a leer, and Mrs Wilson, too, had to tell grocers where they got off, and she too had to put little half-starved cats of girls, thin as toothpicks, in their places. (p. 47)

The examples are well chosen, for the respectable married woman, whether she is Mrs Wilson or Henrietta Collyer Pollit, has to defend herself against male sexual aggression, keep the family's financial head above water, and defend monogamy against the "cats of girls" who threaten it. Marriage is an oppressive and tenuous security, but it is all they have.

She is a modern woman, she has the vote, Henny reflects:

> But the fact remains that a man can take my children from me if he gets something on me; and a lot of fat old maids and scrawny hags in their fifties stand back of every darn man-made law in this and any other state. I have to be pure and chaste before getting married and after - for whom please? - for Samuel Pollit; otherwise, I'm no good before and he can take my children after. (p. 165)

Much as she loathes Sam, Henny is obliged to conceal the fact that she has a lover, the spineless Bert Anderson, because to do so would be to lose the children. Subsequent events suggest that she is already pregnant to him. Looking at her wedding ring, she vows to exploit the only power she has over Sam, "the dread power of wifehood":

> If this plain ugly link meant an eyeless eternity of work and poverty and an early old age, it also meant that to her alone this potent breadwinner owed his money, name, and fidelity, to her, his kitchenmaid and body servant. For a moment, after years of scamping, she felt the dread power of wifehood. . . . (p. 173)

So that when Sam makes his appallingconfession that the "sole reason" for his insistence on their marriage continuing, "despite my sorrow and without your love," was his hope that "I would produce mighty children, a tribe of giants to come after me," Henny says nothing. And when he begs her to go to him, to "have another child, the seal of all our sorrows," to "let this be our fortress against the world," she complies, silently vowing to "wring every penny of my debts out of him some way, before he goes . . ." (p. 176). Henny has to be immoral, breaking man-made laws. And, because she is subject to this morality and without any alternative of her own, she inevitably sees life as a projection of herself, corrupt and "rotten."

Her speech, which defines her, is "the rhetoric of direct and passionate personal attack, . . . partly a contrived speech, aimed at puncturing Sam's ego and partly an instinctive speech, born of desperation, expressing feelings rather than attitudes."[11] Sam's speech, on the other hand, defines not only his personality but also an ideology, a conglomeration of attitudes and rules, which reinforces and justifies his power in a male-dominated world. Both Henny and Louisa defend themselves against him with the accusation, "you know nothing," but this is not enough. Sam's ideology is not simply false. But it is false in the profounder sense that it denies conflict and the oppression of the weak by the strong as, in their different ways, his Indian and Chinese confidantes in Malaya remark. But it is the ruling ideology, and it passes for the voice of the people. Sam feels he could find his proper niche in society in the commercial media - he will be "Uncle Sam," the voice of the nation, "spreading enlightenment," entertaining and instructing "the Lilliputians" with

> . . . tales of our revolutionary past, high deeds of stern men and brave women whereby we won the freedom we have, such freedom that, thank Heaven, there is no need to go through again the turmoil that now confronts poor bonded Europe. . . . He wished that he knew the directors of M.G.M. and Warner Brothers, for they must be good men, since they catered to the people, and he had the same dear wish about Franklin D. Roosevelt and Stephen S. Wise. (pp. 515-16)

Domestic virtues, likewise, are inculcated through the mass media in ways which meet his approval. Looking through a glossy magazine, entertaining the children with his clowning kisses for the advertisers' images of women, he declares:

> 'They don't write stories about really bad girls, Little-Womey, remember that. And they never make a really bad girl pretty, even if they do write about her for the sake of the truth. That's because they really want people to be happy and good, and want us to believe that the beautiful are the good and vice versa. Because, if we believe it, it will come true -' (p. 65)

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[11] Sturm, p. 19.

The voice of Sam is indeed the vox populi, and this gives his daughter's rebellion against it a wider significance: she questions his truths, wills him to shut up, and finally invents a language of her own in order to think things out for herself and present to him her own truth.

During the period of her adolescence portrayed in the novel, Louie's feelings toward her father develop a bewildering complexity as her childish admiration and love turn into an adult hatred of his tyranny. Chapter Eight dramatizes the tipping of the balance toward rejection: when Louie accuses him of "always trying to make me think like you," Sam is hurt and petulant.

> She felt terribly ashamed of herself. . . . But as sure as he opened his mouth, she knew, she would begin to groan and writhe like any Prometheus; she smiled apologetically, 'It's the nature of the beast.'
>
> Sam softened and looked down at her, 'Why must you always be such an obstinate cuss? . . . I know you have little troubles general to your age and sex, and that no doubt upsets you. And then there is the situation at home.'
>
> Louie's lip trembled, 'When I begin to get near home, I begin to tremble all over - I don't know why. I never told anyone what it's like at home.'
>
> 'That is right, Looloo: a merry heart goes all the way; there is nothing we cannot forget if we have a high ideal fixed before us.'
>
> She said in a rebellious tone, 'That is not the reason: I do not say it because no one would believe me!' (pp. 364-65)

Louie's experience of "the situation at home" is indeed, to her, Promethean in its implications: but she has no way of expressing it. There is no language at her disposal which will convey it convincingly to others. She tried once, when Sam returned from Malaya: "I know something. . . . I know there are people not like us, not muddle-headed like us, better than us." She offers Nietzsche's aphorism about chaos and the dancing star, but Sam misinterprets it in terms of his own dualism of order and confusion, just as in the passage quoted above he prescribes his own obliviousness as the antidote to suffering. Louie, protesting that she means something else, really does "groan and writhe":

> 'No,' cried Louie, 'no, no; you understand nothing. People like us understand nothing. I know people at school better than us, better in their minds than -' she stopped in deep embarrassment. The children were following her intently, trying to understand what she had found out, something they were dimly groping for. (pp.314-15)

She is forced to invent a new language to express her knowledge and share it with the other children who, though they do not understand it even in translation, participate in the enactment of her play, Herpes Rom, the Snake Man. It is a brilliantly succinct statement of Louie's response to her sexual coming-of-age, dramatizing the sexual struggle at its origins, from her own experience - the universal struggle between the Patriarch and the Daughter. In the Father's eyes, the Daughter is "guilty of a nameless smirch," which she does not comprehend: "If to breathe the sunlight is a sin, what can I do?" Rebelling against this invasion of her integrity, she threatens vengeance; but her hatred ("the stranger," "the snake") begins to choke her instead: "Mother, father is strangling me. Murderer!" and the play ends with her death (pp. 408-409). But it is useless to call upon the mother for aid, for the "old-fashioned woman" has herself been moulded by this very experience. Louie's intuitive understanding of her situation reflected in this drama is perhaps what enables her so terribly to deflect the self-hatred and self-denial which is her cultural fate as a woman: at the end of the novel it is the mother, not the daughter, who dies.

If the operation of the incest taboo in patriarchal culture is to be examined psychoanalytically from the female point of view, this brief drama of the "Snake Man" might well serve to illustrate it, as Oedipus Rex served Freud's male-oriented analysis of the phenomenon. In the concluding section of her study, Psycho-Analysis and Feminism, Juliet Mitchell notes that:

> In the situation of the Oedipus complex . . . the little boy learns his place as the heir to this law of the father and the little girl learns her place within it. The Oedipus complex is certainly a patriarchal myth and, though he never said so, the importance of this fact was doubtless behind Freud's repudiation of a parallel myth for women - a so-called Electra complex. . . . A myth for women would have to bear most dominantly the marks of the Oedipus complex because it is a man's world into which a woman enters; complementarity or parallelism are out of the question.[12]

In the novel Louie makes the radical decision to destroy the situation rather than resolve it by submission, now that she understands it so deeply. She tries to show Sam the truth by confessing her plan of the double murder and to force him to acknowledge that Henny committed suicide. But, as she had predicted, he refuses to believe her: "You don't know what truth is. The truth isn't in you, only some horrible stupid mess of fantasies mixed up with things I can't even think about" (p. 519). "The man who loved children" refuses to understand the origins of that love and the distortions to which it is subjected by egotism and the desire to dominate. He "does not understand women or children. He is such a good young man, he is too good to understand people at all," as his first wife, Louie's mother, had written (p. 520). Sam represents the patriarchy, and his wilful blindness to his own passions is essential to the whole cultural edifice of law and morality which is raised upon that foundation of repression.

The morning Louie runs from his house, the physical clumsiness and mental confusion of her adolescence miraculously disappear:

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[12] Psycho-Analysis and Feminism (1974; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 403-04.

> She smiled, felt light as a dolphin undulating through the waves, one of those beautiful, large, sleek marine mammals that plunged and wallowed, with their clever eyes. As she crossed the bridge . . . she heaved a great breath. How different everything looked, like the morning of the world. . . . 'Why didn't I run away before?' she wondered. She wondered why everyone didn't run away. Things certainly looked different: they were no longer part of herself but objects that she could freely consider without prejudice. (p. 522)

This ability to distinguish between self and world marks her freedom from the terrible solipsism of Pollitry where everything is referred back to the man himself. It is the foundation of her own moral sense, which she has had to force into existence through such extreme deeds of self-liberation. However, as she finds out when she calls for her friend to go with her, not everyone can run away, and she must set out alone on her "walk around the world"(p. 523). Such a journey of the young woman alone in the world beyond the family and traditional sexual relationships became the subject of Christina Stead's next novel, which begins where this one leaves off, with the rebellion of the daughter against the father.

## For Love Alone

The brilliant opening chapter of the novel dramatizes the conflict between father and daughter, highlighting the ideological issues involved and indicating the mode of characterization peculiar to this work. Here the "psychological drama of the person" is located in the heroine's isolated consciousness, and other characters are brought to life only to the extent and at the point that they impinge upon her development. There is an unforgettably physical, sexual image of a character who scarcely appears again, "the man, Andrew Hawkins," "a tall man with powerful chest," "the golden-haired man," who draws attention to his "long, blond feet," his "marvellous hair," his "large, pale, muscular hand." The fact that he is Teresa's father is secondary to the fact

of his maleness. Flaunting his physical beauty, he tells stories of women's admiration for him and as he flirts with his daughters, trying to tease and bully them into response, the atmosphere of tension mounts. When finally he resorts to the overtly sexual taunt, "Ants in her pants and bats in her belfry," Teresa turns on him in rage:

> 'You offend my honour! I would kill anyone who offends my honour.' There was an instant of surprise, then a long, low laugh, rolling from one end of the table to the other. Andrew began it, Lance with his hollow laugh, Leo with his merry one, Kitty's cackles joined in. . . .
>
> 'Your honour,' said Lance, her elder brother, low and sneering. He was a tall, pale, blond lad, chaste and impure.
>
> 'A woman's honour means something else from what you imagine,' said her father, laughing secretively.
>
> 'A woman can have honour,' declared Leo, a dark, rosy boy. He turned serious in honour of his admired sister.
>
> Lance muttered.
>
> 'You would not kill, you would not take human life,' said the handsome man, the family god, sitting at the head of the table. 'Don't say such things, Teresa.' (p. 13)

It is not Teresa's outburst which is "placed" here, but the situation which makes it necessary; for if, as her brother agrees, "a woman can have honour," an integrity which includes the recognition of her active sexuality, then the fact remains that there is still no word for it in the language. Her humiliation at what commonly passes for good-natured family teasing is all too recognisable: it is a form of sexual repression to which she remains acutely sensitive in her relationship with Jonathan Crow.

The ironic commentary on the heroine's romantic idealism is more structural than textual: the reader, sharing her passionate mental life, is drawn into complicity with her so that her goals and the barriers in her path are never clearly perceived until they are past and can be recognised in retrospect. The extravagance of her outburst here is justified in the sense that she does in effect kill "the family god" by ignoring his taunts from this point onwards. All the same, he

is established in this scene as a potent figure representing a complex of things: he is the male who attracts her but humiliates her with his power; he is the father whom she is about to discard and seek in another man (in his narcissism, and the passivity towards women's love revealed by his stories, he prefigures Jonathan); and he is the voice of patriarchal authority making its contradictory ideological demands upon women.

Women are made to please men, is the burden of his lay. They must be devoted and modest, never revealing their own desires, but they must also be beautiful and alluring in order to fulfil their "natural" sexual function:

> 'If you would smile more, men would look at you. Men have their burdens. How delightful it is to see a dear little woman, happy and smiling, eager to hear them, delighted to cheer them. No one can say why a woman's bright face and intelligent eye mean so much to a man. Of course the sexes were made to attract each other,' he said with an indulgent laugh. (p. 12)

The concept of love as the harmonious attraction of opposites forming "one blessed circle, perpetual motion" which Hawkins sets up as an ideal is deeply questioned in the novel. At the time Teresa merely remarks, referring to her sewing, "We will never be finished" (p. 8). But the words not only draw attention to the negative implications of a circular "perpetual motion." They also anticipate her final bitter comment on the infernal circle of desire and suffering of her relationship with Jonathan: "It's dreadful to think that it will go on being repeated for ever" (p. 502). Teresa is herself to discover the destructive results of living out that ideology of male dominance and female submission which her father celebrates as a natural harmony.

Rebellion against "the family god" is the necessary preliminary to the young woman's quest in life, but it is not to be achieved in this one symbolic fell swoop. Teresa resists the Rule of the Father more

successfully in her mental life than in her actual encounters with its operations in the social world. Her sexual fantasies construct a reality in opposition to the sticky sentimentality and prudishness of middle-class courtship, marriage and family mores:

> The things she wanted existed. At school she first had news of them, she knew they existed. . . . Venus and Adonis, the Rape of Lucrece, Troilus and Cressida. . . . This was the truth, not the daily simpering . . . and putting away in hope chests; but where was one girl who thought so, besides herself? (pp. 75-76)

Isolated from her contemporaries in this "secret life" she is nonetheless sure that "they were all moved by the same passion, in different intensities" (p. 77) and that it needed only a concerted effort to bring the life of passion into being: "several daring acts and they would all be free" (p. 92). She imagines free communities where youth could love and learn, a city-state dedicated to Venus Aphrodite, orgies of sensual pleasure, and occult rites; but in all this confusion of the grotesque and the Utopian runs the common theme of a shared freedom to celebrate passion in all its forms: in the life of her imagination, Teresa's quest for love has the epic proportions of a movement for social liberation.

Her faith in this alternative reality sustains Teresa's rebellion but it is not strong enough to insulate her against the actual social pressures on women. Loveless shotgun marriages like her cousin Malfi's were cause for shame, she thinks, but girls who did not get a man were worse off: "beside the solitary girl three hooded madmen walk, desire, fear, ridicule." When these are the alternatives, any marriage seems preferable to the "long night of spinsterhood" (pp. 74, 75). She urges her sister and cousins to break out of the "iron circle of home and work" (p. 85) so that they can marry, and with such vehemence that it seems she sees in their timidity the reflection of her own failure of nerve. Feminine passivity is epitomized in Sylvia, one of the retarded children

whom Teresa teaches: as her father leads her by the hand, "smiling faintly, for ever wrapped in the slumbers of infancy," she seems "exactly like a life-sized doll" (pp. 119-20). She is an image of the child-like dependency of these young women, the hopelessness of their situation.

The women's humiliation and timidity emphasize the dependency on their parents experienced by all the young people in Teresa's circle. In Sydney in 1933, at the lowest point of the economic slump, there was little opportunity of independence for the children of the _petite-bourgeoisie_ who had grown to adulthood during the Depression. Obliged to leave school after only an elementary education and work for a pittance, perhaps studying at night school, they were often supporting out-of-work parents and younger members of the family. There was a sharp drop in the birth-rate during those years and, presumably, in the number of marriages. The novelist sketches in details of the period - a lock-out at the factory where Leo works, discrimination against married women teachers, the dumping of unsold farm produce. Again it is the children in Teresa's class at school who epitomize the situation, the waifs Joe and George who survive on their own in the slums by petty theft, raiding scrapheaps, selling newspapers. And yet, with their sharp ways and their unconcern for middle-class proprieties, these boys have an affinity with Teresa which, though not articulated, is suggested by her response to them.

Joe brings her gifts, a garish picture of the Virgin Mary and tropical fruit retrieved from the dumps, which may be likened to her scraps of knowledge got from rummaging through libraries. George, when he jumps out of the classroom window after being chastized by the headmaster, seems to provide Teresa with a model of the "extreme deed" (p. 118) necessary to escape from the imprisoning school where she feels trapped not only by the sordid routine but also by the official requirement

that she remain unmarried. When she runs away to Narara, apparently as "mad" as her pupils, her own "extreme deed" has the very practical effect of releasing her from her legal bond to the Education Department, as well as the psychological effect of shedding her fantasy of a rural idyll as an alternative to life in the city.

The need to rebel and the necessary isolation - even the insanity - of the rebel are persistent themes in Teresa's meditations as she approaches this crisis in her life. But her choice of Harper's Ferry, a place she has never seen, as the goal of her pilgrimage indicates her lack of a truly liberating aim.[13] The life of sheltered, innocent fulfilment imaged in the almost-deserted valley, "fruitful and silent as paradise" (p. 163) and associated in her memory with the Carlin boys who had first taken her there, does not after all exist. The valley seems haunted by people maddened by sexual frustration, as Teresa imagines herself to be, and she finds that her relatives and the Carlins are as poor and dispirited as everyone else.

Among all the defeated souls surrounding her, Teresa finds inspiration in Jonathan Crow, the working-class boy who has a scholarship to London. Her two passions, for knowledge and for love, merge and focus on him: he becomes both a symbol of the life she wants as student and traveller and the loved object for whom she feels she must make herself worthy:

> She was ashamed of her timidity and aimlessness, she knew she was not a brave woman. Her twentieth birthday was approaching, she felt old, dull, abandoned, a failure because she had no man. Lance and Jonathan had said in effect: 'Women are cowardly, women only want to tie a man down, women won't make a move themselves, women only want a man to involve himself, women won't take a chance.' She felt that this was true. . . .

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[13] Harper's Ferry, the place where John Brown's liberation army assembled, was the first goal of Louisa's journey in The Man Who Loved Children. The actual place Stead seems to be describing here, on the old convict road north of Sydney, is called Wiseman's Ferry: the irony of that name would have been too heavy altogether.

> She cast about for a man to love; the nearest man was Jonathan, but she ran over the others. . . . She must put herself to the test, could she write to poor Jonathan telling him she loved him? Am I afraid, she asked herself. Yes? Then I must. This is the proof. If I haven't the courage for this, I'll fail everywhere. I'll never get anything done. (p. 225)

Her manner of choosing him shows that he is also important as a representative of the male authority which she is engaged in contesting - by proving herself an exception to its misogynist prejudices. Without realizing the ambiguity of the situation, she suffers over this attempt to prove her integrity in action. The decision to approach him causes her shame because she has transgressed the law of female passivity and "she was like a madwoman, sulky, monosyllabic, torn to pieces by the fear of her solitary deed." Here Stead interposes a rare authorial comment, indicating the kind of failure Teresa is heading for:

> The deeds of the moral inventor are always criminal and their most evil effect is that when done secretly they cut the doer off from society; put around, they attract adherents. But she was too ashamed ever to tell it. (p. 226)

While this "criminal" isolation rules her life, the novel's social environment narrows along with the heroine's consciousness. For over three years after Crow's departure for London she slaves and starves her way to join him. Her quest for love, which had been the fantasy of a shared life where passion would be celebrated and knowledge liberating, now reduces to the single goal of winning Jonathan. Like a medieval knight seeking to prove his devotion she denies her sensuality, all her social impulses, and suffering becomes her *raison d'etre*. She glories in her isolation from others for "it seemed a proof that she was very strange indeed - and to strange persons, strange visions, strange destinies" (p. 265); she even dreads any show of affection from her lover, for then "her sufferings would wither away, be nothing, just as life withers away when death is reached" (p. 266). Her self-communings take place in a daze of exhaustion as she walks incessantly through the

city to and from work, in a grotesque illustration of Crow's theory that "without unsatisfied desire there is no progress." For she does progress, in that she gets to London, the supposed antithesis of the suburban "iron circle," even though her personal development is halted and it seems to her, in retrospect, that all this was just "the rigmarole of her buffoon Odyssey" (p. 348).

The insane extravagance of Teresa's asceticism is as self-evident as that of her earlier "carnal intoxication," and yet the mode of irony Stead employs reveals more than the truism that "self-deception awaits the idealist, whether a Teresa or a Sam Pollit."[14] Teresa both believes and does not believe in Jonathan as the object of her love, and the critical significance of the novel lies in its revelation of how she could come to love so unwisely, while its imaginative power springs from a creative identification with the idealist's energies no matter what strange forms they take in her attempts to give them direction. Her relationship with Jonathan, the central action of the novel, demonstrates not just an incompatibility of temperaments but a representative struggle between the sexes which raises basic questions about true and false knowledge and the human potential for freedom.

Crow's emotional and intellectual manipulativeness is revealed to the reader early in the novel, and it is a measure of the conviction with which Stead depicts Teresa's devotion to her ideal of the man that one can forget those encounters with Clara Rasche and her brother. Teresa was at first "both aroused and intimidated" by his hectoring manner (p. 127), and it is this which Rasche sneeringly refers to as Crow's "excellent new system of female education," of sexual manipulation and intellectual domination: "Nobly cutting himself off from his equals, he goes out among the women and will prove to anyone - if she wear a

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[14] R.G. Geering, Christina Stead (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 112.

spirit - that she must modify herself for men" (p. 172). Crow defends himself by maintaining that it is his function to "start a fermentation" in the minds of his "lovecult" devotees, to be the "gadfly of desire" (p. 179). He will admit no responsibility for the ideas propounded in his lectures on social evolution and the relations of the sexes, that conglomeration of reactionary clichés about the survival of the fittest, racial purity and the natural inferiority of women. Rasche, like James Quick, can see through Crow's game, but the women, who are hungry for knowledge, especially when it presents itself as a liberating altern-ative to established wisdom, are at his mercy. Hunger will feed on garbage rather than be extinguished in death, as a character says in Cotters' England.[15] The proof of Rasche's accusation comes later when, in London, Crow rejects Teresa and she takes this to mean that she is a failure as a woman, her words echoing his: "I can't help it. So much the worse for you, says nature. So much the worse for the woman who can't get a man. I don't care, says nature, die, then" (p. 346). Crow is the mouthpiece of bourgeois "realism", all those nineteenth-century theories which "contain at their core a belief in exploitation and power as the only possible basis for personal and social relationships,"[16] and this function is the logical extension of his primary significance as the nay-sayer to Teresa herself, the cynical exploiter of her love, the enemy of her integrity:

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[15] Christina Stead, Cotters' England (London: Secker and Warburg, 1967), p. 294.

[16] Sturm, p. 14. The significance in For Love Alone of Nietzsche and Australian offshoots of his ideas are discussed by Ian Reid, "'The Woman Problem' in Some Australian and New Zealand Novels," Southern Review, 7 (1974), 187-204.

> He had seen the girl's pale face blazing with ecstasy as she sat on the moving tram. . . . It irritated him to give this great naked slobbering joy to one who could not make payment in kind; the wretched woman could get pleasure out of him when she wished, merely by looking at him; he did not own himself, it made him feel helpless. . . . Only to wipe that expression off her face and make it droop, as he liked to see it, thoughtful and wretched, wearied, with the spurt of resistance breaking through. (pp. 196-97)

This is the essential Crow. Her passionate idealism is a threat to his very being, for he wants to see in her only the reflection of himself, his suffering and his defeatism. Her sexuality must be controlled, so that she will acknowledge his power but never break through his self-enclosure. But throughout the novel his true nature remains hidden from her, obscured by her idea of his purity and kindness bravely confronting an alien world.

They are drawn together by admiration of each other's unconventionality and restless ambition, but the directions to which they devote their energies are diametrically opposed. Crow is one of those cynics like Lawrence's Loerke who, perceiving the corruption of the social system, try to survive by exploiting it for their own purposes. Crow, the working-class boy, becomes a perpetuator of the system which has oppressed him. Like Ursula In _Women in Love_, Teresa is a "resister", a naive rebel; but what makes Ursula a mere stereotype of "feminine" idealism in that novel is Lawrence's sentimentalizing of her as an instinctive being without any real mental life. Teresa is the portrait of a passionate woman whose love has "a thousand sides to it, it was pervasive, strong, intellectual, physical" (p. 459). Even in its failures and distortions, love is the source of energy and growth; there is no Lawrentian straining after a stable perfection of love.

The sublimation of desire in idealism has had some noble exemplars in Western culture, and Christina Stead had St. Theresa of Avila in

mind when she named her heroine.[17] Like her namesake, Teresa devotes herself to the service of love, seeking an impossible, passionate union with a man conceived of as a god and, by doing so, achieves her major goal. Simone de Beauvoir says of women like St. Theresa: "their visions simply provide objective images for their certitudes, encouraging these women to persist in the paths they have mapped out."[18] But unlike the saint, Teresa is forced to suffer a long drawn-out martyrdom when confronted with this man in the flesh. He denies her that union, while continuing to exploit his authority over her mind and his emotional appeal to her heart, ridiculing her ideas and arousing her sexual jealousy as he hints at affairs with other women, while appealing to her pity for his celibate misery. Her suffering in this relationship corresponds to de Beauvoir's account of the woman in love with a man to whom she grants moral authority:

> Yet the descent from generous warmth of feeling to masochistic madness is an easy one. The woman in love who before her lover is in the position of the child before its parents is also liable to that sense of guilt she felt with them; she chooses not to revolt against him as long as she loves him, but she revolts against herself. If he loves her less than she wants him to, if she fails to engross him, to make him happy, to satisfy him, all her narcissism is transformed into self-disgust, into humiliation, into hatred of herself, which drive her to self-punishment.[19]

The term masochism requires some comment, for the novelist has denied its appropriateness: "That really doesn't meet the situation because you can have quite energetic people getting into this situation. It's simply

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[17] John B. Beston, "An Interview with Christina Stead," World Literature Written in English, 15 (1976), 93.

[18] The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 687.

[19] de Beauvoir, pp. 661-62.

that you don't understand."[20] Certainly Teresa is not passive as Jonathan accuses her of being: "You're helpless, but you don't see it" (p. 378). She does not understand what is going on, but she acts and asserts herself in a way which goes beyond de Beauvoir's definition of self-punishment, for when she resolves to commit "rational suicide" by working herself to death she engages in the eminently social act of recording her own experience for the benefit of others.

This double gesture of self-annihilation and self-creation is resolved dramatically when, looking at Jonathan across the gaping black pit in the old sawmill, she simply "released him from her will" instead of throwing herself to her death (p. 408). Teresa's decisive actions are always recounted in appropriately high-coloured, heroic language but within the novel as a whole their authenticity is confirmed by the accumulation of detail which defines the larger forces at work in her life. Her real heroism consists in her escape from Crow's fate, his resignation to mediocrity (p. 329), and finally her escape from his oppressive influence on her life. Through her the novelist critically dissects the determinist ideologies of sexual and social relations which Crow espouses, and affirms the human capacity to break out of destructive bonds. The elements of life and death are precisely differentiated. Christina Stead once used the image of the novelist as a vivisector, who "uses the pen as a scalpel for lifting up the living tissues, cutting through the morbid tissues of the social anatomy."[21] The Teresa-Jonathan relationship shows how intimately the two elements coexist, how the moribund tissues of the social anatomy feed off the energies of the healthy ones.

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[20] "Christina Stead: An Interview" by Joan Lidoff, Aphra, 6, Nos. 3 and 4 (1976), 60.

[21] "The Writers Take Sides," Left Review, 1 (1935), 454.

Teresa's liberation into the social world is also promised by the presence of Quick, her employer. He "lights up the world" for her by talking about political events, economic theories, the contrast between English and American culture (p. 390). As a knowledgeable male he stands potentially in the same relation to the unworldly young woman as Crow had, but his lively generosity in this respect indicates his capacity for emotional generosity too. The predominant image of him roaming restlessly around London by night marks his out as another passionate romantic nature, and his name suggests not only vitality but also his quixotic, impetuous gallantry. He resolves to "save" Teresa from Crow's poisonous influence by his passion and his arguments - and, indeed, some readers see him as he sees himself, "something of a fairy godfather,"[22] "a deus ex machina . . . almost the millionaire seeking the sweet unspoilt heroine of women's magazine fiction."[23] But Quick cannot see that Teresa's rejection of Crow is at the same time a rejection of Crow's construction of reality, and that his is not a substitute knowledge. Rather, his love provides her with a way of working things out for herself:

> She was like a cornered animal before which, miraculously, an escape through rich quiet flowering country is opened; she fled away down the flowering lanes of Quick's life, and had not yet stopped to reconnoitre or to see and admire the plain. Quick could not see himself, for this, as an escape, and as for the rest - marriage was not new to him and it was part of a plan of action, while for her, involving a different kind of knowledge, . . . each part of her new state merited thought and dissection. (p. 460)

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[22] Michael Wilding, "Christina Stead's Australian Novels," Southerly, 27 (1967), 33.

[23] Brian Kiernan, Images of Society and Nature: Seven Essays on Australian Novels (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 77.

Marriage is not for him what it is at first for Teresa, the whole of her life, a new mode of being which demands to be explored before she can regard it as "part of a plan of action." The novelist points out that such reflection on the married state is denied to a woman in traditional marriage, suggesting that "in these lonely distant unions known to wanderers," on the contrary, everything may be brought to consciousness and questioned. In such a union, Teresa discovers, a woman's love is not blind but "like insanity, it sees everything; like insanity, it must not reveal its thoughts" (pp. 461, 460). And she is dismayed to find that Quick "only wanted 'a woman's love,' the intensely passionate, ideal, romantic love of famous love affairs" (p. 459). But marriage is not the end of her quest, only the beginning. The image of flowering lanes and the plain beyond anticipates the climax of the novel, her recovered sense of independent existence in the "citied plain" of history, beyond the shelter of Quick's love which led her there.

Teresa's restlessness disturbs Quick because it seems to him wrong in a woman and yet he feels bound to insist on her freedom, for "he naturally supposed that the life he offered her would not eventually satisfy her, idea-hungry, ambitious and energetic" (p. 461). He suffers over her affair with Harry Girton because he does not understand its meaning for her. It has, in fact, the value of showing her that the "marriage-sleep" which she has always feared is not final, as well as the conscious purpose of trying out her power, extending her new knowledge of sexuality. This overt purpose is slyly hinted at in the novelist's choice of Girton's name - Teresa acquires her Oxford education from the man, not from the women's college. He is the apotheosis of Teresa's romantic quest for knowledge in passion, and with him she discovers that it is not sensuality itself but love which is the mode of knowledge she wants: after they have been together "they now knew each other and what they desired was over." Physically alike, they see

themselves as spiritual twins, "stormy petrels, each looking for adventure not only in physical danger but in moral and heady regions" (p. 489). It is the wanderer in herself that she loves in Girton, the adventurer about to leave for the Spanish Civil War.

Like the previous points of crisis in Teresa's psychological journey, this one is expressed in the kinetic imagery of unsatisfied desire: the lovers walking endlessly around Oxford, then Teresa, alone, watching the flowing river and feeling her mind "lifted high . . . by a great surge (of the pale crested black water? Or was she voyaging by air?)." But unlike her walk to Harper's Ferry, her wandering in the slums, or her last journey with Jonathan, this time she has no doubt of her own sanity. Having gone beyond the pale of conventional morality she feels completely happy: the taboo on free love seems incomprehensible, "a true insanity" (p. 490).

The intuitive association of passion with true knowledge that first pushed her out into the world as a quester is finally validated, although all the signs along the way indicated that, for a woman, love and freedom were irreconcilable desires. This conflict of desires recalls George Eliot's description, in the Prelude to Middlemarch, of those "later-born Theresas" of the Victorian age whose ardour "alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse."[24] Teresa Hawkins survives precisely this experience of suppression, but does so only by embracing the position of a social rebel whose life is a continuing experiment in realizing her desires against the grain of bourgeois culture. Passion, which is repressed by the institutions of that culture and even denied any existence for women by its patriarchal ideology, is her guide. It "performs the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul," in Eliot's words.

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[24] Middlemarch (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), pp. xv-xvi.

George Eliot believed this function could be performed only by a "coherent social faith and order" such as that which helped the original Theresa to realize her ideal of "an epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action." Dorothea Brooke, with the same religious temperament, turns to secular love as the means of realizing her aspirations and as the source of knowledge. Nineteenth-century fiction about women's struggles for self-realization provides many examples of the heroine's adoration of a male of superior education and wisdom through whom she can improve herself spiritually; but although Eliot gave this tradition the "kick of derision" with Casaubon (as one critic puts it)[25] she by no means discarded it. Dorothea, disabused of the belief that marriage to a scholar will help her, must still be content to live through Will Ladislaw, for only he can act upon the world in the service of the new, radical "social faith" in which they both believe. When For Love Alone is seen in the context of this tradition, Christina Stead's contribution to it shows up as a radically critical one. Teresa also turns to men for the knowledge she wants, and the Middlemarch pattern is repeated - the false man of learning is superseded by the loving man of the world, who is her true comrade. But although their union is a joyful commitment for her, her restless hunger for experience continues, and in the final chapters of the novel there is an effort to assert the heroine's essential independence of any man in her quest. Her dedication to "love alone" is seen as dedication to a principle, not a person. It is the principle of Eros, of creative struggle and growth: a shared vision of the collective future, a "social faith," in Eliot's terms, but one which affirms constant change rather than "coherence and order".

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[25] Ellen Moers, Literary Women (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1977), p. 239.

The heroines' temperaments and aspirations have much in common, but the significant difference between Middlemarch and For Love Alone lies in their conception of the relations between the heroine and the social world. In accordance with her view that "poverty and struggle are the usual state of man,"[26] Christina Stead refuses to present Teresa's life as the "tragic failure" or merely the "life of mistakes" which George Eliot saw as the inevitable fate of her "later-born Theresas," cheated by history, whose "spiritual grandeur" was "ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity." Eliot sentimentalizes the exceptional individual as she sentimentalizes the "coherent social faith and order" of pre-industrial society. The tragic conflict between individual and society proposed in bourgeois ideology is ameliorated by her declaration of faith in the "incalculably diffusive" beneficial effects of an obscure life like Dorothea's.[27] Obscurity, which Eliot presents as a virtue, is simply a condition of life in Stead's fiction, along with poverty and struggle.

Teresa's final vision of her quest places that lonely struggle in an historical and collective context, recalling her much earlier fantasies of a shared liberation. Her Romantic idealism has been severely tested and redefined, but not denied:

> And suddenly as a strange thought it came to her, that she had reached the gates of the world of Girton and Quick and that it was towards them that she was only now journeying, . . . and would travel, farther, without them; and with her she felt many thousands of shadows, pressing along with her, storming forwards, but quietly and eagerly, though blindly. She even heard the rushing and jostling of their patched and washed clothes and the flapping of their street-worn shoes, their paper-stuffed soles. (p. 494)

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[26] Letter to Ian Reid, quoted in "'The Woman Problem' . . .," p. 195.

[27] Middlemarch, p. 896.

This vision of life as an endless journey undertaken "eagerly, though blindly" implicitly rejects the desire for fame attributed by Eliot to her heroines who wanted to accomplish "some long-recognisable deed." And yet Teresa's action, undertaken in company with "many thousands of shadows" of the poor and obscure like herself, does indeed have the epic nature of a "constant unfolding of a far-resonant action." There is a vision of human history as a collective struggle, an assertion of human will for the fulfilment of its desire for richness and freedom of experience:

> She suddenly understood that there was something beyond misery, and that at present she had merely fought through that bristling black and sterile plain of misery and that beyond was the real world, red, gold, green, white, in which the youth of the world would be passed; it was from the womb of time she was fighting her way and the first day lay before her. . . . And when she understood this, that there was something on the citied plain for all of them, the thousands like thin famished fire that wavered and throve around her, pressing on, she knew why she continued restless and why the men, having so much in the hollow of their hands, kept on striving. (p. 494)

The major significance of this passage is clear: the miserable struggle of the poor and obscure is merely a prelude to the creative struggle that makes human history. However the language implies a negation of Teresa's experience as a woman up to this point when she enters the world of men. The woman's struggle for personal liberation out of "the womb of time," out of private misery, is conceived of as pre-social, pre-historical. Her achievement of individual freedom cannot be universalized, or so Teresa's final words imply: "It's dreadful to think it will go on being repeated for ever. . . . What's there to stop it?". This is a point of view similar to Simone de Beauvoir's conception of immanence and transcendence in The Second Sex. She constantly implies that only by her rebellion as an individual can Woman escape the immanence to which she is condemned by the conditions

of her life as a member of the second sex. Both writers portray women as experiencing a common kind of oppression in modern capitalist society but implicitly reject the possibility of their collective struggle for liberation. Any notion of women's cause was anathema to the generation who reached maturity during the post-suffrage backlash against feminism. The public world is idealized as a free arena where political struggle and moral choice operate, where "the human condition" may be confronted:

> Women do not contest the human situation, because they have hardly begun to assume it. This explains why their works for the most part lack metaphysical resonances and also anger; they do not take the world incidentally, they do not ask it questions, they do not expose its contradictions: they take it as it is too seriously.[28]

Private life, where women are confined, is inauthentic by their definition. Only in the public world, the male world, is a life of transcendence possible, where the self is continuously created by moral action.

The prospect Teresa faces at the end of the novel is just such a conscious moral struggle:

> But she did not know where she stood, any more than if a high tide had rushed in and swamped the road where she used to walk. What relation had she to Quick, to Girton, to the men who surrounded her, to all men? What was her fate? Here where she stood no old wives' tale and no mother's sad sneer, no father's admonition, reached.
> (p. 495)

This suggests that, liberated from past traditions, she now stands on the same footing as the men. She has only to discover where that is: "In this rough and tumble of need, egotism, and love where was the right thing to do?" (p. 498). It is an heroic but not a joyful prospect. This traveller on the trackless plain, subject to violent swings of

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[28] de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, p. 720.

feeling between guilt and gratitude toward her partner, Quick, but lacking his buoyant certainties, is in no equivalent position to the Harry Girtons of the world, however much she may want to believe she is. She is left with these unanswerable questions about the position of the "free woman" in a world which is still male-defined.

Such questions are basic to Christina Stead's next novel, Letty Fox, and yet Letty is by no means the existential hero, despite the fact that she is wise to the repressive purposes of "old wives' tales" and unburdened by parental "sneers and admonitions." This profoundly ironic work shows a heroine vulnerable to false knowledge in other guises - the pragmatic commonsense of liberal middle-class America, embodied in the education system, the popular media, the Zeitgeist itself. A third full-length study of a woman's life, written at about this time in Christina Stead's career but not published until 1976,[29] concerns a character very different from Letty but whose sense of reality is determined by these same pressures in the English cultural context: Miss Herbert, too, is a work of irony, pre-eminently a study of "bad faith" in the existentialist sense. But there is -- there could be -- no novel depicting that creature of the future, the "free woman" promised by Teresa's vision.[30] Both Letty Fox and Miss Herbert are historical novels of a highly original kind, establishing the representativeness of their heroines by means of allusion and the accumulation of linguistic detail signifying the dominant sexual and social ideologies of the period.

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[29] Marion McDonald, "Christina Stead: The Exile Returns, Unhappily," National Times, 22-27 November 1976, p. 22.

[30] It was written, in an appropriately ironic mode, by Doris Lessing as part of her novel, The Golden Notebook (1962).

Letty Fox: Her Luck

The two-part structure of the novel draws attention to Letty's early detachment from her family and sceptical attitude to traditional sexual mores. Part 1, "With the Others," concerns her childhood, spent with various members of both families while her parents dither over their unhappy marriage. Letty and her sister, Jacky, are shuffled about all over the northern United States, England and Europe. They live at various times with Mathilde, their determinedly unhappy mother; with Solander, the father who leaves them to live with "Die Konkubine"; with Cissie Morgan, their grandmother, the merry widow bent on arranging a wealthy marriage for her youngest daughter, and her witches' coven of elderly women at the hotel; with Percival Hogg, the misogynist crank, their uncle; with Cissie's son, Philip, and his many mistresses; with Solander's mad old mother and her companion, Lily Spontini. They go to various schools and summer camps in America, but most of their childhood is spent with adults. Letty, exposed to the adult world of confusion, infidelity and intrigue, perceives that she has to fight to assert herself: "I always had a great adaptability, was a regular chameleon; . . . I was always off on some fresh tack, learning, imitating, acting something new."[31] This is her education in the ways of the world, of love, money and power:

> Mother's friends and relatives tumbled in and out of the house, tossing off advice, endeavoring to scheme with their self-centred feeble wits, shooting off their private venoms. . . . It was enough to have lost her husband; it was too much for her to bear these gossips and pocket Machiavellis; but Jacky and I saw it for what it was, a grotesque game, played around her, not for her, with stakes high and low, ageless, immoral, and amusing as a circus. (p. 65)

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[31] Letty Fox: Her Luck (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Classics, 1974), p. 27. Further references to this edition appear in the text.

Parents, grandmothers, uncles and aunts are too caught up in their own manoeuvres to take the little girls in hand, and so Letty quickly learns from observation that the men do what they like and the women merely survive, their professed morality at variance with their actions and their superstitions lacking practical efficacy:

> Impossible to become corrupt in this school for girls, for no one had the recipe for anything. Even Grandmother's recipe for getting Solander back had not yet worked, and Grandmother didn't seem to care much. (p. 117)

"Knowing men" is their business in life, and yet the men remain unknowable, unpredictable. The "recipe" for getting Solander back by having another child does not work for Mathilde because Grandmother Morgan has underestimated his devotion to Persia, "Die Konkubine," -- and his ability to support two households. Cissie Morgan, nevertheless, gives by far the most practical advice to Mathilde about women's conflicting needs for love and security:

> She laughed solidly, 'I'm the one who can afford it, love, love. I can pay for it. I've got the time and money. I wouldn't be so crazy - knock my head against a stone wall before I had money in the bank?' she laughed aloud. 'Go on, wake up, you crazy fool, you're just a kid. When you're forty or forty-five, it'll be time to think about necking and -' her voice softened - 'love - and men - and all that. But you've got to get Sol back right now and that's the whole problem. Leave the rest to God. He'll take care of a decent woman, who takes care of her family life.'
>
> 'Then I'm to have no life of my own!'
>
> 'You must sacrifice yourself for Tootsy and Jacky,' said Grandmother heroically. 'I swear to you, Mattie, I never had anything serious to do with a man until you children were grown up. I had a sense of duty.' (p. 114)

Her grandmother's robust submission to the conditions of life set out for women in a world run by men becomes Letty's guiding principle. She learns to demand money from her father to help her "meet the right boy" and get established: "Every magazine in the country was on my side. They all showed a slick, amusing Powers model gouging money out of smooth Papas for clothes, automobiles, hairdos, and society colleges" (p. 238).

This middle-class cycle of reproduction prevails in the end, but it is crossed all the time by Letty's sense of independence, and her youthful desires for love, adventure, fame. But here she gets caught up in what her grandmother describes succinctly as "the tourist business," free love as invented by men. The second part of Letty's story, "On My Own," covers the temporary and anxiety-ridden period of "independence" between school and marriage, when this "run-of-the-mill New York girl" goes out "to make a living in the city" (pp. 9, 12). Letty's final meditations on "her luck" seem to confirm Cissie Morgan's shrewd survival strategy: security in marriage must be a young girl's first priority in a world where love is a luxury which only the very rich or the very foolish can afford. Married and pregnant, Letty now feels she has something to live for:

> I always did, but not in this way. I can see now why society is organised in ways that seem so strange to youngsters. It is, of course, organised to a certain extent for babies. Another thing is that in all this mad and rowdy time of my misguided youth I was looking for something - union with something, an ideal, a lover; but I have a different sort of union now, and this, I believe, is it. (p. 515)

The institution of marriage makes love impossible. This is brought home by the suicide of Philip Morgan, the philanderer, who tells Letty that his vengeful second wife is bleeding him dry and so, denied the love of other women, he has nothing to live for. Letty is frightened by this and observes that "he died for love. But I don't want to" (p. 508). It is evident, though, that she gives up her quest for love for her own reasons, she is tired of playing the part assigned to Philip's lady-loves, the courtesan entertaining married men, who leave her empty-hearted with the excuse that they have their duty to their wives and children. And when Letty gives up on love, she gives up her idealism at the same time; she and her new husband agree on a "modest program" of complacent altruism:

"One can't make a great stir, but one can be on the side of the angels" (p. 514).

Commonsense resignation is Letty's way of rationalizing her defeat. Here in the conclusion to her chronicle, her underlying confusion is indicated by the mixed metaphors of siege and journey, the mixed mottoes (Napoleonic and banal) and the defensive tone:

> I can only tangle with situations as they come along. On s'engage et puis on voit. Perhaps I just love life. I certainly expose myself to it; and I'm accessible to it. I don't ask myself, Will this last? It's a question of getting though life, which is quite a siege, with some self-respect. Before I was married, I had none; now, I respect not only my present position, but also all the efforts I made, in every direction, to get here. I was not always honest, but I had grit, pretty much; what else is there to it? The principal thing is, I got a start in life; and it's from now on. I have a freight, I cast off, the journey has begun. (p. 517)

Letty's recurrent images of herself as a ship indicate the contradictions of her position as a "free woman." When her freewheeling life goes well, she sees herself as a pleasure boat cruising from one port to another, always leaving behind the dullards on the wharf holding broken streamers (p. 437). But when a string of disastrous love affairs leaves her feeling exhausted and depressed, she thinks that "the woman looking for love is like a little boat meeting waterspout after waterspout. She is tired of steering, rowing, looking for land," and she wonders whether "growing up" will mean that she can "weather the troubles and begin to regard men and their passions merely as trade winds" (p. 388). The world of men is her element, but she is unhappy floating aimlessly around in it. She wants a chance to fulfil her proper purpose:

> I was a ship at sea, without a port. I was no hulk nor ghost-ship, but a good freighter made to carry bread and bibles about the world; I was a good, deep draught, built on dependable old-fashioned lines, no victory ship, no canal boat, and no ship of the line. But a freighter doesn't particularly care for the heaving billow; a freighter has a destination. . . . (p. 400)

"Good" is synonymous with "useful" and so marriage and pregnancy confer on Letty the self-respect she had lacked; and the attainment of that good justifies the means she was forced to use to get it, as she declares. It is notable, however, that she is not looking for a captain or a pilot, only a freight. Letty has found a "different sort of union," not with a lover or an ideal, but with the child (p. 515).

Her morality is the same as that which Defoe had attributed to Moll Flanders two hundred years earlier,[32] and it serves a similar ironic purpose for the novelist, to reveal a situation essentially unchanged since the eighteenth century. Prostitution is the inevitable by-product of a "free" marriage market where women's economic and social subordination obliges them to sell themselves to the highest bidder, the "free woman" being the one who hires herself rather than selling outright. Like Moll Flanders, Letty defends the system with a stoical realism that allows for little self-pity, even less compassion for other women, and no possibility at all of rebelling against it. The nature of her acquiesence is revealed in the following passage from the opening chapter, at a time when she is lonely and afraid of the future after Philip's death. She has been offered a paid position as secretary/ mistress to a Hollywood writer, and protests that this does not shock her, for "in this hurried world, no one has any time to seek and try out, and so one buys everything readymade":

> I do not even see a scandal in this, for wide-awake women. In other times, society regarded us as cattle or handsome house slaves; the ability to sell ourselves any way we like is a step toward freedom; we are in just the same position as our Negro compatriots - and they would not go backwards toward their miserable past. One must take the good with the bad and, unmoved by the titles of things and worn-out prejudice, one must look toward the future. I feel, though, that this can't go on for a lifetime. We must bear the burdens of society on our backs just a certain way, then must set them down for someone else to pick up. This was very much my feeling at that time. I had carried the burdens of society just as far as was good for me. (p. 5)

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[32] Pointed out by Geering, p. 131.

The ironies are multiple. The specious relativism of her historical argument about emancipation is self-evident; after comforting herself (though apparently instructing her readers) with Roosevelt-like rhetoric about taking the good with the bad and looking toward the future, she then turns to an opposing strain in the popular ideology of social responsibility in order to voice, in a muffled way, her real complaint - she is at the end of her tether, has had enough of this game. It is inevitable, after this, that the review of her life which follows should end a few weeks later with her retreat into marriage. Letty thinks she is a wide-awake woman, but hasn't the cool cynicism necessary to play the market carefully to her own advantage like her cousin Edwige, the "sex-careerist." Her husband's millionaire father cuts him out of the will and dies suddenly, and Letty doesn't even manage to get the long-promised "suit of furniture" from Grandmother Morgan.

To be "wide-awake" a woman needs to be both clear-sighted and adaptable, Letty thinks. She is confident of her early-learned adaptability but unwilling to admit the emotional cost to herself and the disadvantages involved in moving through experiences so rapidly that the past is always left unexamined. What critical faculty she possesses comes from her much-vaunted pragmatism, the stance which allows her to pour scorn on her sister's romantic dreams, asserting that "I must touch reality and there is no reality till I touch." The problem is that she is short-sighted and cannot see very far ahead of herself: "if I could only see clearer ahead, I'd make my way with a straight mind, for I can always look myself in the face and add one and one" (p. 47). With this combination of qualities, Letty is unaware of the ideological nature of what passes for realism or commonsense. Thus the first-person narrative allows for both direct social criticism from her point of view of sexual-economic hypocrisies and, through the revelation of crucial limitations in her awareness, indirect criticism of the ideology which informs her

expectations and values. The form of the novel, too, is largely shaped by her short-sighted clear-sightedness - a profusion of incidents and conversations reported in great detail but only superficially interpreted, a succession of characters whose lives she touches for briefer and briefer moments as her pursuit becomes more desperate.

Letty is very much a child of her times, brought up according to fashionable psychological theories of the twenties to "express herself freely," sexually and intellectually, and expecting everything from life, "the big rock candy mountain, if you only knew how to approach it" (p. 246). In her buoyant adolescence she becomes a socialist in pursuit of "some place where there's a hope in society (not just in types of automobiles) for a better kind of life all round, intellectual as well" (p. 273). A representative young radical of the thirties, she explains herself this way:

> We did not want things to remain in statu quo for our lifetime . . . because, actually, things had been changing since we were born, and we were enthusiastically used to it. Although our parents . . . worried about my sense of security (a cant phrase of the time), none of us had ever had that; and it was rather the struggle that made us strong. (p. 288)

But her perceptions change with the times. She reports that the fall of Madrid "disturbed everyone with the first truths about mortal combat in society," and as the war approaches, leftist political involvement becomes complex and risky. Letty's confidence is being undermined at the same time by her experience with men, beginning with the upper-class Englishman who leaves her to fight in Spain and eventually writes to tell her that he has married an old flame in London. She begins to realize that "the mortal combat which really affects her is against other women and for men," as Meaghan Morris points out in her introduction to the novel: "The main effect that the issues of conscription and war could have on

American women was through the rise and fall of the marriage market."[33] "Struggle" is no longer Letty's motto: "I don't believe in the struggle of youth. Things ought to be made easy for us when we're at the height of our powers," she explains to Jacky, and what she now wants made easy is marriage and "settling down" (p. 427).

At the time of Pearl Harbour, Letty sees that her contemporaries "had fallen into line with an ungraceful bump and there was no more official iconoclasm" and that she is part of this general retreat from radicalism on all fronts, political and social: "I had enough red blood in me not to like a lot of things I saw passing under the name of patriotism and the war effort, but I hadn't the guts, folly, or lunacy to go out on my own hook. I had to belong to society" (p. 467). This ambivalence is expressed in her personal ambitions at the time. On the one hand, "I always had that mad urge to sink myself in the heaving sweaty mass of humanity and be one of the girls (or boys)" (p. 467); but she also longs to "get in touch with a great man of action," to "work together with men of energy and intelligence, modern men who think the way I do." Although Letty sees it as a choice between conformity and heroic action, the real question is, which society does she belong to, male or female? Napoleon is her hero and she frequently invokes his motto as her own, but she does not want to *be* a Napoleon, only to "get in touch" with one. As there are no such men in her circle, "I couldn't do anything with the compatible groups in which I was happy but lazy, just chewing the rag, and I couldn't dream after stardust and live on nectar." Yet she certainly does not want to join the other women:

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[33] Meaghan Morris, Introduction to Angus and Robertson Classics edition of *Letty Fox*(n.p.).

"I couldn't do much as a stenographer, a special article-writer, or a messenger-girl," and can see no value in "bringing more larval human beings into the daylight and worrying about diapers and cute little sayings . . . at least, not at my age" (p. 470). And yet, as the story ends, there is nothing else for her to do but just that. As the period of radicalism fades so too does Letty -- back into private life, the conventional sphere of women, with its traditional satisfactions of domesticity and child-rearing. What she thinks of as her real life is only now beginning, as this "freighter" casts off in well-charted waters.

The subject of Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife) begins and ends her story with such an image of her destiny. She carries to the extreme Letty's conviction that she has nothing of the rebel in her, could never go "out on her own hook." Eleanor Herbert is unwilling even to try out the turbulent waters of emancipation. Here the authorial stance is even more detached, merely reporting her experiences and allowing her massive self-deceptions to reveal and speak for themselves. Eleanor never sees herself as responsible for her own acts, as a participant in history: events in the public world scarcely impinge on her consciousness and she is equally unaware of her own real impulses and needs.

In this novel the dilemma of woman is again posed in terms of finding her destiny through love. As Eleanor sees it, there is a clear-cut choice for a woman between passionate love and respectable marriage, and she wants to see herself as a good woman, wanting nothing more than a "plain, wholesome" life: suburbia is her real home and normality is her catch-cry. Passion enters her life twice, and each time it shakes the foundations of her self-image, sending her into panicky retreat. At thirty she meets Thieme, a wine-merchant, at a wedding in Paris and before she has even exchanged a word with him she is thrown into confusion, her conscious mind registering "a threat, like a premonition of disease," while she experiences a moment of intense feeling and heightened perception:

> Thoughts went through her mind that had never been part of her before: There are side booths, confessionals, I suppose, thousands of lives have been lived before me. . . . Where have they all got to? Just streaming out into what's faraway. And those to come - a cataract of light! Ages and ages of people. It's funny they won't have heard about me: nor anyone here. But then he is in the same boat. If I allowed it and our lives were to begin to circle round each other from now on - what a thought! On and on. I couldn't do it. . . .
>
> These stray ideas were as fragrant and delightful to her as patches of low-growing flowers on a forest floor. . . . They are there every year, but new now. A great quiet wind blowing round and round her on which the church and audience were dim paintings from past time, carried before her eyes, recollections, images and breaths of passion, like sprays of flowers. She had never lived so intensely. . . . (pp. 44-45)

Passion breaks up the self-enclosed circle of her existence with intimations of a supra-individual human life and of the mystery of death. The imagery recalls Teresa's final vision of her destiny as a part of this wider life, but Eleanor's refusal to acknowledge such a dimension in her life is already indicated: "I couldn't do it." Safely back in England, she rationalizes her rejection of Thieme by setting up an absolute distinction between "passion, love, the hand of fate," becoming "all-in-all to a man," and the sort of marriage suitable for a "modern woman": "No closed world, but society, neighbors, friends, the stream of time" (p. 73). The ideological nature of these cant phrases is self-evident and yet the story of Eleanor's unfulfilled life suggests that she has refused something more challenging than romantic submission to a man, the "hand of fate." Is Christina Stead suggesting that the "modern," emancipated woman whom Eleanor represents has allowed herself, through lack of courage, to be cheated of love?

Eleanor's second such experience comes when, as a woman of fifty, she meets her daughter's lover at a performance (significantly) of _La Forza del Destino_. He looks at her in the somewhat Lawrentian way that Thieme had done, "with the glance of a man who understands a woman wants him and who gives himself and means to take all," Eleanor thinks,

and she "looked away, to hide it from the others." Then "her heart began pounding out hard and real thoughts, like pieces of metal," expressing again her fear that passion would render meaningless the world and time, "flooding everything, everything would be washed away" (pp. 303-304). The music provides a validation of her feeling rather as the church setting had done on that previous occasion:

> What a terrible, powerful beat the music had, threatening and promising sullenly, something tremendous, nothing good. In it was a life Eleanor had never known, and which frightened her, but now, for the first time, attracted her - a great potency, passion, which she had always been unconscious of; some great thing approached her and for the first time spoke to her, as if a new world came somewhere near her world and she felt its attraction and feared to be pulled away off the earth, out of life. (p. 304)

The potency that is in the music is in her, too, though she had always hidden it from herself, as now, with "an ordinary suburban face and ordinary suburban remarks" (p. 305). Now the repressed forces return with a vengeance and she felt "as if something stronger than herself had got inside, a turbine which had started out on a long voyage and was now well on its way churning up the shallow waters, satisfied in the deep waters." She begins to fear the projection of this power in "this intruder, this man, this god, this tyrant, who had begun to squeeze the life out of her" (p. 307). She suffers a kind of stroke, which appears to be a punishment for the denial of her own power that has characterized her whole life, and at this point the novel ends. The portrait of Miss Herbert is finished off with a sombre irony that deepens the predominantly satirical surface tones: her potential power is affirmed at the same time as she is punished for her failure to realize it.

Just before her stroke, Eleanor goes on a kind of pilgrimage to see her old friend, Dr Linda Mack, an independent and apparently celibate woman, only to find her gone to Northern India on one of _her_ pilgrimages in search of mystical revelation; or she may go to Mount Athos, her Greek landlord tells Eleanor, and try to get into the forbidden territory, for "she has special clothing; it would not be easy to tell whether she is a man or a woman" (p. 307). This character is a foil to Eleanor's, and together they reveal the essential dilemma of the modern woman as it is presented in this novel. Unlike Eleanor, Dr Mack does not wholly deny her deepest nature but with her, passion takes the form of ascetic mysticism; and in order to search for revelation she has to deny her femaleness altogether (again, there are echoes of Teresa Hawkins here). She, too, is limited by her submission to the sexual _status quo_. With her career and her rigorous self-discipline, she morally condemns other women who take love where they can find it: denying herself this pursuit of happiness she makes many journeys after the "certainty, pure light" of a mystical individual salvation (p. 203). As a young woman she had been "a champion of many liberal causes of free trade, minority rights, social services, nationalization of industry" but she also hoped to find "some greater cause the best of all, and bind her life to it, as a living body is bound to a stake" (pp. 11-12). A true ascetic, she wants to transcend social relations rather than, like Eleanor, to immerse herself blindly in them. The novel presents no third way for women to meet their destiny, unless it is to be guessed at in the secondary figure of Marge, Eleanor's sister-in-law, who leaves her husband to live with her lover and appears to have some political and artistic interests.

Dr Mack and Eleanor represent two sides of the English character, just as Letty and her sister Jacky represent the pragmatic and the idealist sides of the American character. Linda Mack is described as

coming from "a well-to-do Whig family, generous, proud, with a severe, altruistic cult of personality" and "a passionate patriot" (p. 11); but as time goes on her inherited liberalism dwindles away to an individualistic search for salvation. Sexually and politically, Eleanor is her opposite -- a dyed-in-the wool Tory, patriotic only when put on the defensive (during the war), sentimental about "old England" and old ways but passive and unprincipled in the face of change, an aimless muddler, hard-working but hopelessly inefficient; described as a beauty of the "English rose" type, she is in fact more like Blake's Rose, vivacious but unawakened sexually and morally, naively corrupt and so able to uphold, without conscious hypocrisy, the strictest traditional standards of chastity while indulging in meaningless hedonistic experiments out of idle curiosity.[34] It is worth looking more closely at the sexual and political circumstances of Eleanor's life so as to highlight the historical specificity of her fate. This specificity, always an important element of Christina Stead's art, is particularly revealing, in this novel, of the political and sexual ideologies that militate against the heroine's fulfilment.

Although she never allows herself to see it, Eleanor's life enmeshes her in all the significant social and political conflicts of her time (she is, it seems from internal evidence, approximately the same age as the century, and is in her late twenties when the novel opens). Through her family she is connected with two significant lost causes in English social history, the anti-Imperial element of the nineteenth-

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[34] Eleanor is a fuller development of the character of Elvira in The Beauties and Furies (London: Peter Davies, 1936): the quintessential English middle-class woman, Elvira is described schematically by Marpurgo as possessing a "complex, subtle nature -- chiefly latent, though, so that her will only appears in common rational-mystic forms known to dream-doctors and psychiatrists" (p. 150). cf. Eleanor's narrow reasonableness, drawing back from her own "mystical" concept of passion.

century socialist movement (represented by her father and brother with their not-quite self-sufficient "Commonwealth Farm") and the anti-Established Church religious societies which attempted to initiate a moral rearmament movement in England during the twenties (represented by her mother's affiliation with the New Religious Society). The political implications of the Society's program are indicated by the fact that Eleanor's pro-fascist husband, Heinz (alias Henry) is employed by the Society on mysterious missions all over Europe. Eleanor and Henry are divorced, appropriately enough, during the course of World War II. After the war, when she tries to earn a living by selling her undeveloped literary talents on Grub Street, she ends up working for a petty political spy, feeding him information about the personal lives of her leftist acquaintances. Eleanor's shoddy activities and highly respectable self-image can be seen in the novel as a reflection of England's unacknowledged decline as a world power in the post-war world.

Her career from the late twenties through to the late fifties can be read as a parody of all the dire predictions of those who opposed women's emancipation: her university education is wasted as she plays at being a writer and has pointless affairs with assorted men, preferring those who "could first refer to Bertrand Russell, Bosanquet, Whitehead" (p. 31); then her eminently respectable marriage falls apart and ends in divorce, and she has to struggle to support herself and her two children with only the prospect of a lonely old age before her. But because of Eleanor's extreme naivety and boundless capacity for self-deception the satiric target becomes the society that could produce such a woman as its representative type and abet her rationalizations with its dominant ideologies, which have just enough truth in them to be mystifying to such a character. Her gullible belief that society will provide all the new "opportunities" for women along with "normal" marriage

and family and her implicit faith in social harmony and rewards for good behaviour are illustrated in this reply to Dr Mack's accusation that she is aimless and conformist:

> 'I do feel that it ought all to be plain sailing. I know what I want and it's all planned; I believe I'm going to be happy. . . . Why not? Society wants us to be happy, doesn't it? And it's our natural right. So why shouldn't it all chime together? "In harmony, in heavenly harmony, this universal frame began,"' she sang. 'I think if we follow our instincts, we and society too will be best served.' (p. 12)

When Eleanor sets out to follow her own advice she soon becomes an amateur prostitute. Her "instincts" at this time are poverty and a curiosity about her power to attract men, which turns necessity into virtue as she defends herself to her old schoolteacher: "You always said domestic women were treated as cattle, they should be free. . . . Well, I'm striking a blow for freedom." She calls the older woman a hypocrite for calling her wanton while condoning a love affair between her adopted daughter, Diana, and a married man (p. 29). When Eleanor marries, however, she discards Diana along with all her old bohemian friends. Now she professes herself ready to turn her back on a romanticized past of "struggle and dreams and youth" in favour of "the good life," marriage, which is, she explains ingenuously, "much more like a sound business proposition than a picaresque tale" (pp. 89-90).

Her favourite expressions come so trippingly off the tongue because Eleanor is an avid consumer of the cant phrases and homespun philosophies of the popular magazines. When sowing her wild oats she babbles on in the manner of a 1920's glossy aimed at flappers, like this one called _Eve_: "Tired of shams, we have torn down the musty hangings which the Victorians erected. We talk of everything. . . . We are determined to let in the air - to ventilate every corner of our mansion. . . ."[35]

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[35] Quoted in Cynthia White, _Women's Magazines, 1693-1968_ (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), p. 94.

As a sober-minded young wife she is equally ready to fit herself to the image presented in editorials like that of Housewife in the 1930's:

> '. . . happy and lucky is the man whose wife is house-proud, a woman who revels in the fact that she has a home of her own to make, and who is determined to make it attractive for him and for herself, a woman who likes to do things well, to make him proud of her and of their children, and who yet endeavours to do all this cheerfully on a limited income.'[36]

Eleanor is not only a consumer of these magazines but contributes to them her own stories, often ghost-written under well-known names. During a dinner party she almost weeps because her husband queries her management of the wine:

> Over and over again she had read that 'before dinner just one cocktail or one glass of sherry . . . is correct; nothing more is needed to give them that pleasant anticipatory glow.' She had written it herself. 'More leads to raised voices and flushed faces.' Now, mortified, . . . she went away ('slipped away' she thought to herself) and put on the dinner; Henry should not have the second bottle of sherry. (p. 107)

What is so pathetic about her is her sincere and energetic effort to live by her own recipes for success in a dinner party or a marriage. Just often enough to make her credible, her resentments rise unbidden to the surface: the "rainbow interchange" she imagines between an ideal husband and wife quietly "thrashing out" their misunderstandings is "coarsely interrupted by fierce words hurtling across her mind: 'He gets the best end of the stick and leaves me all the dirty work. He's a brute, the cold little climbing devil.'" (p. 111). Later, when Henry demands a divorce, she is similarly infuriated and "great formless feelings rushed healthily through her mind giving her release and power, but she did not know what these feelings were because she had never had them before . . ." (p. 144). But just as she will not admit passionate love,

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[36] Quoted in White, p. 100.

so she refuses to let such passionate hatred "upset her life" or "ruin her future," so she writes him a confident, no-nonsense letter in reply, "more like a friend or a dear sister," insisting that:

> 'Nothing can happen to us to hurt us. It's all been too perfect. Bless us all, we knew, both of us (the dear babies don't know yet, thank heaven), that life is not whipped cream and roses and that "all kinds of things and weather must be taken in together to make up a year and a sphere." Wives, husbands, parents are no longer themselves, they think in terms of "years and spheres," they must overlook many things for the sake of life itself, for life is their duty and their happiness. I am simply forgetting your letter, dear . . . for you can't be so illogical and foolish as to build so much upon the lower animal functions.' (p. 145)

She cannot write about her real, unacknowledged feelings: instead of the promised story about "the injustice of marriage," she produces a saccharine children's story, sheer wish-fulfilment which, she insists, is "sheer inspiration, automatic writing" (pp. 137, 138). Both story and letter reflect in their style and sentiments the homely, cosy tone which Cynthia White found to be characteristic of English women's magazines during wartime. They were, she points out, "offering women . . . a respite from the grim struggles of everyday living. Oversweet commiseration was beginning to replace the astringent counselling of an earlier period."[37] The ideological styles employed by the novelist in _Miss Herbert_ demand that one read beneath the refracting surface of Eleanor's consciousness in order to realize for oneself what "grim struggles of everyday living" she is actually suffering.

Eleanor is portrayed in the mindlessly conservative ideological role attributed to middle-class English women by those political pundits of the thirties whom Virginia Woolf attacked in _Three Guineas_ for expressing their misogyny under the cover of a defence of England's

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[37] White, p. 111.

jeopardized greatness. Believing that "change comes by itself, by natural laws," Eleanor criticizes as "rash rank outsiders" those who would intervene in this natural process and cause disorder, people like her father, brother and sister-in-law. But they contradict her claim that England is "a perfectly free society," arguing that "covert understandings had repressed thoughts and thoughts had dwindled and died" (p. 131). The statement is as applicable to Eleanor as it is to England: both are suffering from atrophy. Her father's tale of Sabrina, the beautiful, chaste woman dying of consumption, who "threw a spell over the men left in the village" (one of covert references to the war going on at this time) and brought the whole community to ruin, illustrates exactly this phenomenon. "The story was tender, forgiving, like a man writing about his daughter," (pp. 168, 169) and Eleanor collaborates with her father in completing and publishing it: as <u>Brief Candle</u> it becomes a best-selling novel. It is an archetypal fable of the destructive power of Woman, but because of its clear association with the heroine of this novel it points to sexual repression and the atrophy of creative mind as the underlying cause of this destructiveness.

During this period of the war Eleanor is forced to confront doubt and disorder on both personal and national fronts. Her response to war is identical to her professed bewilderment about the failure of her marriage: "'Did I marry the wrong man? . . . It's as if there's something I don't understand, but I do understand, I face all my problems squarely'" and "'What if we go down? If it's all been for nothing? If we've all been wrong? Can I live in a world where the British Empire does not live?'" (pp. 164-65). It is said that "she never recovered from those days, she never recovered her self-possession" (p. 167). In the second half of the novel her life and, by implication, England's, go downhill all the way. In drab post-war London she struggles to make a living, consumed by a single passion, the "guinea fever" spread by

her Grub Street friend, Cope Pigsney. The men she meets are such a sorry crew that they remind one of the complaint expressed by the heroine of Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook that "there are no real men left." Cope is sexually impotent, a Grub Street parasite and a spy; others are a self-seeking homosexual, a child-like farmer who wants to marry her, and an ageing necrophile. Her relationship with Quaideson, where she poses among his antique instruments of torture and feels "perfectly feminine" (p. 288), marks the final stages of the process of atrophy: Eleanor's denial of her own subjectivity and her active sexuality is complete. The condemnation of what is meant by "femininity" in patriarchal culture could not be stronger.

Eleanor's fate is made representative and, in her, "private and social anguish mesh perfectly."[38] Although it is indisputably a novel "about a foolish woman" whom Christina Stead "sets up in revealing scenes" and then dispatches ~~her "victim"~~ "with hatpins of stainless prose," it will not do to accuse the novelist, as this Time critic does, of sadism.[39] In the ironic mode of her later novels, no character can gain redemption through a sudden access of self-awareness, and here it is the representative meaning of Eleanor's life for which both revulsion and compassion are evoked. Through this character Christina Stead satirizes the society whose ruling ideologies are expressed in her "suburban," "feminine" "normality."

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[38] Helen Yglesias, rev. of Miss Herbert, National Times, 5-10 July 1976, p. 19.

[39] R.Z. Sheppard, "Out From Down Under," Time, 7 June 1976, p. 61.

Letty Fox and Miss Herbert point out the ironies of women's emancipation into a repressive and corrupt social structure. In these two novels Christina Stead may be seen as answering the liberal feminists of an earlier period who believed that emancipation into an idealized public world would at last allow women to fulfil themselves. Among twentieth-century women writers she is the great ironist of the female experience. Her creations not only criticize the social structure and its ideologies but also insist that women are neither immune from its corruptions nor its passive victims. They are shown to be accomplices in the suppression of their own desires and needs, particularly their sexuality. The very monstrousness of characters like Letty and Eleanor -- their gargantuan capacity for self-deceit -- is a kind of tribute to the energy they are misusing. In dissecting the processes of this self-deception she also reveals the extent to which ready-made ideological constructions of reality are accepted as true knowledge of the real world, a world to which these women (even the "wide-awake" Letty) come so ill-prepared with the usual survival tactics. Despite such qualifications, however, these two novels, because of the social context in which they are read, tend to confirm the misogynist notion of women's moral incompetence. And this is one reason why I think that Christina Stead's best novels are those which present the interaction of fully-developed male and female characters who are all presented with her compelling balance of critical detachment and creative involvement: The Man Who Loved Children, For Love Alone and Cotters' England.

In The Man Who Loved Children the deathly struggle between man and woman is transcended, in both its eternal and its historically-specific aspects, through Louisa's act of self-liberation. By the end of For Love Alone the balance of Christina Stead's art has swung even further in the direction of celebrating a faith in the human capacity for freedom and self-creation, and this is why it can be seen as a successor to the novels

of radical sexual idealism written by Hardy and Lawrence before World War I which explore the possibilities of reinventing heterosexual love and thus subverting or evading what Hardy called "the cruel law of nature and society." But there is no successor to For Love Alone in Stead's oeuvre to date, in which I would place Cotters' England as the fullest development of the ironic mode of her "new realism". She returns to the task of dissecting the living from the moribund tissue within individuals and within society. Her "psychological drama of the person" is of such a kind as to present characters with all the threads of their attachment to the social context still visible, even in their ideals and dreams. And so there can be no heroic women transcending the circumstances of their ordinary lives and no ideal love relationships which might point the way to a new world, in the Lawrentian way.

Our culture's concepts of love are, indeed, seen as contributing to the destructiveness of human relations: Teresa almost kills herself in the service of self-abnegating love, and Sam Pollit and Nellie Cotter do terrible things to those weaker than themselves in the name of humanitarian sentiments. There is, however, an alternative conception of love, dramatized in the characters of Louisa and Teresa, which is both generous and self-affirming. It is a passionate impulse, subtly distinguished from the passionate egotism which ordinarily motivates Stead's major characters by its power to liberate the lover from the bonds of a destructive attachment to the image of herself produced in normal social relationships. It frees Louisa from daughterhood and Teresa from womanhood, as those states of being are experienced in patriarchal society. In the earlier discussion of For Love Alone I associated this love with Eros, creative sexual energy. It is dramatized in both novels as an impulse, not a continuous state of being but a human potential which has to be created in emotional and moral activity. As a potential not

realized in any existing social institutions, this creative love is everywhere subject to social pressures which distort it, channelling it into "normal" behaviour and its "perverse" complements. The novelist, committed to a critical realism that implicitly places the psychological drama of individuals in its social and historical context, inevitably portrays the frustration rather than the fulfilment of Eros. Where another critic sees in Stead's development of new techniques of irony after For Love Alone evidence of her "loss of faith in the heroic temperament,"[40] I would suggest that her later novels show a deep disillusionment about the possibilities of social liberation that invigorated European and American intellectual life during the years between the two World Wars. Instead of retreating into mysticism or becoming an apologist for the status quo like some of those who shared her political views, Christina Stead might be said to have settled down "for the duration" to write a critical history of that period of defeat through the lives of ordinary people who experienced it. The Cold War in world politics, which is the wider context of her later work, corresponded with the Cold War in sexual politics that came with the submergence of the first wave of feminism, and Stead has provided some of the most penetrating insights in fiction about the dynamics of this struggle, too.

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[40] A. Thomas, "Nightmare World: A Study of the Fiction of Christina Stead," M.A. thesis Univ. of Western Australia 1970, p. 238.

# CONCLUSION

This study has tried to show how some of the greatest British novels of this century were born out of the radical aspirations and deep conflicts attendant on the emancipation of women. There are, however, no very heartening conclusions to be drawn about the impact of feminism on the whole social process of British culture. The radical ideologies of sexual liberation and social renewal associated with the "New Woman" in the final decades of the nineteenth century proved to be little more than a rhetorical stance with insufficient popular support for its development into an effective movement for social change. The relation between the "New Spirit" and the felt needs and aspirations of women was confused. Feminist writers showed some interest in the Victorian ideal of the "odd women" renouncing personal life in the service of their oppressed sisters, but their concern with questions of independence, love and maternity was more vital. Yet they could neither accept the idea that both their sexual fulfilment and their social role was determined by the maternal instinct, nor embrace wholeheartedly the notion of free unions as an answer to the problems of the marriage-family institution.

They were so caught up, inevitably, in questioning traditional definitions of their female nature, that they could offer no clear answers to their contemporary, Freud's, plaintive question, "What does a woman want?" Later, when the women's movement entered its militant Suffragette phase, the sexual and emotional dimensions of this question were submerged altogether while feminists gained new experiences of collective solidarity and political effectiveness. This new consciousness is not, however, much in evidence in the popular fiction written about the Suffragette period. Despite the exciting stories it provided, the militant movement is dismissed in the ideological reaction of the

time as a cynical, or else merely wrong-headed, manipulation of the energies of those "odd women" whose driving instinct, the maternal, was frustrated.

By the time the vote was actually gained for women after World War I, the very word "feminism" was an embarrassment. The Suffragettes were abhorred for having tried to ferment a war between the sexes: they had demanded equality, denying that fundamental difference between male and female fulfilment which popular psychology was now concerned to demonstrate. The right to vote and the right to work, together with a more liberal conception of women's filial and marital obligations, seemed to have answered all the legitimate demands of the women's movement. But below this apparent _fait accompli_ there were undercurrents of unease. Women active politically found that there were still "women's issues" to be fought, and writers who returned to those previously submerged questions of women's sexual and emotional needs began to express their dissatisfactions more openly. Continued social unrest in Britain and the rise of fascism in Europe evoked ideological responses that were unabashedly male supremacist, and feminists began to speak out against political oppression in both public and "private" life. The advent of World War II, however, called a halt to such polarization; and feminist consciousness reached its nadir in the period of the Cold War.

During this grim period Christina Stead was composing her two great novels on the theme of love, its distortions in the "iron circle of home and work" and its possibilities as a dynamic force for human freedom. In these masterpieces she recaptured the vitality of her own youth and the optimism of the generation of the thirties. Not by submitting to a life of toil "in poverty and obscurity" (as Virginia Woolf had once advised) but by risking all for love, her heroine triumphs.

Love, the power of Eros, brings Teresa out of the darkness of false knowledge and privatized suffering into the bright, daytime world of human history, the "flux of time." It is a momentary triumph for the representative New Woman, as visionary in its way as Ursula's glimpse of the world made new at the end of The Rainbow. But, like Lawrence in the earlier period of social crisis, Stead returns in her later novels to present the doomed struggle of powerless individuals in the intractable here-and-now. Retreating from the visionary to the ironic mode, she saves her work from the reactionary despair which characterizes Lawrence's later novels.

The work of Virginia Woolf presents a significantly different progression from these two writers. Less alienated by class and national origins from the hegemonic culture, she persisted in the effort to relate her sense of the profound changes promised by the emancipation of women to the inner life of ordinary middle-class experience. There were to be no heroics, no metaphysics: the system-making that Lawrence used to help him overcome the hold of the dominant ideology on his own imagination was no use to her. As a feminist acutely sensitive to the pressures of patriarchal ideology on the formation of identity she portrays women, young and old alike, engaged in the constant effort to affirm the validity of their own perceptions, to get free of emotional and mental tyranny. But the cost of such independence is isolation. In Between the Acts the isolation of the independent woman, the artist, from the community to which she attempts to restore a sense of purpose, is complete.

This, her last novel, concludes on a note of ambivalence about the value of "natural," procreative sexuality as profound as that expressed in the tragedy of Gerald in Women in Love. Only in fantasy could Woolf project, in Orlando, an ideal of androgynous equality in the relationship between woman and man. Lawrence's later attempt to revive his ideal of sexual love as salvation produced only the oppressively male

supremacist system-making of Lady Chatterley's lover. For both writers their late-Victorian inheritance of a belief in "love's coming-of-age" (a belief which both Olive Schreiner and Thomas Hardy, among others, had entertained), lent urgency to their search for a new relation between the sexes. But it was not yet the time for a "novel about Love Triumphant," as Lawrence had promised. Stead's notion of Eros as a mode of knowledge, as authentic relation to the world outside the individual self, brings For Love Alone closest to this. Since then the project seems to have been discontinued.

The conflicting demands of individuality and relationship, of the venture into consciousness and the fulfilment of desire, are deeply felt and strenuously explored in the major novels discussed in this study. In key works which are based on the novelist's own experience -- The Story of an African Farm, Jude the Obscure, The Rainbow, To the Lighthouse, For Love Alone -- these issues are elaborated as they arise from the writers' vision of their lives as experiments. The common elements in the novels are the struggle out of obscurity and poverty, the effort to establish sexual identity as the basis of individual freedom, and the search for new modes of personal and social relationship. All make authentic breaks with the hegemonic ideology of sex and love, and point the way towards radical alternatives to the institutionalization of personal relationships in marriage and the family. The symbolic defeats and flickering triumphs portrayed in their attempts to reinvent love on the basis of equality between the sexes testify to the profound changes in consciousness demanded by the feminist challenge to patriarchal power.

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