

**The University of Hull**

**Lesbian Identities – A Comparison of Two Sets of  
Female Friends in the Early Twentieth Century**

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the University of Hull

by

**Clair Glynis Roberts**

**M.A. University of York**

**B.A. (Hons) University of Lancaster**

**June 2003**

## **Table of Contents**

Table of Contents	i
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Illustrations	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: A Lesbian's Life or a Woman's Life? – The Social and Cultural Context of Women's Lives in the Early Twentieth Century	55
Chapter Two: Establishing Difference	108
Chapter Three: Expressing Identity	148
Chapter Four: "No self-respecting woman could be other than a Suffragist": The Role of Political Activism in the Expression of Sexual Identity	195
Chapter Five: Identity in the Public and Private Spheres	239
Conclusion	294
Bibliography	316

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Nigel Nicolson for permission to quote from Christopher St John's letters and the "Love Journal" written to his mother, Vita Sackville-West. I would also like to thank him for permission to copy the photograph of Christopher St John, Edith Craig and Clare "Tony" Atwood from his personal collection. Further, I would like to thank Margaret Weare, the National Trust's Custodian of the Ellen Terry Memorial Museum at Smallhythe, for access to the Edith Craig Archive located there. She was particularly helpful in identifying family photographs of Edy Craig, Christopher St John and Clare "Tony" Atwood, which she kindly copied for me at Smallhythe. From the Fawcett Library I would like to thank David Doughan and from the Women's Library I would like to thank Liza Giffen and Monica Willet, all of whom provided assistance in allowing me to access the Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson archive and also the Vera "Jack" Holmes archive, both of which are currently uncatalogued.

I would like to thank the following people and institutions for their assistance. At the Imperial War Museum I would like to thank Michael Moody for access to hitherto unknown papers relating to Clare Atwood. At the British Library I would particularly like to thank Barbara O'Connor for information and advice. Thanks are also due to the library staff at the British Library; York University Library; Kingston University Library and Leeds Metropolitan University

Library. I have also had assistance from the Probate Registry for the last will and testaments of various women, which proved useful.

Finally I would like to thank my supervisor, Gabriele Griffin, who has kept me focused throughout my research and offered invaluable guidance and advice. Both close friends and family have supported me in my endeavours over the past few years. My thanks to them.

## List of Illustrations

Fig. 1	Cartoon. <u>Punch</u> 21 <sup>st</sup> March 1928: 334	2
Fig. 2	“Is your Wife a Suffragette?” Postcard, postmarked 1908 (Tickner, 35)	152
Fig. 3	Cartoon. “Extremes that Meet: At Mrs Lyons Chacer’s ‘Small and Early” <u>Punch</u> 14 <sup>th</sup> March 1874: 110	158
Fig. 4	“Pagan rituals and ‘theatricals” in Natalie Barney’s garden (Weiss, 103)	166
Fig. 5	Una Troubridge painted by Romaine Brooks 1924 (Souhami, <u>Trials</u> , n.p.)	167
Fig. 6	Ruth photographed in York c.1917 (T. Thompson, n.p.)	192
Fig. 7	Eva c.1915 (T. Thompson, n.p.)	192
Fig. 8	Edy (Tickner, 24)	192
Fig. 9	Edy as Rosa Bonheur (Melville, n.p.)	253
Fig. 10	Chris as Hannah Snell (Mackenzie, 120)	255
Fig. 11	Radclyffe Hall photographed by Howard Coster 1932 (Baker, n.p.)	260
Fig. 12	Beresford Egan’s Cartoon lampooning Radclyffe Hall and <u>The Well of Loneliness</u> (Baker, n.p.)	263
Fig. 13	Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge photographed in August 1923 for <u>The Queen</u> (Souhami, <u>Trials</u> , n.p.)	264
Fig. 14	Gertrude Stein and Thelma Wood (Weiss, 22)	265
Fig. 15	“Briar Hedge” (Edith Craig Archive)	273

Fig. 16	Chris and Edy in the garden (Edith Craig Archive)	275
Fig. 17	Chris, Edy and Gabriele Enthoven at Smallhythe (Edith Craig Archive)	277
Fig. 18	Friends at Smallhythe (back row standing: Chris, Haskie; middle row: Edy, Pixie (Pamela Colman Smith), John; front row sitting: Reggie (Regina Laurence), Fanny Dellavent, Tassle. (Edith Craig Archive)	278
Fig. 19	Chris and Tony on the beach (Edith Craig Archive)	280
Fig. 20	Edy, Chris and Tony at Sissinghurst (Nicolson Family Album)	282
Fig. 21	Edy, Tony and Chris at Smallhythe (Edith Craig Archive)	283
Fig. 22	Ruth Bower at Smallhythe (Edith Craig Archive)	284
Fig. 23	Ruth picking potatoes (Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive)	286
Fig. 24	Ruth at Woodbrooke (Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive)	288
Fig. 25	Ruth and Hugh (Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive)	289
Fig. 26	Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey photographed in the 1920s (postcard, National Portrait Gallery)	290

## Introduction

If we think about lesbian history in the early twentieth century we inevitably think of Radclyffe Hall (1883 -1943) and her novel The Well of Loneliness, published in 1928. She and her protagonist, Stephen Gordon, have become the epitomes of the “mannish lesbian” that is associated with the lesbian at the turn of the century. As Ruehl asserts,

both she [Hall] and her fictional heroine, Stephen, became points of reference for women who, in a time when landmarks were few, were struggling to make sense of their attraction to other women and find a social identity by which to live. (15)

Indeed, by her own admission Hall wrote her novel

to encourage inverts to face up to a hostile world in their true colours, and this with dignity and courage. To spur all classes of inverts to make good through hard work, faithful and loyal attachments and sober and useful living. To bring normal men and women of good will to a fuller and more tolerant understanding of the inverted. (Hall, letter to Gorham Munson quoted in Souhami, 151)

In her novel Hall (re)produced the stereotype of the mannish lesbian.<sup>1</sup> This provides us with one vision of early twentieth-century lesbianism.<sup>2</sup> However, lesbian history written over the last century and the writings of lesbian women themselves such as auto/biographies or novels demonstrate that lesbian history is much more diverse than this particular image suggests. Radclyffe Hall's work, an important contribution to lesbian history, reflected her own experience, her historical, social and economic circumstances, inflected by her upper-class

---

<sup>1</sup>This view of the mannish lesbian was based on the earlier image of the New Woman (Smith-Rosenberg, Brandon, Newton, Bland, Richardson and Willis), perceived as a woman trying to obtain male privilege and as such a danger to men. There were a number of cartoons in popular magazines such as Punch which made fun of this image as shown below. Especially notable was Beresford Egan's satirical booklet entitled The Sink of Solitude, published during the obscenity trial for The Well of Loneliness which caused "the ladylike Radclyffe Hall considerable pain" (Brittain, Obscenity,95) according to Una Troubridge.



Fig. 1. Young woman looking at photograph of a friend's fiancé. "Well, God bless you, my dear, Congratulations and all that. He certainly looks twice the man you are". (Punch, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1928, 334).

<sup>2</sup> Hall based her work on the theories of "inversion" put forward by Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. I discuss this and subsequent theories of lesbian identity in the literature review and Chapter Two.



status.

Jeanette Foster based her pioneering text on lesbian identity and literature, Sex Variant Women in Literature (1956), on the "assumption that what has been written and read for pleasure is a fair index of popular interest and social attitude from one century to another" (11). Following her lead other writers such as Faderman and Donoghue have looked at a variety of textual sources<sup>3</sup> to understand the development of lesbian identities and piece together a lesbian history. Writings, fictional as well as auto/biographical, provide a picture of the lives of lesbian women and an insight into their beliefs and thoughts. And as the example of Hall demonstrates, her lived experience and understanding of sexology were fundamental to her writing.

In my thesis I shall compare two friendship networks that have both been described in recent years as lesbian ones (Bland, 170; Cockin, Edith Craig, 66; T. Thompson, 14). The first one is the *ménage à trois* of Edith Craig (1869 -1947), Christopher St John (1873 -1960) and Clare Atwood (1866-1963), known by their friends as Edy, Chris and Tony. They were all upper middle-class women who lived together at their homes in London and Smallhythe in Kent. The second network is that of Ruth Slate (1884-1953) and Eva Slawson (1882-1916) who

---

<sup>3</sup> Faderman in Surpassing the Love of Men (1981) looks at correspondence, poems and novels for evidence of passionate friendships between women. Donoghue analyses a variety of texts published between 1668 and 1801 that include plays, novels, medical treatises and erotica but which do not include private papers.

were lower middle-class women living in East London. I have chosen these two groups of women because they illustrate different versions of female friendships in the early twentieth century. As a consequence of their different class backgrounds they had distinct expectations of their lives and their lifestyles. But it is how these women defined their friendships with each other and also understood the nature of their sexuality that is the central concern of my research. Whilst some work has been done on the development, understanding and expression of lesbian identity at that time (Faderman, Jeffreys, Vicinus), and work by (lesbian) women from the period exists (Hall, St John, Sackville-West, Smyth), no research has focused on the role of cross-class differences in this context. My research will place two sets of friendship within a wider frame of contemporary debates about the relationship between the historical moment and contemporary thinking of lesbian identities, and the ways in which definitional discourses of the present operate to (re)read historical phenomena.

### **The Smallhythe Trio**

Edy, Chris and Tony were dubbed the "Smallhythe trio" by Melville (252). I shall employ this phrase throughout my writing to refer to these three women as it illustrates the closeness of their partnership. All three women were well known in their own right at the beginning of the twentieth century but their inclusion in many biographies is due to the fact that Edy was the daughter of the well-known nineteenth-century actress Ellen Terry. From an early age Edy was exposed to theatrical life and it was perhaps inevitable that she would follow in her mother's

footsteps to some extent. After initially training as a pianist from which she had to retire because of rheumatism (Melville, 129), Edy took some acting roles alongside her mother, but her true gift was for the production of theatrical events. Chris was known as a writer with a variety of novels and biographies to her name alongside her work as a journalist and music critic, all of which I shall discuss in greater detail when looking at the primary sources I employed in my research. Tony was an artist who trained at the Slade School; her work was exhibited in London as well as Liverpool and Scotland (Cockin, Edith Craig, 124). Spalding states that she was “commissioned to paint war scenes during the First World War for the Canadian Government; four of these paintings are in the Imperial War Museum” (59). The Imperial War Museum holds over seventy letters that comprise the correspondence between Tony and the museum in relation to these four paintings, including the transfer of copyright. This made her one of very few women to receive such commissions at this time and must point to a level of professional achievement that is perhaps underestimated today. Indeed, following Tony’s gift of the painting “Christmas Day,” her primary contact at the museum, Agnes Ethel Conway (the “Hon-Secretary Women’s Work Sub-Committee”) wrote: “It is nice of you to say you have enjoyed working for us. We feel almost ashamed of accepting so important a gift from you and think you are the most generous of all artists and the most business like!” (Conway, letter to Atwood, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1920).

Their story is documented in several biographies. The focus of these

biographies, as I shall go on to demonstrate, both in terms of the subject and the way in which it is portrayed, varies dependent upon the time they were written. As I shall elaborate on their relationship throughout my thesis I shall mention only briefly here that Chris and Edy met in passing in 1896 when Chris went backstage to see Ellen Terry. Chris had "fallen in love" with Terry after seeing her play Lucy Ashton in Ravenswood (St John, "Close-up", 16) some six years earlier. Calling her the "goddess of my youthful idolatry" (St John, "Close-up", 16), Chris had continued to write to Terry from this moment until their meeting in 1896. However, it was not until 1899 that Chris and Edy met properly, following an invitation from Terry to visit her at the Grand Theatre in Fulham where she was performing.

She [Edy] gave me a welcome I cannot truthfully describe as cordial. She was busy mending a mitten . . . and did not put it down before shaking hands, with the result that I was pricked by her needle. Cupid's dart, for I loved Edy from that moment. (St John, "Close-up", 19)

Later in that year whilst Ellen Terry went on tour, they set up home together in a flat at 7 Smith Square in London. They continued to live together until Edy's death in 1947, a partnership of forty-eight years. By 1916 Tony had joined the household. However, although it is clear that a close relationship had been formed between Edy and Chris, it is not clear how or why Tony was invited to join them. What we do know is that Chris reported that Edy had told Tony, "I must warn you that if Chris does not like your being here, and feels you are interfering

with our friendship, out you go!" (St John, "Close-up", 32). After Edy's death Chris and Tony continued to live together until they each entered nursing homes prior to their deaths in 1962 and 1960 respectively.

### **The "Dear Girl" duo**

Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson were lower middle-class women. On the one hand they lived not unusual lives for their time which I shall go on to explore in Chapter One. However, what makes these two women unusual is that they left a wealth of information about their lives in their letters and diaries. This archive, which runs into nine boxes, is held at the Women's Library in London.<sup>4</sup> Some of their writings have been edited and appear in Dear Girl: The Diaries and Letters of Two Working Women 1897-1917 (1987) by Tierl Thompson. Ruth and Eva seem to have met early in 1902 as Ruth makes reference to "my friend Eva Slawson" on 30<sup>th</sup> May of that year (Slate, diary rough notes, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1902). They discussed many issues that affected women in the early twentieth century such as the women's movement and the "sex question." Their friendship supported them throughout difficult times in both their lives. Unlike the trio they never lived together and there is no evidence to suggest that they ever had a physically intimate relationship.

Although the archive of letters and diaries consists primarily of writings by Ruth and Eva, there was a third friend who was important within this group, Minna

---

<sup>4</sup>This library was known as the Fawcett Library until 2001.

Simmons (1873-1946). From her letters it appears that Eva met Minna in 1911 (Slawson, letter to Slate, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1911), and they had a passionate relationship which may well have been physical. These relationships have been compared to nineteenth-century “romantic friendships” by Tierl Thompson (14) and Bland (170), the notion of which, as I shall go on to show, has an important place within lesbian history.

### **Primary Sources**

There are a variety of archival sources that relate to the Smallhythe trio. A key resource for anyone researching Edy is the Edith Craig Archive at Smallhythe. I first visited the museum in 1996. This was a short visit and I was not able to study the archive in any great depth. The archive is only open to researchers during the winter months and it was not until 2000 that I was able to spend any length of time in the archive. This was due both to the indexing work that Katherine Cockin was undertaking on the archive and the introduction of a new heating system at the museum, both of which made the archive inaccessible. On my visits there I discovered that whilst this archive is extensive, it holds very little that relates to the personal lives of the trio. The material that there is relates very firmly to Edy’s theatrical career and any letters that remain focus on that, or are innocuous notes that say very little about the lives the trio lived. Cockin refers to the “selective destruction of documents” (Edith Craig, 3) and Whitelaw claims that after Edy’s death Chris destroyed “all their papers and letters” (111). The archive consists of newspaper cuttings and letters that relate to Edy’s theatrical

work, some scrapbooks and three photograph albums. I have used the latter along with other photographs to look at the ways in which the three women represented themselves in public and in private (see Chapter Five).

As a writer Chris left the most written material, which includes a semi-autobiographical novel, Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul (1915), published anonymously and much quoted from by biographers and historians. There is another earlier novel, The Crimson Weed (1900), and she wrote some biographies including books on Ellen Terry (1847-1928), Ethel Smyth (1858-1944)<sup>5</sup> and Christine Murrell (1874-1932).<sup>6</sup> Her two novels are only available to read at the British Library. I have tried unsuccessfully to obtain copies through specialist booksellers. In addition to these books there are a cache of letters and a "Love Journal"<sup>7</sup> written to Vita Sackville-West which are owned by Nigel

---

<sup>5</sup> Chris first met Ethel Smyth the composer in 1911 at Chris and Edy's London flat. They did not meet again for another twenty years (St John, Ethel, xv-xvi). Smyth was active within the suffrage movement, being a close friend of Emmeline Pankhurst.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Murrell was a doctor who was the first woman to be elected to the Council of the British Medical Association and subsequently the General Medical Council of Great Britain (St John, Christine Murrell, xiii). Not only a distinguished doctor, she was active in the Suffrage Movement. Although not a personal friend of Chris, they were known to each other through mutual friends and interests, and on one occasion Christine attended a suffrage meeting at the trio's flat in Bedford Street (Christine Murrell, xvi-xvii). Christine lived with her long-term life and business partner Dr Honor Bone and they were later joined by Marie Lawson, establishing a *ménage à trois* not dissimilar, it would appear, from Chris's own. I shall return to this in Chapter Two.

<sup>7</sup> This "Love Journal" was written in the form of a diary in an A4 hardback notebook. It focuses on the love affair as Chris saw it between herself and Vita Sackville-West. Chris wrote it over a period of time and made additional comments as she read it years afterwards.

Nicolson and held at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent where I spent some research time, reading these items. In her will Chris appointed Sackville-West as her literary executor, leaving her all her books and papers in addition to the letters that Vita had written to Chris. Interestingly, whilst the letters from Chris to Sackville-West survive, the letters from Sackville-West to Chris apparently do not. There was a strong feeling at the time of this "passion" that Sackville-West had treated Chris unfairly as she did not reciprocate Chris's feeling. Glendinning cites Ethel Smyth who approached both Sackville-West directly, and through Virginia Woolf, on Chris's behalf (271). It may be that Sackville-West's letters would have thrown some light on the situation, showing Sackville-West in a less favourable light. Of course the letters could have been lost when Chris moved from Smallhythe to the nursing home in the early 1960s, but it could be that the Nicolson family did not want to revive this story.<sup>8</sup> Had they reached Sissinghurst I would have expected that they would be preserved alongside other writings of Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson. There is also another unpublished love journal, entitled "The Golden Book,"<sup>9</sup> which was written by Chris for Edy and apparently given to her in 1911 (Cockin, Edith Craig, 71), predating the more public representation of their relationship in Hungerheart.

---

<sup>8</sup> In a personal letter from Nigel Nicolson to myself he is anxious not to have "the legend revived that Vita ill-treated Xopher [sic] (being unable to return her affection with equal fervour), or that Xopher was a foolish old woman. In isolation that version of her character might appear from the letters and journal" (Letter to author, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1996).

<sup>9</sup> This manuscript is held at the University of California in Los Angeles and was unavailable to me.



There is no written material relating to Tony in the Edith Craig archive at Smallhythe with the exception of one letter. However, what she has left are a range of paintings and sketches that have been reproduced in biographies such as that by Adlard. In the museum itself a number of her paintings can be found on the walls. Of her commercial work, the Imperial War Museum has four of her paintings in addition to related correspondence.<sup>10</sup>

The main archival sources for Ruth and Eva are at the Women's Library in London. They consist of nine boxes full of partially catalogued diaries, letters and ephemera dating from 1897 to 1986. The large majority of this material consists of the diaries of Ruth and Eva, and their letters to each other. There are also a few letters written by Minna to Ruth after Eva's death which provide us with an additional insight into the relationship between Eva and Minna. After Eva's death in 1916 Ruth appears to have stopped writing. Her diary entries become more sporadic and in later years the collection consists only of handbag diaries mentioning a few social events. The archive was discovered by Ruth's husband Hugh after her death and Tierl Thompson suggests that he found that "it was like opening a door to a forgotten world, some aspects of which he found he knew very little about, despite having known Ruth since 1910" (5). According to Thompson he approached Margaret Johnson (a mutual friend of his and Ruth's)

---

<sup>10</sup> The four paintings are "Victoria Station 1918: Green Cross Corps at work"; "Devonshire House 1918: VAD Workers engaged in filing papers in the ballroom" "Olympia in War Time" a painting of the Army Clothing Depot and "Christmas Day Y.M.C.A. at London Bridge."

to do something with her writing. Although she did not publish anything with regard to the diaries and letters herself she allowed the Women's Theatre Group to use them to write the play "Dear Girl" and Thompson used them in her book of the same title (5). In quoting from the archive I have tried at all times to quote from the original, stating what document it was, for example a diary or letter, who wrote it and the date. If I have taken a quotation from Thompson's edited version of the archive I have given the page number from the book. I have spent considerable time at the Women's Library examining these resources. During the period of my research, the Womens' Library closed for over a year as it moved into its new premises. Following the library's move I had some difficulty accessing the archives, as they are currently uncatalogued and therefore the library is unwilling for people to view them. However, I had concluded the majority of my archival research before the library's move, and was therefore ultimately not impeded in my work by the current inaccessibility of the material.

A difference between the two groups of women is the amount that has been written about them. As I shall go on to discuss there are a number of biographies which feature the Smallhythe Trio, but about the Slate/Slawson duo nothing has been written with the exception of the play and Thompson's edited version of their letters and diaries. In view of the amount of resources available about each of the two groups of women it is perhaps unfair that so little attention has been paid to the Slate/Slawson duo as this unique record gives us an insight into the lives of some lower middle-class women whose lives we do not usually

get the opportunity to investigate.

The photographs that I have used throughout my thesis have come from a variety of sources. The images that originate from Sissinghurst and the Women's Library are from photographs that I subsequently copied. The curator copied the photographs that have come from Smallhythe for me so I had no control over the quality of that copy. The remainder of the images have come from books that I have scanned into my thesis.

The rest of my research has taken place at both York University Library and the British Library. At York University Library I was able to look at copies of Punch for images of the "New Woman" and copies of The Vote, Votes For Women and The Times. In the British Library not only did I have access to secondary reading, but also biographies of contemporaries of, primarily, the Smallhythe trio. It was there that I discovered that there were two versions of Françoise Lafitte-Cyon's autobiography Friendship's Odyssey which makes brief reference to Ruth Slate, one which mentions her by name and the earlier one which gives her a false name (see Chapter Five).

## **Methodology**

In my research I used primary sources to develop comparative case studies of two different friendship groups whose writings, like Hall's, are tempered by class, education and economic status. Through document analysis of primary

and secondary sources I establish how these differences were fundamental to the women's expectations and their expression of their experiences.

I approach my material from a historicist feminist perspective. June Purvis points out that this perspective does not apply to all women's history as women's history is not necessarily feminist and similarly feminist history does not necessarily concentrate solely on women. She explains that it

involves in addition a number of other important features, such as challenging the stereotypical representation of women as mainly wives and mothers who are supportive towards, and supported by, their menfolk, and presenting women in their own right; questioning the concepts and analyses offered in malestream historical work since such phenomena are mainly based on the lives of men whose experiences were usually different from those of women; exploring the power relationships between the sexes whereby women are oppressed and subordinated to men; and lastly finding the hidden subjective voices and experiences of women so that their own words can speak to us, even though they may be mediated through the discourses of the day. ("Primary Sources," 274)

None of the women I am researching were traditional wives and mothers. They did not lead particularly conventional lives either through their jobs and living arrangements as with the Smallhythe trio, or through their aspirations and achievements as with Ruth and Eva. This difference in itself prevents me from

stereotyping them and their experiences. However, it is possible to see in the writings of Ruth and Eva that some of their relationships with men were strongly influenced by the social, economic and cultural mores of the time. As I demonstrate through Ruth's writings, her early relationships with men were traditional ones and she later described her friendships with men as "disappointing things" (Slate, diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1916). However, by the time she married Hugh in 1918 her beliefs about the ideal relationship between men and women had changed considerably, demonstrated by the fact that she and Hugh did not live together until 1921. In Ruth's and Eva's letters and diaries it is possible to find those hidden voices that Purvis speaks about.

I have also chosen to look at two groups of women in order to make comparisons between their lives and experiences as differentiated by their class. This is an approach suggested by Liz Stanley, who points out in her discussion of the disadvantages to "'spotlight' historical biography", that there are limitations to looking at a single person's life and that

alternatives bring biography and history into much closer relationship. One alternative is to be concerned with the interrelationship of a group of lives in a particular social milieu; another is to explore the interplay of biography and autobiography in particular histories ("Romantic Friendship," 194).

By looking at lives in this way she argues that this places historical biography into a social, economic and political context which is much more meaningful in trying

to understand someone's life.

In my thesis I use recent research in addition to contemporary readings of class and sexuality. My research is primarily text-based, analysing a range of published and unpublished documentary sources. These include letters, diaries, auto/biographies and photographs of both my subjects and their contemporaries. In terms of evidence of lesbian behaviour, it is very difficult to find "proof" of such a relationship unless there is a public record of it. Through the examples of Billy Tipton (1914-1989),<sup>11</sup> Colonel Barker (1895-1960)<sup>12</sup> or James Miranda Barry (1795-1865),<sup>13</sup> some women's lesbian experience has been made part of the public record. Although in none of these scenarios there is an unambiguous explanation why the women chose to live as they did, all of them have been

---

<sup>11</sup> Billy Tipton was a jazz musician, married with three children, whose gender was discovered after his death and widely publicised in the press. Diane Wood Middlebrook has written a biography Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton which charts his changes from woman to man and how he concealed or failed to conceal his gender. Jackie Kay has also written a novel based on his life entitled Trumpet.

<sup>12</sup> Colonel Barker was infamous in that his gender was exposed through a number of court cases under a number of different male identities. Rose Collis has produced a biography, Colonel Barker's Monstrous Regiment, detailing his life and various disguises.

<sup>13</sup> James Miranda Barry went to Edinburgh University where he trained to be a doctor and then joined the army. He was a well known physician and known as a medical reformer. It was not until his death that it was discovered that he was a woman. His story has been told most recently in a novel by Patrica Duncker based on his life. Additionally there are two biographies written by Isobel Rae and June Rose.

viewed as having a lesbian identity.<sup>14</sup> Other records in which we can find evidence are autobiographical ones where the woman herself states quite clearly her sexual identity. Examples of this are the diaries left by Anne Lister (Whitbread) or some of the letters written by Sackville-West (DeSalvo and Leaska; Leaska and Phillips).

However, whilst there is apparently a wealth of information about the trio it should be noted that much of this information is repetitive. As such it may occasionally serve as a "Chinese whisper," as misinformation is passed from one writer to another. In this instance I am thinking of the identity of the first of Edy's beaux. Manvell and Melville<sup>15</sup> give his name as Joe Evans, whereas Margaret Webster and later Holledge give the name Sydney Valentine. On the basis that Webster was a contemporary of Edy's and had worked closely with both her and her mother I am inclined to take Webster's version. Manvell, on the other hand, did not know Ellen or Edy and was a biographer and writer. In this view Cockin, who also identifies Sydney Valentine as Edy's first beau, supports me.

In addition to the auto/biographical writings, I make use of photographs of

---

<sup>14</sup> James Vernon looks at how Colonel Barker's behaviour can be attributed to a range of different explanations such as "a woman seeking to empower herself by passing as a man (Wheelwright 1990), a mannish lesbian radically fashioning herself as a desiring subject (Gurney 1997) or a transvestite (Doan 1998)" (38). Similarly, other biographers have looked at Barry and Tipton and posited a range of explanations for their behaviours in addition to that of lesbian identity.

<sup>15</sup> Whilst Melville does not identify Manvell as her source of information, his book is in her bibliography, as is Holledge's.

the women, both in public and private settings to place their expression of identity into a visual context. Visual clues are central to my discussion in Chapter Three about sexual identity and difference. A key source of all the women's understanding about sexuality came from the work of the sexologists and Hallett, highlighting the work of Broster et al, points out that "early sexology essays and tracts . . . used photographic case study to reinforce and prove theory (or vice versa)" (177). In a similar way I examine photographic evidence to see whether visual clues about sexuality are there to be analysed. Gillian Rose suggests that "looking carefully at images, then entails, among other things, thinking about how they offer very particular visions of social categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, able-bodiedness and so on" (11).

In addition to the diaries and letters of the women I am researching I use other contemporary accounts including other autobiographical material, novels and sexological writings (Ellis, Steen). I also utilise the more general historical work of writers such as Sheila Rowbotham and Martha Vicinus to place the writings of the women in an historical context.

### **The Role of Biography**

The period in time at which a biography, or indeed any other kind of text, is written, influences the manner in which a story is (re)told. Liz Stanley describes the development of auto/biography as a political process:

The "auto/biographical" canon – that is, those biographies and



autobiographies which are recognised as major pieces of writing and the critical and academic literature which promotes them as such – is currently being contested and revised, and a new canon is in the process of formation, and this itself is a highly political process. (Auto/biographical, 4)

To demonstrate this development Stanley goes on to cite recent challenges to auto/biographical writing such as Carolyn Steedman's Landscape for a Good Woman and Ann Oakley's Taking it Like a Woman, the latter of which "continues weaving a hazy line between fact and fiction" (13). This itself creates dilemmas around notions of truth in life-writing. As Benstock demonstrates, writing about the inevitable failure of authority within autobiography: "the workings of memory, crucial to the recollection implicit in life writing, are found to be suspect. They slip beyond the borders of the conscious world" (Private Self, 27). The problems with autobiographical "truth" are similar to those of biographical writings and this is visible in the various biographical representations of Edy within different biographies over a period of time. To demonstrate this point I shall analyse four key texts which focus on Edy, by Adlard (1949), Steen (1962), Holledge (1981), and finally Cockin (1997). These show how the story of the Smallhythe Trio has been written within biographies and developed over time.

Edy: Recollections of Edy Craig (1947) by Eleanor Adlard, is a collection of essays written about Edy Craig after her death in 1947. Although Edy's partner Chris was both a writer and biographer, she did not undertake this editorial task.

However, she wrote the biographical note and contributed an essay. There is no reference as to why this task was given to Eleanor Adlard or who originated the idea. Perhaps it was too painful for Chris to contemplate. Writing shortly after Edy's death, Chris indicates how difficult it was for her to write about Edy:

You say in your last letter that you may be the only one of my friends who has not written me a "definite letter of what is called condolence". I must tell you that the bulk of the letters that Tony and I have come from Edy's friends not ours. Tony is simply wonderful. Manages to write about eight letters while I am painfully composing one. (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1947)

However, Adlard emphasises the importance of Chris and Tony in her editing of the book: "I need hardly add that without the help of Christopher St. John and Clare Atwood, who lived so happily with Edy at Smallhythe, this book could not have come into being" (Foreword). The fact that the trio lived together is not only acknowledged within the book but also remarked upon. Adlard writes about the three after Ellen's death: "the family left at Smallhythe was a successful *ménage à trois*" (144). In some biographies the relationship between Edy, Chris and Tony is not always recognised in such an open manner, nor the relationship acknowledged as a familial one. It is possible that this was because there was an ignorance about the lesbian nature of their relationship as, despite the growing awareness of lesbianism and homosexuality, it was still possible for women to live

together with "no suspicion" being attached to them.<sup>16</sup>

Adlard's volume contains sixteen essays and one poem, all written by Edy's friends. Chris and Tony both contributed an essay which comprises the most illuminating piece of the latter's writing that remains today as far as I am aware. Other contributors included Edy's brother Edward Gordon Craig and friends such as Cicely Hamilton,<sup>17</sup> Vita Sackville-West,<sup>18</sup> and Dame Sybil Thorndike.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the book was about Edy, it was not intended to be a biography of Edy's life in terms of a chronological version of events over time, but a means of remembering her and what she meant to the people who loved her. As such it provides much valuable information about her and is a useful source for all subsequent biographers. All the essays draw on different aspects of Edy's life. Hamilton, for example, starts her reminiscence with the words "it was natural

---

<sup>16</sup> Melville suggests that "the Smallhythe trio were regarded as unconventional and odd: but they didn't arouse the same hostility as the Rye couple" [Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge] (252). Although Melville is not explicit about whether or not the trio were known as lesbians it is likely that it was their involvement in the worlds of theatre and art that was considered odd rather than their sexuality. At this period in time, although there were women who worked and were economically independent, this was not the norm for middle-class women.

<sup>17</sup> Cicely Hamilton was a playwright who is perhaps best known for her suffrage dramas. Her story is well documented in Whitelaw's The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton.

<sup>18</sup> Vita Sackville-West was a well-known and popular writer. Some of her works include her poem The Land (1926) for which she won the Hawthorndon prize in 1927 (Glendinning, 171), The Edwardians (1930), All Passion Spent (1931), Pepita (1937). She was married to the diplomat Harold Nicolson and both were known for their homosexual relationships, Sackville-West's most notorious relationship being with Violet Trefusis, the story of which is told in Nigel Nicolson's Portrait of a Marriage. However, probably better known is her relationship with Virginia Woolf, who wrote Orlando (1928) for her.

<sup>19</sup> Dame Sybil Thorndike (1882-1976) was a well-known actress of the day.

that Edith Craig should be a good feminist" (38), going on to talk about their work together in theatrical and suffrage productions. She calls her essay "Triumphant Women," a reference to the Pageant of Great Women which was conceived and staged by Craig and written by Hamilton. Hamilton describes Edy's work on the Pageant: "I saw it there at its best, masterly and tireless, though often at the cost of weariness to herself" (44). Sackville-West, who knew the trio as neighbours rather than colleagues, concentrates on the trio at home at Smallhythe which she describes as "an encampment, for it had a gipsy [sic] quality about it" (118) and "the most hospitable and welcoming house in the world" (120). Edy's brother, the producer Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), shows us yet another picture of Edy as his essay concentrates on her skills at playing the piano and dancing. His memories are all early memories of Edy and their mother together at what were perhaps happier times; Edy and her brother were not always on good terms with each other.<sup>20</sup>

What all the descriptions and memories of Edy have in common is a sense of vibrancy in both her personal life and her work. For Ernest Milton:

The name Edith Craig evokes in me immediately the thought, the sight, the feeling – of *stuffs* [sic]. At once you remember brocades, tapestry, - her own special theatre-made tapestry of deft paint

---

<sup>20</sup> They fell out primarily over their mother. At times this was done very publicly. Gordon Craig objected to the publication of letters between George Bernard Shaw and his mother and produced in return his own biography of Terry entitled Ellen Terry and her Secret Self which Edy disapproved of as she did not feel that it was accurate.

applied perhaps to sacking (85).

Through the description of fabric he manages to give Edy a textural quality conveying a sense of depth, as well as colour and creativity. Edy's friend, the actress Dame May Whitty(1865 -1948)<sup>21</sup> described her as a magician (51), alluding, as Milton does, to her ability to create a theatrical illusion:

she could transform the commonplace into something magical.

Give her some old wooden cases, an odd prop or two, some nails and a hammer, and a charming scene would emerge, and best of all a satisfying background for the actors (51).

The personal nature of the essays in Adlard's book is reflected in the photographs that were chosen to illustrate it. There are no formal photographs<sup>22</sup> and the people shown are all family and friends. There are a couple of photographs of Edy as a child, one of her dressed in a kimono, which we know her father liked her wearing and had been given to her by Whistler (Adlard, "List of Illustrations" n.p.). Half of the photographs are of paintings or sketches that

---

<sup>21</sup> Dame May Whitty was an esteemed actress who had toured in America in 1895 with Ellen Terry and Edy. It was during this trip that Edy fell in love with Sydney Valentine (Cockin, Edith Craig, 38). Whitty and her husband, Ben Webster, at a later date lived in the flat above Edy in Bedford Street (M. Webster, 181).

<sup>22</sup> In this context I mean photographs that were meant to be published rather than those that had been taken by a photographer at a studio. Most of the studio photographs maintain an informality, such as Edy in 1913 taken by E. O. Hoppé, where she is sat with her head supported by one hand in contemplative manner. There are no family photographs where everyone appears to be dressed in their best clothes and formally arranged around each other – this was not the kind of family Edy belonged to.

were done by Tony. One of these paintings shows the Barn Theatre, with Edy seated busy with some sewing, Vera Holmes on a set of ladders hanging some drapes and Charles Staite, the museum's curator, is writing. This is a picture that may represent a typical day in the household leading up to a production. A more intimate painting shows Edy in bed with the cat "George," painted in 1943. This was the last portrait that was done of her (Adlard, "List of Illustrations" n.p.). The remaining sketches depict the house and the Barn Theatre.

The difference between this biography and others is that this was written by a collection of her friends – people who were happy to write "their loving remembrances of her, expressing something of what she meant to them" (Foreword). It was also not written for personal gain; royalties from the book went to the Ellen Terry Fellowship Fund (Foreword). Subsequent biographies have been written by people who either did not know her (Cockin, Melville) and so could claim an impartiality, or by people who claimed to have the "true" story of Edy's life, and because of their personal knowledge, claimed an authority about their subject (Steen). The aim of this book was clearly to pay homage to Edy after her death in a very personal capacity.

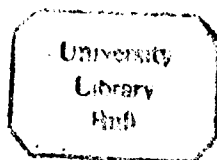
Biographies about Ellen Terry that were not written, or closely influenced,

by Chris do not start to appear until the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> The first one was A Pride of Terry's: Family Saga written by Marguerite Steen in 1962. It could be a coincidence that other biographies started to appear after Chris's death although it is likely that would-be biographers such as Steen waited until the main people identified within the book had died.<sup>24</sup> Whether or not this was out of respect for the lives that inevitably intertwined with her main protagonist is unclear. Although Clare Atwood did not die until the following year she was living in a nursing home and, at the age of ninety-seven, it is unlikely that she was in a position to object to the book, even if she was aware of its publication. Steen writes that "A Pride of Terrys was first proposed to the writer by Ellen Terry some time in 1921 as a Family Saga" (xi). Steen suggests that Terry was unhappy with her autobiography because "the convention of the period obliged her to lay a roseate

---

<sup>23</sup> The only other biographies produced prior to this were either written by Christopher St John or Edward Gordon Craig. St John, together with Edy re-wrote Ellen Terry's autobiography in Ellen Terry's Memoirs and she edited the letters between Ellen and George Bernard Shaw. Edward Gordon Craig produced a "sentimental" biography of his mother following the publication of the letters containing "side-swipes at Shaw" (Melville, 251). The only other biography is by Edgar Pemberton and is called Ellen Terry and Her Sisters and is again a family biography. This biography concentrates solely on stage performances and there are only two references to Edy.

<sup>24</sup> It is common for biographies to be produced after people's deaths as a means of remembering someone, as in the case of Adlard's book. Also cultural interests at any one time can produce an increase in biographies; for example, over the past five years there has been a marked increase in lesbian biographies with Cline, Glasgow and Souhami bringing out their biographies of Radclyffe Hall in quick succession. At the same time Cockin's biography of Edy Craig was published. In addition there have been biographies from Collis and Summerscale on the less well-known lesbians, "Colonel" Barker and "Joe" Carstairs. This increase in writing – marketed by mainstream publishing houses - marks a greater public acceptance and interest in lesbian figures, culminating in the production of Sarah Waters Tipping the Velvet, an explicit lesbian historical novel, as a mainstream TV drama in 2002.



glaze upon certain incidents and relationships” and said to Steen on many occasions that “you must write all this after I’m dead – it’s part of the picture. That’s what you’ve got to do: make a picture of all of us” (xi). Steen takes this request as the justification for her book and suggests that she would be able to put right Ellen’s desire to “tell the truth so far as I know it” (Terry, viii). Steen’s knowledge was based upon forty years of close friendship with not only Ellen but also other members of the Terry family (Steen, xi-ii). She therefore felt that she was in an excellent position to write the biography as she claims that “it may have been easier for her [Ellen] to talk freely to a girl in her twenties, who was completely disinterested” (Steen, xi). This comment may have been aimed at Chris and intended to indicate why Steen felt she could be a more objective biographer than Chris. Indeed, Steen legitimises her knowledge when she writes:

Living under a person’s roof, one gets to know him (or her) more closely than it is possible to do in the casual exchange of luncheons, tea-parties, dinner-parties – or in the inevitably artificial atmosphere of an “interview.” I never had an “interview” with any Terry; they would have laughed their hearty laughter at such an idea. (xii)

Steen takes as her focus for the book the Terry family and their theatrical endeavours in the widest sense. She does not write a “theatrical record, which anyone can compile with the assistance of a few text-books, but the picture of a great theatrical family” (xii). Steen’s biography is interesting for my research on two counts: firstly, because it is one of the first biographies to have been written



which included a picture of Edy that was wider than her birth and theatrical relationship to her mother. Secondly, it is evident from Steen's text that she did not approve of Edy's relationships and in denouncing them, she implicitly substantiates the lesbian nature of these relationships, a notion I examine in greater detail in Chapter Two. Steen describes the relationship between Edy and her mother from a brutally personal point of view.

Edy, a precociously intelligent girl of fourteen, with her father's dark eyes, and original features – wide, thin mouth and rather a clumsy nose which did not belong to either side of the family – hid her mother-worship under an attitude of cool and often critical detachment. She may have developed this Cordelia-like attitude as a form of silent protest against the sickly adulation of which she saw her mother a victim. (189-90)

Throughout her biography Steen makes comments about Edy's appearance and personality, comparing the latter unfavourably with that of her mother.

She suffered from the defect of "always knowing best." It is possible she did know best, but she had not the wit, tact, insincerity or plain common sense to disguise her knowledge, and in this was not helped by the well-meaning sycophants who gathered around her – as they gathered round her mother. And she had not Ellen's sense of humour and proportion to guide her! (210)

Steen claims that Chris "would have no place in this record but for the fact that it was she who brilliantly ghosted Ellen Terry's Story of My Life, and collaborated

with Edy on the notes which later amplified it into the Memoirs" (251). Having said this, Steen goes on to talk about the "lifelong (as it was to prove) attachment" (251) between Chris and Edy. Steen appears to have mixed feelings towards Edy regarding her work. On the one hand she refers to her as "the *doyenne* of her generation . . . nobly toiling in the non-commercial theatre" (356), on the other she suggests that "unlike her brother, she contributed nothing original to the arts" (386). Steen may well have been jealous of Edy in some way – for what reason it is impossible to tell, but in her writing of the family the impression is that Steen wished that she were a part of it rather than an observer.

The 1960s saw many biographies published. The proliferation of biographies at this time coincides with the point at which many people who were well-known in the early part of the twentieth century died, which not only generated interest in them and their lives but also made it easier for biographers to write about them. Manvell and Margaret Webster both wrote books about the Terrys, the former concentrating purely on Ellen, the latter like Steen focusing on the family as a whole. In a similar vein Una Troubridge published her biography of Radclyffe Hall The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall (1961) and Alice Toklas her autobiography What is Remembered (1963).

There was again a gap of about twenty years before the next group of biographies or biographical references came about. Julie Holledge did not set out to write a biography of Edy Craig but "about the indirect influence of actresses

active in the women's rights movement on the playwrights of the time" (2). In so doing she came upon the suffrage political group, the Actresses Franchise League, and discovered Edy, who was heavily involved in its activities.

Consequently, a third of her book, Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre (1981), concentrates on her as the "first woman director of the twentieth-century English theatre" (3). Holledge is the first biographer to truly represent the trio as a legitimate lesbian family group. Both Holledge, and to a lesser extent Melville, whose biography of Ellen and Edy was published in 1987, place the relationship of the trio into a circle of homosexual relationships which I explore in Chapter Three. Both biographies demonstrate a move away from chatty books by people who knew the Terry's personally like Steen and Margaret Webster, to those based on research and formal interviews where possible. However, much of the material used by Holledge and Melville is based on information from Adlard, Steen, Marvell and Webster. The difference in Holledge's biography is that it is the first biography to examine Edy in her own right. As Holledge's first focus was political activism in the theatre we can see the impact of the women's rights movement on how people thought critically within other disciplines.

Throughout the 1970s there was an increasing interest in women's political theatre (Wandor, 54-57). Holledge discovered that this was more of a resurgence with its traditions very firmly established by Edy and her colleagues in the Actresses Franchise League (A.F.L.) and the Pioneer Players. Holledge describes Edy's contribution to British theatre thus: "she was involved in the first productions of Ibsen, the suffrage theatre of the pre-war period and continued this tradition of

women's theatre through the war into the 1920s" (3).

One incident, recorded in both Steen's and Holledge's biographies, demonstrates the difference between these two writers and how they saw Edy. Steen writes that Edward Gordon Craig "got his own way with everybody except Edy, who despised him for his cowardice (he was a great cry-baby), hit him over the head and exhorted him to be a woman!" (190). Both Steen and Holledge relate this to an early feminism but Holledge suggests that Edy "developed a high opinion of her own sex. Whenever she wanted to encourage her brother to do something she would say, 'Come on Teddy, be a woman'" (108). It is likely that Steen as well as Holledge, who references this, took this incident from Ellen Terry's Memoirs which says:

"the feather of England"<sup>[25]</sup> was considered by his sister a great coward. She used to hit him on the head with a wooden spoon for crying, and exhort him, when he said "Master Teddy afraid of the dark," to be a *woman!* (68)

It would appear from this that Steen's is the more accurate description of the original tale. The "spin" that Holledge puts on this incident allows her to produce a less aggressive picture of Edy, concentrating on a positive trait of encouragement rather than a negative one of aggression – which was a theme throughout Steen's writing. This may have been to counteract the image that

---

<sup>25</sup> Gordon Craig was called this by the nursemaid Essie "because he was fat and fair and angelic-looking" (68).

Steen had painted of Edy which, as I have outlined above, was not always very flattering.

The key difference between Holledge's biography and those that went before is her discussion of the relationship between Edy and Chris as a lesbian relationship. She, as many biographers have done (see Chapter One), uses Chris's semi-autobiographical novel Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul as a "thinly disguised account of her relationship with Edy" (115). Whilst she says that it is not possible to know whether Edy and Chris ever had an "explicit lesbian relationship" (116), Holledge uses Hungerheart to legitimise the emotional relationship between the two, establishing that it was a lesbian relationship irrespective of its exact sexual nature. Here Holledge may well have been influenced by writers such as Faderman, also writing at this time.

The final biography that I want to discuss here is the most recent one and the only book that concentrates in its entirety on Edy Craig. Published in 1997 by Katharine Cockin, it focuses on Edy's work in far greater depth than Holledge does,<sup>26</sup> although Cockin cites her initial discovery of Edy as coming through Holledge's book Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre (Edith Craig, 2). Cockin recognised that Edy's famous relatives, most notably her mother, had overshadowed Edy's achievements. Specifically the task she set

---

<sup>26</sup> In fact Cockin had access to a greater amount of material than other biographers, including Melville (Cockin, Edith Craig, 2).

herself was to “explore the ways in which Edith Craig’s life has been represented and to analyse this in the context of my unique knowledge of the Archive” (Edith Craig, 3).<sup>27</sup> Cockin’s is the most vigorously researched book to date, bringing together material from the Smallhythe Museum and other archive sources, public and private, and interviews with a range of people who knew Edy, Chris and Tony. At Smallhythe Edy’s papers had been “stored in a trunk in an unused room” (Edith Craig, 2) and had not been available to previous biographers.<sup>28</sup> However, Cockin describes the difficulty in “reading” these papers.

Constructing new knowledge about Craig’s life and work from these remains has exceeded the cliché of detective work. The selective destruction of documents seems to have orchestrated possible narratives of Craig’s life. (Edith Craig, 3)

From my own research I know that the archive at Smallhythe contains much information about Edith Craig, including letters and newspaper cuttings, but all of it relates to the public figure, involved in theatrical and suffrage work. Any material pertaining to her personal friendships and relationships has been destroyed, suggesting as Cockin implies above that Edy and her family endeavoured to shape the ways in which she is remembered.

Cockin examines Edy’s life in detail, looking at Edy’s relationship with her

---

<sup>27</sup> After her doctoral work on the Pioneer Players, Cockin worked with the National Trust at the Smallhythe Museum to catalogue the Edith Craig papers (iv).

<sup>28</sup> Cockin cites Auerbach and Melville as these authors.

mother and brother; her education; her suffrage work; her theatre work; and her relationship with Chris and Tony. Cockin assumes that Edy was a lesbian, treating the familial relationships between the trio as a given, rather than, as Melville does, ignoring it as far as possible. However, differently from previous biographers she feels that she has to explain or legitimise her own sexuality in order to write about the trio.

The assumption that, because the subject of my research was a lesbian, I must be a lesbian as well as a feminist, has raised some important political issues about overlapping and mutually exclusive identities and categories, about appropriation and advocacy. (Edith Craig, 3)

Cockin reflects that there are a range of ways in which she could represent Edy's life. During the 1970s and 1980s there was an assumption of synonymy of positions represented and positions inhabited. This was the position especially with regard to writing about sexuality and lesbianism. Cockin concludes by identifying the variety of ways in which Edy could be and has been remembered.

Craig was a character actress, a costumier, a director, musician and pageant organizer. She lived a women-centred life. She identified with Rosa Bonheur and Elizabeth I. She was inspirational in her work and much loved at home. Even Edward Gordon Craig made his peace with her late in life. Perhaps the most radical tribute to Edith Craig would be to recognize each of her achievements, each of her dramatic lives. (182)

It is evident from this brief examination of biographies on Edy Craig how time has changed the way in which lesbian lives have been represented and this is a subject that I shall return to in my conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

My thesis brings together a number of different areas of research and my literature review is split into four sections in order to reflect that. Firstly, I have drawn on twentieth-century writings on lesbian identity; secondly, I have utilised work on friendships and female communities; thirdly, there is a range of secondary reading which relates directly to Edy; and fourthly, I have looked at background readings on class.

### **I. Twentieth-Century Writing on Lesbian Identity**

There is a significant body of work relating to lesbian history and the nature of lesbian relationships. The construction of lesbian identities started with the work of sexologists such as Iwan Bloch (1872-1922), Edward Carpenter (1844 - 1929), Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840 - 1902) and Havelock Ellis (1859 - 1939) among others. Their predominant interest was male homosexuality and research into lesbianism was a by-product of this. This is not to say that lesbianism did not exist before the late nineteenth century. Donoghue shows quite clearly that it did, but this was the first time that it had been medicalised and thereby constructed as a specific identity, a notion that Foucault expounds upon (30). I shall explore the theories of the sexologists in greater detail in Chapter Two. Suffice it to say here



that their theories supported the notion of inversion that I have already alluded to in relation to Radclyffe Hall's view of lesbianism.

During the twentieth century, especially during its latter half, scholars have developed as well as denounced these theories.<sup>29</sup> Around the 1980s there was a shift in the approach to lesbian identities. Faderman introduced the idea of the "Romantic Friendship" and there was a renewal of interest in the figure of the "New Woman" (Smith-Rosenberg). Faderman, in Surpassing The Love Of Men (1981), introduced the concept of the "romantic friendship" and this work created a basis for much of the lesbian history that was written during the 1980s and early 1990s. Whether people have agreed with Faderman's view of the non-sexual romantic friendship or not, she provided a place from which lesbian history could be explored. Smith-Rosenberg examined the role of the "New Woman," typically an educated and economically independent single woman. Being able to support themselves meant that such women did not have to marry in order to obtain economic security. For a variety of practical reasons such as security, companionships and economic viability women set up homes together. These became known as Boston Marriages and inevitably some of these relationships were lesbian relationships as we would know them today.

Sheila Jeffreys and Catherine Stimpson looked at lesbian identity in a

---

<sup>29</sup> Writers such as Stopes, Kinsey, Wolff for example contributed to the debates around female sexuality.

much wider sense than an acknowledged sexualised expression of erotic interest, and showed how women developed women-identified lifestyles in spite of the heterosexual mores of the day. Jeffreys introduced the concept of the "spinster" (1985), and as before, took a wider view of lesbian history that included many women who did not necessarily identify themselves as lesbian (or invert), including single women or spinsters. Catherine Stimpson meanwhile wrote about "the kiss," a literary means by which lesbian writers could allude to sexuality without being explicitly sexual.

More recent research into sexuality around the period includes Sidhe's thesis, which examines English sexuality in the years between the two World Wars. Like other writers Sidhe uses literature to read what was happening at that period in time, including censored books such as The Well of Loneliness to explore this subject. There is also an increased interest in the notion of sexuality and transgender issues in the early twentieth century, which Taylor explores in literary and visual texts by Romaine Brooks, Gertrude Stein, Radclyffe Hall and Virginia Woolf.

The most contemporary theory of sexual identity is that of "queer". This term was developed out of a concern that the binary of heterosexual and homosexual does not convey the sense of "difference" that were people's lived experiences. By breaking down the barriers between these terms it allowed for "difference" to be inflected by a diversity of erotica, embracing both men and

women.

The term “queer” was arrived at in the effort to avoid all these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to transgress and transcend them – or, at the very least problemantize them. (de Lauretis, v)

Whilst many writers have taken the opportunity to explore aspects of sexual identity within the context of “queer” (Butler, Smyth), Andermahr argues that “queer” theory does not address the non-sexual aspects of lesbian culture (19). She cites the work of Diana Coole, who raises issues about whether queer theory actually allows for class in its differentiation of difference. Coole argues that “class is relational, but its dynamics cannot be understood according to the structure of linguistics (as a play of *différance*), as mobile and open” (Coole, 23). Whilst “queer” theory allows for the experiences of all of the women I am looking at to be accommodated, it does so predominantly on the basis of sexual difference and takes little account of their class difference.

## **II. Women’s Friendships and Female Communities.**

The 1970s saw an increasing radicalism within the women’s movement, which became known as the Women’s Liberation Movement.<sup>30</sup> Women bonded together in order to fight patriarchy. Subsequently there was an interest in

---

<sup>30</sup> In A Century of Women Rowbotham provides a brief overview of the politics of this time. See also Rowbotham’s Hidden from History, and Bryson.

reclaiming communities of women as a means of establishing female-centred alternatives to patriarchal structures. Nina Auerbach published her key text Communities of Women in 1974, finding that:

a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone. The communities of women which have haunted our literary imagination from the beginning are emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears (5).

Auerbach investigates, through literature from Britain and America, the representation of communities of women over the past two hundred years as described by women, including Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott, Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, and men, Henry James and George Gissing. Through this literature and finishing with the work of Muriel Spark, contemporary with the publication of Auerbach's book, she maps a "series of emancipations and expanding fields of conquest" (Communities, 6) that have not so easily been achieved by women in reality.

This interest in women's communities continued into the 1980s with the publication of Faderman's Surpassing the Love of Men in 1981, Raymond's A Passion for Friends in 1986 and Benstock's Women of the Left Bank in 1987. Faderman discovered through letters and books the previously overlooked

subject of women's friendships. Raymond also focused on the tradition of female friendships, demonstrating their importance as empowering and, through her writing, "returning friendship to a primary place as a basis of feminist purpose, passion, and politics" (9). Finally Benstock's Women of the Left Bank describes a particular community of women. I want to discuss this book in more detail as the networks of women described by Benstock have many similarities with the networks evident through my research of the Smallhythe trio. These, mainly American women who included Natalie Barney, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein and Janet Flanner amongst others, were known as lesbian or bisexual and they congregated in Paris where they wrote and met at weekly salons. Living in the early twentieth century, their lives had certain parallels with the trio as well as huge differences. Radclyffe Hall, a friend of the trio, was known in the Paris salons although she was never a true member of the community.<sup>31</sup> The women of the Left Bank were very open about their sexuality and whilst the Paris "scene" was very different from London, it can give us insights into what the experience of being within a lesbian community could be like.

Other writers such as Weiss have researched this group of women in addition to the biographers who have written biographies about the women individually (Chalon, Field, Fitch, Souhami, Wineapple). The network that Benstock describes was not an exclusive one.

---

<sup>31</sup> Doan points out that although Hall has been included by Benstock as part of the Paris lesbian scene Hall and Troubridge only spent three weeks in Paris between 1921 and 1925 (Fashioning, 98).

It is not at all clear that among them there was ever a sense of community as such, or of a bonding. It is highly probable that the various relationships among these women developed haphazardly and at random. It is clear, however, that the expatriate residents of the Left Bank were intensely preoccupied with each other, living intellectually and geographically in close proximity to one another. Everyone knew about and was aware of everyone else (Women, 34).

This experience was not quite the same as in London, where the networks of women that the Smallhythe trio were linked to did not for example live in the same area of London.<sup>32</sup> However, the notion of there being a wide network of lesbian women knowing others through each other and through their work was exactly the same.

In many of the books on female communities the authors tread a thin line between describing non-sexual friendships between women and lesbian, that is sexual, friendships or relationships between women. For Faderman, who did not believe that many women knew about lesbianism or the possibility of sexual relationships between women, "Romantic Friendship" was the outcome. These passionate although - Faderman believes - unconsummated relationships were

---

<sup>32</sup> It should be highlighted that in the area around Smallhythe there did appear to be an active lesbian and gay network. Some of the people living in this area of Kent included not only Hall and Troubridge, Sackville-West but also Noël Coward, Lady Maud Warrender (a previous Lady Mayoress of Rye), Mary "Robert" Allen, Ford Madox Ford and E. F. Benson (Castle, Kindred, 22-3).

socially accepted, ensuring that women learnt about emotional relationships whilst remaining pure for their future husbands (Surpassing, 75).

Increasingly there has been a desire to reclaim lesbian women and their relationships from history. There are a number of biographies about British lesbians. These are inevitably dominated by those on Radclyffe Hall (Barker, Castle, Cline, Dickson, Souhami, Troubridge). In addition to these biographies Hall has been the focus of much research (Dellamora, Medd, Taylor). Other British lesbians about whom biographies have been written include Sackville-West (Glendinning, Nicolson), Smyth (St John), Gluck (Souhami), Woolf (H. Lee). These provide evidence about what it meant to have a sexual identity that did not correspond to the heterosexual norm, living in the early twentieth century. Both Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson believed that their marriage was very successful, although they both had homosexual relationships with other people throughout their lives (Nicolson, Vita and Harold, 6). The most notorious affair was that between Sackville-West and Violet Trefusis which has been written about by Sackville-West and her son in Portrait of a Marriage. Of their marriage subsequent to this affair Nigel Nicolson writes, "my parents' love for each other survived all further threats to it, and made out of a non-marriage a marriage which succeeded beyond their dreams" (5). He seems concerned to show that their relationship was the true one. This introduces a paradox in that here we have a marriage that was not always physical and yet it is seen as the primary relationship whereas long-term friendships between women, whether they are

sexual or not, have historically been dismissed.

Other women who may or may not have been lesbian have also created an interesting history from which lesbians have been able to draw. There are women who lived as men like the previously mentioned Billy Tipton and Colonel Barker. This is not to say that they did not have sexual relationships with women – in fact in these examples they did - but that today they might identify themselves as transgendered rather than lesbian. Prosser uses this term to describe someone “who crosses gender boundaries in some way, whether through identification, actions or dress” (“No Place,” 484). Some women, as identified in Wheelwright’s Amazons and Military Maids, posed as men to obtain work or access to education. As relationships between women - especially sexual ones - were not openly discussed or written about, public debates such as those in the press around the more publicised cases of women like Tipton and Barker provide examples of what a lesbian identity may have meant to some women.

Billy Tipton appears to have chosen to make it known after his death that he<sup>33</sup> was a woman. Middlebrook evidences this by commenting on the fact that when he died, Billy

had done away with her sex-concealing gear, for the trailer was

---

<sup>33</sup> In referring to their gender I have assumed that as both these women lived their lives as men they would prefer to be referred to in the masculine.



empty of the jockstrap and bindings familiar to Billy's wives and sons . . . And locked away in Billy's office closet, along with the carefully worded and updated will, was the record of a lifetime's achievements: clippings and photographs documenting the transformation of Billy from *she* to he . . . These professional files show how, night after night, Billy scattered clues and riddles about the drag she wore, including risqué gags about homosexuality and jokes that called attention to the costume. (11)

This suggests that not only did he want his true sex to be known, he also left clues throughout his life which do not appear to have been picked up on, or if they were, he was not "exposed."

The experience of Colonel Barker was very different as his masquerade was played out in the public eye through the various court cases he became involved in where he was exposed as a woman. However, for both these stories that we know about, how many are there that remain undetected? In The Hide and Seek Files, a novel written in 1988, Caeia March tells exactly that story, recognising that there are many such narratives that will remain unknown as the public, precisely because the public, if not private, deception was so successful. Both Tipton and Barker had relationships with women. The women did not always appear to know that they were having a relationship with another woman. Neither woman defined herself as lesbian, but neither did they define their sexuality in any other terms. As such we only have their actions with which to understand

them and the fact that they had sexual relationships with other women makes them relevant to the understanding of lesbian history and the development of a sexual identity.

### **III. Secondary Material on the Smallhythe Trio**

The Smallhythe trio were part of a number of lesbian or women-centred networks which included many well-known women. Their biographies either feature the trio or add to our knowledge of the lifestyle they lived. The friendship that firmly places the trio in the middle of a range of lesbian networks is that with Radclyffe Hall and her partner Lady Una Troubridge. Their friendship began in the 1930s when Hall and Troubridge moved to Rye (Baker, 263), although Edy knew Hall from their schooldays - they attended the same school (Souhami, The Trials, 241). Of their friendship Una wrote: "there is great consolation and gratification to me in the company of these friends who like us and want to be with us because they know us for what we are and respect what John has done for her kind" (Baker, 271). Other biographies about Hall (Troubridge, Dickson, Ormrod, Cline, Souhami) also make references to the trio or include pictures. They provide information about the social life that the trio enjoyed: for example, in 1931 the trio spent Christmas with Hall and Troubridge (Cline, 300) but they also indicate the connections between different groups of lesbians at that time. Another friend of the trio, the actress Gabrielle Enthoven, was also known to Hall and Troubridge as was Ethel Smyth and "Toupie" Lowther. Vita Sackville-West, who became friends with Chris and the trio, was also friends with Ethel Smyth

who, in turn, was friends with the trio and also Virginia Woolf. It is evident therefore that there was a very strong network of women who, as Benstock demonstrates in Women of the Left Bank, may not have known each other well, but they certainly knew about each other, not least through their mutual friends. Other biographies which have proved useful in this regard are Whitelaw's account of the life of the actress Cicely Hamilton; Souhami's other biographies of Gluck, and Gertrude Stein and her partner Alice B Toklas.

Whilst Edy's theatre work and her involvement in the suffrage movement have been well researched, Chris's work has perhaps been overshadowed. In Howlett's thesis entitled "Gender, Identity and Collectivity in the Writings of the British Suffragette Movement" Chris's writing is analysed for interpretations of maternity alongside that of Frances Swiney. This is one of the few pieces of writing that discusses Chris's work rather than Edy's. Needless to say, Tony does not feature in any literature except in relation to Edy and Chris.

#### **IV. Class**

As class plays a part in my analysis of the friendship networks I have also looked at background literature on this topic. Research that has proved useful in setting the debates about class into context have been Crompton; Joyce; Lee and Turner; Martin. Veblen offers an historical position on class, published in 1899 which is contemporary with the women that I am researching. More recently Davidoff and Hall have written about the middle classes and especially the role of

women and the family which is key to my research. They argue that “the language of class formation was gendered” (Family Fortunes, 451) and that the middle classes took and shaped the moral order that had a lasting effect and can be seen in the lives of Ruth and Eva rather than the trio, the latter being more bohemian. Giles provides a more contemporary view, looking at the experiences of women in the first half of the twentieth century, especially those of working-class or lower-middle-class women. In addition to this work she has also analysed the relationships, or sometimes friendships, between women and their domestic servants. One of her case studies includes Virginia Woolf. Her work has been useful in contextualising the lives of both groups of women, as Eva started her working life as a servant, albeit a short-lived experience (Slawson, diary, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914) and the trio had daily servants (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1932), demonstrating the class differences between the two groups of women. Vicinus has also been invaluable in her research on both class and sexuality. In defining the differences that distinguish the upper, middle and lower classes, two key indicators are education and economics and I look at these more closely in Chapter One.

The twentieth century saw great changes for women and the two World Wars significantly altered women's working lives and their subsequent expectations. This was perhaps more evident in the lives of Ruth and Eva than those of the trio. Ruth and Eva took advantage of night schools to further their education, which enabled them to gain secretarial skills. For Eva this meant that

she did not have to go back to domestic service. Both Ruth and Eva fulfilled their dreams of education by going to college at Woodbrooke and Ruth qualified as a social worker. The Smallhythe trio were able to pursue their own careers through being financially self-supporting. However, they too faced disadvantages. Edy, for example, was perhaps less successful within the commercial theatre than her brother was.

### **Terminology**

As shall become apparent in my thesis the representation and discussion of lesbian identity has undergone many changes in the last hundred years and therefore it is important to be clear about the terminology I use and the context in which I use it. The term lesbian is commonly used today to describe a woman with "a sexual interest in other women" (Oxford English Dictionary,<sup>34</sup> on-line 17th May 2001). But the development of a science of sexuality - known as sexology - and developments in the general understanding and discussion of homosexuality during the twentieth century mean that there have been significant changes in terminology over time. As such it is important to establish what language women used to describe themselves and their erotic feelings at the turn of the century and subsequently, and to clarify how I define and use this language in my thesis. The OED tells us that the term lesbian is a relatively recent one, which came into common usage through medical texts. The first use of the term quoted by the OED is the Billings Medical Dictionary in 1890; the second Krafft-Ebing's

---

<sup>34</sup> Hereafter referred to as the OED.

Psychopathia Sexualis (1894), a tome that, as I shall show in Chapter Two, was read by lesbians such as Radclyffe Hall. However, both these texts are medical ones and were not widely available to non-medical people. It is not until 1931 that the OED cites other texts which use the term lesbian in relation to sexual attraction between women.

In addition to this modern understanding of the term, the OED refers to the term “lesbian” as a native of the island of Lesbos. Lesbos was the home of Sappho, a Greek poet writing around 400 B.C. who was known for her love of women and her “ever-changing circle of younger women to whom she taught the verse-writing, music, and dancing which constituted a well-born girl’s preparation for marriage” (Foster, 18). Her poems, especially, have resulted in her becoming a lesbian icon for many centuries and the association between her name and birthplace denoting a love of women. However, as Donoghue’s research citing William King’s The Toast of 1732 shows, the term lesbian had been used before the twentieth century. This mock-epic poem “referred to sexual relationships between women as ‘Lesbian Loves’ and the edition of 1736 called those women ‘Tribades or Lesbians’” (3). So whilst the term lesbian was not commonly used between women or about women in the early twentieth century it was not unknown.

In the early twentieth century it is more usual to find references to the term Sappho and Sapphism as describing the erotic interest between women than

“lesbian.” In 1928, after the publication and subsequent obscenity trial of The Well of Loneliness, Virginia Woolf wrote: “at this moment our thoughts center [sic] upon Sapphism” (quoted in Doan, 24). Interestingly both Chris and Edy’s cat<sup>35</sup> (“Tony’s Album”) and Radclyffe Hall’s parrot (Souhami, 146) were called Sappho. In Paris Natalie Barney was staging “ritual observances to Sappho” (Benstock, 180). The terminology favoured by Hall and used in her novel The Well of Loneliness is that of inversion (Souhami, 146). This was the language of sexology. Its basic premise was that in the case of inverts there is a man’s soul in a woman’s body and vice versa. This concept had been prevalent for many years with women such as Anne Lister (1791-1840) describing themselves in terms of masculinity as her nickname “Gentleman Jack” testifies (Whitbread, ix). In Chapter 2 I shall discuss in more detail the way in which the women in my study expressed their sexuality in relation to the theories of the day. In my writings about the women I have tried to use the terminology that the women used to describe themselves in preference to talking about them as lesbians. In terms of my analysis overall however, I use the term lesbian as it is used in the context of today’s interpretations of lesbian identity, to mean women who have emotional and sexual relationships with each other.

In Websters International Dictionary published in 1900 there is no reference to homosexuality as a term that needs defining. The definition of lesbian is “of or pertaining to the island anciently called Lesbos, now Mitylene, in

---

<sup>35</sup> Chris and Edy’s cat was called Sappho – an earlier spelling of the poet’s name.

the Grecian Archipelago" (814). The term "sapphic" is defined variously as "of or pertaining to Sappho, the Grecian poetess," "belonging to, or in the manner of Sappho; - said of a certain kind of verse reputed to have been invented by Sappho" and "a Sapphic verse" (1276). None of these definitions make any reference to lesbian sexuality although it is possible to see how the use of the term sapphic could be appropriated in trying to determine terminology for lesbian identities. By 1913, however, Websters New International Dictionary had introduced another definition of the term "lesbian" which is "erotic; - in allusion to the reputed sensuality of the lesbian people and literature" (1237). The next definition is that of "lesbianism," new to the dictionary, which it defines as "unnatural sexual relations between women" (1237). Again, the dictionary introduces a new definition of the term "sapphism" which it describes as "sensual desire of a woman for other women – lesbianism" (1880).

Whilst identifying terminology it is also important that I clarify what I mean when I refer to terms such as working-class, upper-class and middle-class. The OED describes class as "[a] division or order of society according to status; a rank or grade of society," going on to cite the subdivisions of upper, middle, working classes previously known as higher or upper orders (OED on-line 17th May 2001). In addition to this it suggests that class refers to "[a] number of individuals (persons or things) possessing common attributes, and grouped together under a general or 'class' name" (OED on-line, 17th May 2001). These definitions however, do not give us any context in which to place the different



expressions of class. Waites offers a much more practical approach to these definitions, suggesting that

during the early nineteenth century, the language of "class" came to designate the social divisions of an increasingly industrial, capitalist society, not entirely to the exclusion of older terms appropriate to the pre-industry hierarchy, but in such a way as to be the dominant convention. This language became enmeshed in social practises and relations, and helped constitute the sense people made of their society. (34)

Again, this does not give us any indication of what it meant to be a member of various classes. Martin demonstrates that there were clear class cultures that operated as late as the 1950s and states that "what is easily misunderstood about this hierarchical structure is that people usually knew their place and strove to keep it" (69). Martin cites an earlier example demonstrating how class expectations suppressed desires for social improvement or "difference."

In 1928, when my mother left school, she rashly proposed to my grandmother that it would be nice to work in a shop instead of going into the cotton mill like her older sisters. My grandmother was horrified and forbade any such thing: "Our sort go int' [sic] mill." It was less the social climbing than the violation of the "natural" category that shocked her. (69)

As I demonstrate in Chapter Three this attitude to social improvement is one that Ruth had to fight against from her mother.

Martin suggests that "the middle classes proper are even less thoroughly researched than the clerical class or the petty bourgeoisie" (75). King and Raynor dispute this idea, suggesting that rather than being ignored the middle class has been taken for granted (1). This disparity of views is possibly because the term covers a wide range of experiences, which have become increasingly hard to define. In the Marxist view of class King and Raynor argue that there is "little room for a 'middle' class" (7) based as it is on the social relations of production. The problem with Weber, they argue, is that his approach leads to "a multiplicity of classes" (9). Looking specifically at the Edwardian period, Raynor and King defined three levels of the middle class. The first was the "solid' middle class" a group which were pillars of society, they had an income in excess of £700 a year, a suburban villa, servants and a carriage (61-2). The "middle-middle" and "lower-middle class" they argue "were distinguishable one from another by fine degrees of social observation" (62). The former they define as having an income between £150 and £700 a year, and employing a domestic servant. The "lower-middle" group they define as "the growing army of clerical workers, lower grade professionals, elementary school teachers and the emerging technician class" (62). Their definition of the middle classes clearly places the Smallhythe trio into the upper or "solid" middle class. Whilst I do not know what their income was, they were public figures which marked them out from the other groups. They also had two homes, their flat in London and their Smallhythe cottage. As clerical workers both Ruth and Eva fall clearly into King

and Raynor's definition of the lower-middle class. Through their determination to improve their education and subsequently employment it is also possible to see how Ruth and Eva were themselves part of the emerging and developing middle-classes.

### **Thesis Structure**

I have already made reference to the timescale which the sources I have used span, and the difficulties in making sense of information that is coloured by changes within the self as well as externally. In my first chapter I outline the historical, social and cultural contexts in which the women in question lived. I shall discuss the position of women in society in the period in general before analysing how *lesbian* women were viewed. I explore in greater detail the lives of the five women to show how unusual or not they were in comparison to their contemporaries in relation to their class. From this point I then move on to explore in Chapter Two whether lesbian women in the first part of the twentieth century saw themselves as different from other women and, if they did, what they thought the nature of this difference was. I look at the role the sexologists played in the creation of a discourse that enabled women to recognise their difference. I examine whether the class difference between the two groups of women influenced their understanding of their difference in any way. In Chapter Three I analyse how the two groups of women expressed this difference, both to themselves and their friends through the use of names, clothes, and the language they used to each other.

The women at the centre of this thesis were actively involved in the women's movement and suffrage campaign. In Chapter Four I examine how sexuality and political activism were related and analyse their relationship to class position, considering its impact on what motivated the women to become politically active and what the suffrage movement meant to them. I use the evidence of Ruth and Eva's diaries and letters in addition to the work of the suffrage organisations that the women belonged to such as the Actresses Franchise League and the Pioneer Players, a theatre group founded by Edy Craig. The different ways in which these women represented themselves in public and private are central to my analysis of their self-representation. In my fifth chapter I investigate how these women defined their identities in the different spheres of the workplace and home or in the company of friends. Class is key to these definitions. Here I use photographs in addition to autobiographical material to demonstrate their different public and private identities. The conclusion will present a summary of my findings in the light of current debates about the impact of changes in discourse on contemporary readings of the past. I will demonstrate how debates on sexuality at any one time in history have influenced how women have defined their lesbian identity.

## Chapter One

### A Lesbian Life or a Woman's Life? - The Social and Cultural Context of Women's Lives in the early Twentieth Century

If, as some biographers have maintained, the trio of Christopher St John, Edy Craig and Clare "Tony" Atwood, and the friendship between Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson, constituted lesbian relationships (Hollidge; T. Thompson) it is important to clarify exactly what this means. In this chapter I intend to examine this view by looking at the evidence that is presented through the written records of the Smallhythe's and "Dear Girl" groups' lives, and placing these in the social and cultural context of the early twentieth century. If we are labelling these women as lesbian then it is important to establish how their lives were different from those of any other women living independently at that time. What was it that made their lifestyles "lesbian" rather than "spinstered" or "heterosexual"? In this context I make the distinction between a spinstered lifestyle and a lesbian one on the basis that some women choose to remain unmarried, a decision that is not necessarily based on their sexuality but on their desire for an independent lifestyle (Jeffreys, Spinster, 88). However, this desire to retain their independence did not preclude some heterosexual women from having sexual and familial

relationships, known at the time as “free love,”<sup>1</sup> demonstrated by Ruth’s friend Françoise Lafitte.

A lesbian lifestyle today suggests an erotic interest in women. As Hamer writes:

lesbians are socially, culturally, geographically, politically and erotically diverse. If the basis of lesbianism is an erotic desire for women, this need not be manifested in exactly the same way; we do not all need to do it in the same position or wearing the same clothes (205-6).

The work of Faderman and Smith-Rosenberg questions whether women thought of each other erotically or had sexual relationships in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and they maintain that if, as they believe, they did not, this does not necessarily mean that they were not lesbians. At the beginning of her best-known book, Surpassing the Love of Men, Faderman states:

most of the female friends that I was studying probably did not have sexual relationships. Was that then the primary difference between romantic friendship and lesbian love? The definition of lesbianism became somewhat confused for me when I

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “Free Love” was used at the end of the nineteenth century by women who were rejecting the notion of marriage on the basis that marriage laws treated women as the property of their husband. By entering free unions it was argued that women were free to establish relationships on equal terms with men. Obviously the reality was not that simple as any children born in these relationships were illegitimate and therefore the father had no legal duty towards them. Brandon and Bland both discuss the issues and political aspects of “free love.”

discovered that many of the lesbian cases cited by the early sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud . . . were of Victorian and post-Victorian women whose love relationships were nongenital . . . It became clear that women's love relationships have seldom been limited to that one area of expression (17).

Faderman argues that the romantic friendship was the precursor to what we would term today a lesbian relationship. As Weeks points out, "what we define as 'sexuality' is an historical construction" (Weeks, Sexuality, 15). Throughout this chapter I shall provide an idea of the context in which the women whose lives I am researching lived. This will form the basis of my understanding of their lives and their understanding of themselves. I shall start by giving a brief introduction to the women and then look at some key areas, such as education and employment, to provide the context for their lives and how this influenced their life choices.

### **The Smallhythe Trio**

The story of Chris, Edy and Tony's relationship is documented in a number of books (Steen, Holledge, Melville, Whitelaw) as indicated in the Introduction of this thesis. All three women were well known in their own right, Chris as a writer, Tony as an artist, and Edy within the theatre. What is actually documented about the women varies, but in each case the information concentrates on their public rather than private lives.

## Christopher St John

Christopher St John's early life is not very well documented and much of the information which is readily available from biographies has come from her semi-autobiographical novel Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul which writers have taken very literally.<sup>2</sup> None of the biographers appears to have discovered the biography of Emma Marshall by her daughter Beatrice.<sup>3</sup> It provides a picture of Chris's early life, however brief, which contrasts with both her novel and her own

---

<sup>2</sup> Chris describes Hungerheart as a semi-autobiographical novel (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1932). In view of the fact that when she published it she did so anonymously she perhaps suggests that the book is rather more autobiographical than it in fact is. In Chapter Three I shall look in more detail at the nature of auto/biography and "truth." Suffice it for now that whilst this is a problematic area Chris does state that her book is *semi*-autobiographical, and I emphasise the "semi" as other readings of the text have focused on the autobiographical and have not acknowledged or questioned the fictional element. As this has been done so widely by all biographers it is easy to fall into the same trap of defining something as truth which may not be so. Throughout my thesis I have tried to be aware of this problem and avoid doing this myself.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Marshall was Chris's mother and Beatrice was Chris's older sister.



version of events.<sup>4</sup> Steen writes that Chris claimed that she was an orphan and had been born illegitimately, but Steen goes on to reveal that she was the daughter of the Victorian novelist Emma Marshall (251). The Who was Who 1897-1916 lists Emma Marshall as a writer of historical novels (475). Her recreational interests included music, something in addition to writing which may have had a formative influence on her daughter as in later years Chris was to work as a music critic.<sup>5</sup> The Dictionary of National Biography shows that Chris, born Christabel, was the youngest of four daughters and three sons by Emma Marshall and her husband Hugh Graham Marshall. Her father worked for the

---

<sup>4</sup> A key example of this is Chris's attempted suicide. It has been documented by a number of biographers that after Edy and Chris had been living together for a few years, Edy met and fell in love with one of her brother's friends, Martin Shaw. When Chris discovered that Edy was planning to marry Martin she took an overdose and ended up in hospital. In Hungerheart she claims: "I remembered clearly a bottle of cocaine lotion in the bath-room, which had been prescribed for my ear-ache. I went in and drank it without a moment's hesitation" (227). Chris later referred to this event as the "grave of a thing past which had threatened to separate us" (St John, "Close-up", 22). Melville suggests that following this emotional blackmail Edy's romance with Shaw petered out. However, in her biography Beatrice Marshall talks of an episode in 1896 when Chris had "taken overdoses of phenaetine carelessly, being in agony from toothache and neuralgia" (302). The descriptions of both events are so similar that I believe the event was one and the same, but for the purposes of a good story Chris wrote it into her novel at a later date. I imagine that Edy's love "affair" did happen and that this probably changed the nature of their relationship afterwards, but that she did not attempt suicide at that time. However, other situations, such as the house she was living in being burnt down and her bicycle accident are authenticated by her sister's book.

<sup>5</sup> In one letter to Vita Sackville-West she wrote following a performance of a young musician that they had seen together:

Yehudi Menuin aged 15, revealed to us what music is when it is pure, uncontaminated by the wisdom of this world . . . I remember with some pride that I was the only music critic who recognised that he was a great interpreter of great music when he made his London debut in the Brahms concerto (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1932).

West of England Bank where he would appear to have had an influential position until the bank failed and he lost his position, income, and, as a shareholder, was held liable for debts. Emma Marshall started to write "from a desire to amuse and instruct young people." However, as a result of her husband's financial crisis she wrote over two hundred "stories" which enabled them to clear his debts (Dictionary of National Biography, n.p.).

At some point in the early 1890s Chris changed her name from Christabel Gertrude Marshall to Christopher Marie St John. The Somerville College Register records her name as "Christopher Marie St John (C.G. Marshall)" (Hamer, 31), suggesting that she made this decision at some point between 1890 and 1893, the period that she attended the College. According to Melville she "took part of St John The Baptist's name on converting to Catholicism" (174), but the subject of her name and her reasons for changing it is a subject I shall return to in Chapter Three. She was the only one of the women discussed here who went to university and she was one of the first women to attend Somerville College in Oxford where she obtained a third in history (Hamer, 31). As Hamer points out, the fact that not many women were able to attend college and those that did were in the main from the upper-middle classes would sustain Steen's point that she had a family who were obviously able to support her in this (Hamer, 31) although they had clearly experienced financial problems at some point. This is further underlined by Beatrice Marshall's biography.

With the exception of Beatrice Marshall's biography of her mother and Steen's biography, Chris' family are never mentioned. This may be because Chris never talked about them or it may be that any information was destroyed when the trio burnt their papers. Whist Beatrice Marshall's account suggests that Chris was loved by her family and loving towards them, this is not the story that she tells either in Hungerheart or through her letters to Vita. What is clear however, is that in Chris's last will and testament she made no reference to her birth family which suggests that they were no longer close by this time and that her primary thoughts were with Edy and Tony. In a letter to Vita Sackville-West in 1942 Chris talks about her closest relationships:

I should become very serious if I discussed the only human relationships besides mine with you which count for anything in my life. They can be whittled down to these people with perfect truth. Look at the list. Edy, Tony, Dame Laurentia.<sup>[6]</sup> That last relationship has become less close with the years (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1942).

There is no mention of her family, her sisters or brothers at all.

The manner in which Steen writes about Chris suggests not only that she did not like Chris but had some difficulty concerning the relationship between Chris and Edy. The following reference to Chris's birth is emphasised, perhaps in an attempt to set the record straight about Chris' early life.

---

<sup>6</sup> Dame Laurentia was an Abbess with whom Chris maintained a long friendship. I have found no other references to her.

She [Edy] had formed an attachment to a young writer, called Christabel Marshall, the legitimate daughter of Emma Marshall, a Victorian novelist. The legitimacy is emphasised because it was her fancy sometimes to represent herself as the offspring of a romantic episode. This could have been to put herself in line with Edy, for whom she had developed a *Schwärmerei*. She would have no place in this record but for the fact that it was she who brilliantly ghosted Ellen Terry's Story of My Life and collaborated with Edy on the notes which later amplified it into the Memoirs (Steen, 250).

Steen continues to make a number of veiled comments about Edy and Chris's relationship that make it plain that she did not approve or condone the manner in which they lived: "[Ellen] endured Edy's over-earnest women friends, with their political affiliations and their obscure antagonism to the opposite sex" (Steen, 306). In particular she points to Chris as being key in the manipulation of both Ellen and Edy's lives: "[Edy] was surrounded, inevitably, by a group of female sycophants, of whom the chief was her house-mate, Christopher St John" (Steen, 325). The brief reference that she makes to the relationship between Edy, Chris and Tony is that "The history of the *ménage* was unwriteable" (Steen, 326). This comment and the reference to Chris's much quoted, semi-autobiographical novel Hungerheart and Steen's authorisation of its autobiographical content (251) are perhaps the most overt references to Edy's sexuality and her relationship with Chris in this biography.

One of Chris's first jobs was working for Lady Randolph Churchill as her secretary (St John, "Close-up," 20). She later became a journalist, working as a music critic for The Lady and subsequently as a drama and music critic for Time and Tide (Hamer, 32). Her published writing includes the novel The Crimson Weed, which is a relatively conventional love story about a woman lured into a relationship with a married man. The novel contains echoes of Edy's early life as well as Chris's interpretation of herself within Hungerheart in that the protagonist, Luke, discovers that he is illegitimate. Like Edy's father, Luke's father abandons his mother who becomes a successful opera singer. Another strand to the story is the relationship between Luke and his friend Richard Savile, although this is more about sexual anguish than anything else. In 1915 Chris published Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul, which I discussed earlier, and in which, it is alleged, the story of Edy and her relationship is described. The book is divided into two sections, the first "The World of Ignorance," the second "The Cell of Self Knowledge." The former tells of the protagonist's childhood, her relationships and politics, the latter concentrates more on her Catholicism. The narrator suggests that it is her "personal vision of life that I seek to communicate to you in this book" (289). Chris also wrote and translated a number of plays; she co-wrote the play How the Vote was Won with Cicely Hamilton, a suffrage drama that was one of the Actresses Franchise League's greatest successes (Hollidge, 122), and edited the letters between Ellen Terry and George Bernard Shaw, as well as collaborating on Ellen Terry's memoirs.

## **Edy Craig**

Edy's public and early life is well documented, not only because of her mother's celebrity but because after her mother's death, Edy ensured that her mother's life was commemorated by raising money to turn Ellen's house and the outside barn into a museum and theatre dedicated to her memory. Melville and Cockin both explore Edy's life in greater detail than I intend to do here. Her upbringing was more unconventional than either that of Chris or Tony. Edy and her brother were both born illegitimately to Ellen and Edward Godwin with whom the former had eloped. He was an architect who, whilst successful and respected, managed to spend all their money on the house he was building for Ellen and the children, so they lived in poverty much of the time. Godwin does not play a large role within the family as he was often absent and eventually left them in 1875 when Edy was six and Edward three (Melville, 263). He did, however, have strong ideas about how the children should be brought up.

Godwin had very strong ideas about the effects of environment on children, believing that their minds could be corrupted by discordant colours, unsightly objects, unattractive shapes. He designed Ellen's and Edy's clothes, in simple, unrestricted Japanese and Grecian styles. (Melville, 55)

In the early twentieth century, to be illegitimate, or to have borne children out of wedlock, was socially unacceptable and therefore Edy's illegitimacy could have created a social stigma that impacted upon her whole life. This was the experience of one young mother much later in the 1930s:

a Good Mother was expected to have a home for her children, a father for her children and, above all, a ring on her wedding finger. An unmarried mother who became pregnant at eighteen remembers that, in the eyes of her family, she had literally suffered a fate worse than death. Her mother tried to perform an amateur abortion on her own daughter. (Holdsworth, 119)

Although the rate of illegitimacy went up after the First World War (Holdsworth, 144) it was not until the 1960s that not only did the rate of illegitimate births shoot up but also the numbers of women refusing or choosing not to marry the fathers (Holdsworth, 151). Ellen Terry's experience was thus different from the norm of her time in that it would appear that Edy and her brother did not suffer from being illegitimate. This may have been because Ellen was an esteemed actress and was forgiven some of her indiscretions, or that the theatrical circles they moved in were rather more liberal than most. George Bernard Shaw, in his preface to the correspondence between himself and Ellen Terry edited by Christopher St John, puts forward this view:

the trade union view of marriage, from which the unmarried woman who is not a celibate must at all costs be boycotted as a blackleg, had no meaning in the theatre. Outside it women were held to a strict licitness in their sexual relations on penalty of ostracism, loss of employment, and every other injury that could express total reprobation by all decent people. In fact a woman incurring this penalty used to be described as "ruined" . . . In the theatre illicit

relations *as such* involved no penalty whatever. (Shaw, xii)

The phrase “as such” is clarified by demonstrating that theatre folk had their own morals. As Holledge demonstrates in the case of the actress Eva Moore, by virtue of her employment it was assumed by the public that not only was she sexually aware but that she was “fair game for the stage-door johnnies” (16). Edy and Edward may not have appeared to suffer from their illegitimacy, but Ellen herself faced some censure.

Having two illegitimate children was totally unacceptable in those days: even Lewis Carroll, devoted though he was to her [Ellen] wouldn't introduce a young girl to her without the permission of the girl's mother. Although Ellen cared little about such censure herself, she adored her children and feared their lack of a surname would cause them to be ostracised. (Melville, 78)

It may be that Ellen chose to invent a surname for both of her children<sup>7</sup> that bore no relation to either hers or Godwin's to protect them in some measure from any scandal that might have attached to her.

Edy is primarily remembered for her theatrical endeavours. Initially she followed in her mother's footsteps, and made her first acting appearance in 1878 (Adlard, 9 -11). She did not pursue acting as a career which, Holledge maintains,

---

<sup>7</sup> In Terry's memoirs she mentions that on visiting the Scottish rock “Ailsa Craig” on a boat trip she had declared that it was a good stage name and that as she could not give it to her son, would give it to Edy. Although she used this as her stage name initially there was already another actress using that name and she reverted back to Edith. At the same time that Edy was christened, Terry added the name Craig to her son's name as well (Craig and St John, 195).



was because Edy did not want to compete with her mother (110-11), but she remained within the theatre throughout her working life. In 1886 Edy went to Germany to train as a pianist. She was unable to continue with this when her rheumatism which she had had since childhood, prevented her from playing (Melville, 129). For some years she took acting roles, but at the age of thirty she set up her first business venture as a theatrical costumier. May Whitty makes reference to her skills with costumes:

Edy played "Jessica" in The Merchant of Venice, and one night was taken ill, and I had to go on in a great hurry in her place. When I was tremblingly making up, and asked for my dress, the dresser produced many scarves and bits and pieces and said Miss Edy always fixed these herself! By the aid of the dresser and many safety-pins I managed to adjust these strange, shapeless materials into some semblance of a dress, and decided I must watch Edy at work another time. (Whitty, 53)

Later on Edy became involved in the Suffrage movement and the Actresses Franchise League and subsequently masterminded the Pioneer Players, and developed an active "little theatre"<sup>8</sup> attracting some of the biggest names in theatre to Smallhythe.

Actors and actresses like John Gielgud, Sybil Thorndike, Peggy Ashcroft and Edith Evans, though acting in the West End, would

---

<sup>8</sup> The reference "little theatre" describes a type of theatre which was owned or rented by an amateur group. Edy worked in York, Letchworth and Hampstead in this type of theatre (Melville, 247) as well as setting up her own Barn Theatre.

learn new parts for the Barn Theatre, rehearse them with Edy in London, then cheerfully travel the sixty five [sic] miles down to Smallhythe for a single performance. (Melville, 251).

### **Clare “Tony” Atwood**

Most of the information about Clare Atwood, known as Tony, is cited within her obituary in The Times (8) and in the Who Was Who 1961-1970 (40).

She was the only daughter of Frederick Atwood, an architect from Richmond in Surrey. Tony was an accomplished artist who had been trained at the Slade School under Professor Frederick Brown. Her achievements included exhibiting work at the Royal Academy and commissions to paint for both the Canadian Government and the Imperial War Museum. Like Chris, Tony was religious and one of the few stories that is told about her was that

John [Radclyffe Hall] and Una [Troubridge] had been deeply touched by a gesture of Tony's designed to mark the completion of The Master of the House.<sup>[9]</sup> She entrusted to their care what she believed was a relic of the True Cross, reputedly given to an ancestor of hers by the Pope 150 years before . . . Although doubt was later cast on the authenticity of the relic, it remained a token of respect and friendship between the two households. Una would later write: “Tony has that greatest of all qualities: a steady faithfulness . . . As one grows older one realizes more and more

---

<sup>9</sup> This was a novel by Radclyffe Hall first published in 1932.

how rare it is" (Baker, 274).

Tony has been described as having a "quiet, tactful manner and sweet nature serving to keep the peace between the other two" (Baker, 264) and appears to have been a very private person.

### **Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson**

The fact that we know anything about the lives of Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson today is quite remarkable. They met in 1902 through the Manor Park Chapel, Eva's family just having moved to the Manor Park area (Slate, diary rough notes, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1902), and they represent two of the many "forgotten women" throughout history (T. Thompson, 1). By this I mean that

women's history does not have a long-standing and definable historiographic tradition within which interpretations can be debated and revised. Instead, the subject of women has been either grafted on to other traditions or studied in isolation from them (Scott, 16).

In other words the history of women has been sidelined and history has concentrated on the rich and powerful. For the large part this did not include women.<sup>10</sup> Ruth and Eva did not write their diaries with the thought that they might

---

<sup>10</sup> Nor did it include working-class men. Sheila Rowbotham argues that: "who and what gets into the record of the past are contentious political matters and women's history, like labour history or black history, has contributed to the argument" (Century, 3).

one day be published as perhaps some people did.<sup>11</sup> Instead they wrote about their lives in order to have some space of their own in which to think and express themselves.

The diaries were vital places where they could express their most private feelings, attempt to sort out their ideas, or simply enjoy describing their "doings and sayings" as Ruth said, "so that I shall know, even when my memory fails me". (T. Thompson, 4)

The diaries and letters that remain were kept by Ruth after Eva's death and were discovered by Ruth's husband after her death in 1953. Ruth and Eva never lived together as the trio did, or had a sexual relationship together and so the suggestion that their relationship was lesbian in its nature might be considered a peculiar one. What was it about their relationship that moves it from a heterosexual friendship to a lesbian one, and can there be a lesbian relationship without sexual desire? As is demonstrated by Anne Lister's diaries, written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and subsequently decoded, it is not necessary to live with another woman to have a lesbian lifestyle and identify as a lesbian.<sup>12</sup> As such it is not necessary that Ruth and Eva lived together to have a lesbian relationship. The key to defining their relationship as a lesbian one is the

---

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf wrote her diaries with a view to other people being interested in them (Walker, 275). Vita Sackville-West said of her husband, Harold Nicolson's letters: "I hope that someday Nigel may publish a selection of them" (Nicolson, Vita, 3). Nigel Nicolson states that Vita thought her letters unworthy of publication.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Lister and her diaries have been edited into two volumes by Helena Whitbread and one by Jill Liddington. What is clear from Anne's diaries is her lesbian sexual activity, her conquests and love interests. In the last six years of her life Anne lived with and entered into a "marriage" with a wealthy neighbour, Ann Walker (Liddington,69).

ways in which they thought about each other and the centrality of each other in their lives. This is all evident from their letters to each other and their diaries. The records left by Ruth and Eva give us an insight into a world of women's friendships that we do not generally see, as the writings of lower-middle and working-class women are not as prevalent as those of the upper and upper-middle classes. This could be due to a number of reasons including illiteracy or lack of time and money - subjects that I shall return to later in this chapter.

Walker argues that

other forms of writing not traditionally considered "literature" may be equally revealing of the writer's vision and relation to the world.

Such forms as letters, journals, and diaries are at once more private and more accessible than poetry or fiction that is intended for the direct exposure to the eyes of strangers. (273)

The letters and diaries written by Ruth and Eva give us an intimate picture of their lives, their hopes and expectations as they wrote them. May Sarton described the difference between autobiographical writing and diaries by saying that "autobiography is 'what I remember,' whereas a journal has to do with 'what I am now, at this instant'" (91). In analysing the lives of the two groups of women we get a much more accurate and intimate picture of the lives and thoughts of Ruth and Eva than we do of the trio through the letters and diaries. This is especially true when we think about the limited information that is available about Tony and the array of information and misinformation about Chris. Through these personal

papers we get an indication of the lives Ruth and Eva were living whereas all the personal information about the trio comes from other people's records and Chris's letters. For example, in Ruth's diary on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1908 she recorded her impressions of the "Votes for Women' Procession" that she attended with Eva and another friend May. Other entries deal with the day to day "troubles" Ruth had with her family (Slate, diary, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1909).

### **Ruth Slate**

Ruth was the eldest daughter of a commercial clerk. She had a younger sister, Daisy, and a brother, Tom (T. Thompson, 18). Tierl Thompson has defined the family as lower-middle class (3) and I shall return to definitions of class later in this chapter. Her father was employed as a commercial clerk which at times meant that they did not have a regular income (T. Thompson, 3) and Ruth's mother supplemented this earning money by dressmaking (Slate, diary, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1898). Ruth left school in 1898 at the age of thirteen although from her diary entry of 10<sup>th</sup> February it is obvious that she had wanted to continue her education and teach. "I have been to the Doctors four times and he says I am not strong enough for teaching and so I am going to stay at home and help Mother for a little while with the blouse work she sometimes does for a friend" (Slate, diary, 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 1898). However, in the same entry she mentions that she and Daisy continue to attend Night School. Despite the fact that they now had to work full-time they continued their education. It is ironic that although Ruth was not considered "strong enough" to be a teacher, at the age of thirteen she worked full-

time in addition to attending night school.<sup>13</sup> She started her first job in a factory in 1898 earning eight shillings a week (Slate, diary, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1898). After a year she went to Hornchurch to be an assistant to her Grandfather who ran a Post Office (Slate, diary, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1899). By 1902, after learning shorthand and typing Ruth found a job as a clerk for a grocery business called Kearley and Tonge's based in the City (Slate, diary rough notes, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1902) where she stayed until 1913. In that year Ruth met an American, David Thompson, with whom she had an intimate correspondence and who wanted to marry her (D. Thompson, letter to Slate, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1914; 26<sup>th</sup> December 1916). Although this did not happen he gave her the money which enabled her to go to Woodbrooke College where she was able to continue her education and train as a social worker (D. Thompson, letter to Slate, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1913).

I do not intend to go into great detail here about the relationships she had but it is important to introduce them at this stage. In 1897 Ruth declared that she was "in love with another boy. Ewart Johnson by name" (Slate, diary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1897). Had he not died in May 1903 from consumption it is possible that they would have married and the whole course of her life might have been different. Some time later in 1904<sup>14</sup> she met and later became engaged to Walter Randall, a man with whom, from her diaries and letters, she had a complex and

---

<sup>13</sup> An earlier entry in Ruth's diary suggests why her doctor did not consider her strong enough. "I went to Dr Collier's I found I have got Enemia [sic]. I have some medicine and rules by the dozen" (Slate, diary, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1898).

<sup>14</sup> Ruth records in her diary that "the previous evening I had received a letter from Mr Randall asking me if we could be 'friends'" (Slate, diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1904).

not very satisfying relationship. The relationship ended in 1909.<sup>15</sup> In January 1910 Ruth met Hugh Johnson, the man she married eight years later. Theirs was also a complex relationship, and they did not live together until 1921.<sup>16</sup>

## **Eva Slawson**

When Ruth and Eva met they were seventeen and nineteen years old respectively. Eva had been adopted by her grandparents as she had been born illegitimately to their eldest daughter Mary (Genealogical Information Box 6.3). Eva had left school early, becoming a domestic servant.<sup>17</sup> However, when her grandparents were able to afford to educate her further they did so and she learnt typing and shorthand, enabling her to find a job as a typist (T. Thompson, 4). By 1903 she was employed as a secretary for a firm of solicitors in Walthamstow where she worked until 1915. When Eva was twenty-two she

---

<sup>15</sup> It is not entirely clear what caused the relationship come to an end but Ruth writes:

Letter from Wal waiting at home for me – Oh, what a letter! It told me all I have suspected, but I am still uncertain whether it is a passing phase or the real Wal . . . at last he spoke his mind . . . He declared himself unable to give much affection to any one individual, and said he believes he could be sentimental with anyone. In talking he would be frank, he said, if I was prepared to be shocked, we could start all over again if I liked – but there must be no expressions of affection, for he had none (Slate, diary, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1909).

<sup>16</sup> Much of the information regarding the relationship between Ruth and Hugh I have taken directly from T. Thompson. Although there are a couple of letters from Hugh to Ruth in the archive these were very difficult to read and gave little information about their relationship. Thompson may have relied here on information supplied by Margaret Johnson, the friend to whom Hugh initially gave Ruth's diaries and letters.

<sup>17</sup> Eva writes that "for a week [she was] fourth housemaid" (Slawson, diary, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914).



moved to live with her Aunt Edie, her mother's sister to whom she was very close. She was also close to her half-sister Gertie.

In 1911 Eva met Minna Simmons,<sup>18</sup> whom she described as "a type of woman of the future" (Slawson, letter to Slate, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1911). Their relationship was a physically close one that Eva talks about in her diaries and Minna, after Eva's death, talks about in her letters to Ruth. Whilst they would appear to have been lovers, they did not think of their relationship as a valid alternative to heterosexual unions. How they viewed this relationship I shall return to in Chapters Two and Three where I look at their understanding and expression of "difference."

### **Ruth, Eva and "Self-improvement"**

Although Ruth and Eva had left school at thirteen, they both had the desire to continue to learn. The religious ethos of their chapel also encouraged education and Woodbrooke College which Ruth and later Eva attended was established in this tradition. Both Ruth and Eva showed their desires to learn and expand their knowledge by their references in their diaries and letters to visits they had made to museums, books they had read and their talk of the Sunday School class they ran together. In 1903 at Manor Park Chapel they were given a class to teach. Ruth describes this task:

---

<sup>18</sup> Although Minna Simmons is mentioned regularly in connection with Ruth and Eva I have not focused on her in my thesis, as there are only a few letters in the archive that have been written by her.

My heart is filled with such a deep peace, such a wondrous calm this morning! It seems that I am going to be useful at last, and I am so glad. Eva and I are to have a little class between us, one evening each week, where we can read and talk to some girls, while they sew and make things perhaps for a mission. (Slate, rough diary notes, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1903)

In addition to this they undertook the teaching of a young disabled girl named Emma Clover.

I have a little deformed girl in my Sunday School class now. She is a dear little child and though she cannot walk about, seems very bright. I want her to come to tea next Sunday. Her people are very poor, and Eva wheels her to school in such a funny old bassinet perambulator. She is just nine years old. Eva goes to see her almost every evening and is teaching her to write, read and sew. She has to be very patient, for Emma [Clover], (that is the child's name) has scarcely any fingers on the right hand, and has to use the left (which is also very deformed) for everything. I want to do some good, oh, so much, it is the only thing that brings true happiness I am certain. (Slate, diary, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1903)

Emma was initially unable to go to school because of her disability, but with tutelage from first Eva and later Ruth she was later able to attend school. By 1912 Eva and Ruth were teaching religious and social topics at Hoxton Adult

School in the evenings.

As indicated above, in 1914 Ruth was given financial support by David Thompson (D. Thompson, letter to Slate, December 1913), which enabled her study at the Woodbrooke Settlement. This study centre, which still exists today, had been established by the Quaker movement to further religious and social study. They positively encouraged and supported women or those without a private income to enrol (T. Thompson, 189). In 1915 Ruth managed to get a scholarship for Eva to attend Woodbrooke as well. Unfortunately it was whilst Eva was at Woodbrooke that she died of undiagnosed diabetes.

## **Class**

I have described the Smallhythe Trio as upper-middle class and the “Dear Girl” duo as lower-middle class. The OED defines the former as “of, pertaining to, or characterized by the class of polite society next below the upper class” (OED, on-line 17<sup>th</sup> May 2001). For the latter it is equally obscure in its definition; the adjective “lower” includes the explanation “used in contradistinction to Upper or Higher as the specific designation of an object, a class or a group of objects”. Neither of these definitions provides us with a picture of what it meant to be upper-middle or lower-middle class. An earlier version of the OED defines the middle class as “the class of society between upper and lower including professional and business workers and their families” (1967 edition, 880). Bock questions definitions of class on the basis that “both class and gender are

context-specific and context-dependent categories" (quoted in Giles, 13). It is also true that women's relation to class, especially in the early twentieth century, was related to men's occupation, either the father's or husband's, and the consequent expectations of the woman in relation to this. Neither of the groups of women I focus on relied on men in their adulthood for their economic survival. Rather, they were supported by other women when they needed supporting, or they supported themselves. However, for these women their class was determined by their birth, their occupations, their economic and cultural capital. Both Chris and Tony had fathers who were in the professional classes, which meant that the fathers had an income which enabled their daughters to live at a certain standard. Edy's father was also a professional and although she was illegitimate her mother's status as one of the most respected actresses of her day enabled her to live a relatively privileged lifestyle. Ruth and Eva I have described as lower middle-class since their fathers were not manual labourers, which raises their social status but neither family was financially secure (T. Thompson, 3). Ruth's father was a commercial clerk and Eva's grandfather was a master baker.

The OED definition does not seem to help in defining the class position of women in the early twentieth century who were single, independent and campaigning for the right to be defined by themselves rather than by their fathers or husbands. Martha Vicinus is more specific in how she defines middle-class women at the turn of the century, many of whom will not necessarily have had the opportunity to train for professional careers. She states that "middle-class single

women had the education, economic opportunities, and personal confidence to take advantage of larger social changes" (Vicusus, Independent, 6). The Smallhythe trio conform to both these descriptions of middle-class women, the daughters of professionals and educated women themselves. Ruth and Eva sought education as a means to develop their opportunities whether that was for work or to manage social changes.

### **Education .**

The Smallhythe trio had a fairly conventional education by our standards today. Chris attended a school in Bristol prior to going to Somerville College at Cambridge University; Tony went to the Slade School of Art; Edy went to a co-educational school. By educational standards today these experiences would not be unusual, but considering that it was only in 1880 that free and compulsory education was introduced for children up to the age of thirteen (Richardson and Willis,6) this was not the experience of the majority of people, especially women. In general education for women was not considered that important as

Educational policy was predicated on the assumption that women would only engage in waged work prior to marriage and thus formal schooling need only prepare women for "filler" occupations between school and marriage. (Giles, 4-5)

Class therefore played a major role in the availability and quality of education open to women, and the subsequent employment opportunities that women were able to access. Working-class women were unlikely to be able to access higher

education both because of the need to start earning money to help support the family, and because of the cost of continuing education. This problem was exactly the one faced by Ruth, who was unable to pursue her dreams of studying until offered that opportunity through David Thompson. None of the “Smallhythe trio” were in the privileged position of not having to work for a living, by which I mean that none of them had an independent income. However, they were all able to rely on friends or relations for financial support at times. Throughout Edy’s life her mother supported her financially to varying extents, which was essential to the trio’s joint household at times.<sup>19</sup> In later life, after Edy’s death and before the negotiations concerning the transfer of the Priest’s House where they lived to the National Trust were completed, Chris and Tony were financially supported by Vita Sackville-West (Glendinning, 349). Despite fluctuations in their financial resources, it does not appear that they felt any necessity to rely on marriage as a financial option, which may be because all three women had the ability to support themselves to some extent, or perhaps it reinforces the notion that they were fully aware of their sexuality and would not have contemplated marriage for this reason.

Ruth and Eva’s experience of education is more reflective of the norm for

---

<sup>19</sup> Edy’s venture as a theatrical costumier was financed by Terry (Cockin, Edith Craig, 42), and Edy, along with her brother and his family received allowances until their mother’s finances collapsed in the 1920s (Melville, 234). Ellen also gave Edy “The Priest’s House,” the house where the trio lived, next door to Smallhythe Place (Melville, 179).

the late nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Both had to leave their education in order to supplement the family income. Indeed, it would appear that despite the fact that education was compulsory it was commonplace for families to pull out their children from school early if they felt the economic need to do so. However, where Ruth and Eva's experience differs from the norm is that they continued with their education by not only attending classes themselves but by teaching and then by attending Woodbrooke. Their independence allowed them this opportunity, which would not have been available, had they married and had children. Indeed, Ruth especially was criticised by her family for spending so much time, and money, on furthering her education.

In Ruth's and Eva's case, imagining "noble work" was more a way of being active that seemed compatible with the religious beliefs they were trying so hard to live up to. In reality, activity and self-sacrifice militated against each other and caused conflict, and even "worthy work", if it involved training or independence from home, was discouraged by Ruth's family. (T. Thompson, 8)

## Employment

Whilst all the women at the centre of this thesis were working, Giles<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Attendance at elementary (primary) schools was not compulsory until 1880. See Carol Dyhouse Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England; Felicity Hunt Lessons for Life: the schooling of girls and women 1850-1950; "Women and Education" in Jane Purvis' Womens History in Britain for more information about education for girls at the turn of the century.

<sup>21</sup> For other references to women and employment see Davidoff, Liddington and Vicinus.

demonstrates that for many women permanent employment was not an option, as it was expected that women would leave their job upon marriage. In some occupations, such as the civil service, this was compulsory (Giles, 5) and this was certainly Ruth's experience when she married Hugh in 1918 (T. Thompson, 309). As a result it is not surprising that women were a minority in the professions at this time: "there were still only 553 women doctors in Britain by 1912; women were excluded from the upper ranks of the civil service, the law and accountancy" (Rowbotham, Century, 22). Obviously class and economic situations affected the types of employment open to women, and Ruth is the only woman here who eventually went into the profession of social work. Although Chris had the opportunity to go to university her interests, as with Tony and Edy, as their work suggests, was in the arts rather than the sciences. There was considerable pressure upon middle-class women to forego employment because "if they worked they took away the job of someone who needed it more" (Vicus, Independent, 25). In addition to this, women were much lower paid than their male equivalents: Vicus suggests that women would be paid somewhere between one and two-thirds of men's salary, the latter when women had reached the height of their profession (Vicus, Independent, 25). For the working-class woman, the employment options were more limited, as is demonstrated by the experiences of Ruth and Eva. Domestic service, which was Eva's first experience of work, accounted for forty per cent of the employed female workforce in 1901 (Giles, 132). This figure would not change significantly until World War Two, when the employment market was transformed by the need to use women



workers, and they in turn were able to demonstrate their skills in traditionally male areas of work. After these new and unaccustomed opportunities women were not going to give up their newfound expertise and return to the old ways of working easily.

The trio were able to pursue their artistic careers and believed in their ability to do so. Chris and Tony could, due to their family's ability to send them to university or art college, pursue their chosen careers of writing and painting respectively. They both believed in their ability. Ruth and Eva, who strove to "do good things," did not have the confidence to do as they wished – something that Ruth wrote about in her diary after Eva's death.

I was pondering yesterday on the stress everyone at Woodbrooke seemed to lay on Eva's "humility" – How little they understood either of us! Much of that humility was the lack of self-confidence which both Eva and I have felt to be the curse of our lives, and which has been unduly and unhealthily fostered in us by mistaken religious training and hard circumstances. (Slate, diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1916)

### **Sexuality and Difference**

In recent years a number of books and articles have been written about the history of lesbianism and female sexuality (Donoghue, Faderman, Jeffreys, E. Newton, Smith-Rosenberg). Most of these agree that female sexuality only

became an issue when sexologists started to discuss it and turn it into a science (Jeffreys, Weeks).

As part of their self-imposed task of categorising varieties of human sexual behaviour, the sexologists of the late nineteenth century set about the "scientific" description of lesbianism . . . They codified as "scientific" wisdom current myths about lesbian sexual practice, a stereotype of the lesbian and the "pseudohomosexual" woman, categorising women's passionate friendships as female homosexuality and offered explanations for the phenomenon. (Jeffreys, 105)

Although male homosexuality was a criminal offence at the beginning of the century, lesbianism was not seen in the same light.

Notwithstanding the severity with which homosexuality in women has been visited in a few cases, for the most part men seem to have been indifferent toward it; when it has been made a crime or a cause for divorce in men, it has usually been considered as no offence at all in women. (Ellis, Studies in the Psychology,203)

There were two sexologists, Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, who shaped the main body of work<sup>22</sup> around lesbianism influential at the turn of the century. Their work built on that of earlier sexologists such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and

---

<sup>22</sup> Carpenter's best known texts are The Intermediate Sex and Love's Coming-of-Age, Havelock Ellis wrote Studies in the Psychology of Sex which encompassed six volumes, of which the best known was entitled "Sexual Inversion."

Richard von Krafft-Ebing.<sup>23</sup> These earlier works focused on male homosexuality and when they did consider female sexuality, only looked upon it as a rare phenomenon. Sheila Jeffreys summarises the main distinctions between the sexologists:

One form of explanation was to attribute homosexuality to a hereditary, unchangeable cause. Havelock Ellis saw homosexuality as innate, Krafft-Ebing cited a hereditary taint and Edward Carpenter favoured the theory of a third or intermediate sex. The other form of explanation, developed in the work of the psychoanalysts from Freud onwards, was to see homosexuality as a result of childhood trauma. (Jeffreys, 112)

Although Ulrichs, who was writing in the 1860's and 1870's (Bristow, 20), and who formed the basis of most of the subsequent research, maintained that homosexuality was both normal and healthy, the impact of its being defined within a medical discourse implied its unnaturalness and helped to ensure that homosexuality continued to be viewed as an illness.

Part of Carpenter's notion of the "third sex" consisted of the view that a man's soul was trapped inside a female body or vice versa. This idea forms the basis of homosexual stereotypes that have persisted over the twentieth century, most notably the "mannish lesbian", "butch" woman and "effeminate" man. The

---

<sup>23</sup> Ulrichs wrote a series of twelve short books published between 1864 and 1879 under the title Forschungen zur mann-männlichen Liebe which have recently been translated into one book entitled The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love. Krafft-Ebing's key text was Psychopathia Sexualis.

research undertaken by these men was based upon medical theories, designed to ensure scientific credibility in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even today many of these stereotypes persist within the general population (Birke, 59). The stereotypes were not necessarily coincidental with how men and women saw themselves, however. The women that I focus on in my thesis and many of their friends do not fit easily within the stereotypes as defined by Carpenter and the other sexologists, as I shall demonstrate throughout my thesis.

Some of the male sexologists were undoubtedly homosexual themselves.<sup>24</sup> It is possibly also the case that Havelock Ellis was perhaps closer to a network of lesbians than previous sexologists had been. His wife, Edith Lee Ellis, is acknowledged to have been a lesbian (Hamer, 110). Brandon throws some doubt upon this view with her assertion that had Havelock Ellis been a more attentive husband, Edith would not have been so lonely and looked for a lesbian relationship (Brandon, 115). However, Brandon does point out that the evidence for Edith's sexuality comes from Havelock's book Studies in the Psychology of Sex in which she is widely thought to be the case history known as "Miss H" (Brandon, 115). It was on the basis of his knowledge of his wife and five other case studies, who were - probably - women known to him and his wife personally, that he came to the following conclusion:

---

<sup>24</sup> Bristow writes that Ulrichs "pursued a lifelong campaign in Germany to justify the naturalness of sexual relations between men" (20). Norton suggests that the work of the sexologists, naming both Symonds and Carpenter in this context, "was important for them to recognize that they had common ancestors and they were determined to share this tradition with their fellow queers by making their researches public" (130).

Homosexuality is not less common in women than in men . . . Like other anomalies, indeed, in its more pronounced forms it may be less frequently met with in women, in its less pronounced forms, also most certainly, it is more frequently found. (Ellis, 195)

This latter comment is perhaps informed by the knowledge of his wife's lesbianism, which may not have been very "pronounced" as he describes it. Certainly she did not appear to fit any of Ellis's stereotypes. He also noted different attitudes to lesbianism as a result of class distinctions. He maintained that the lower and middle classes were mainly ignorant of their sexuality unlike the upper classes who had a greater freedom (Ellis, 216). This notion that there was a correlation between class and sex consciousness is important for my research. Souhami suggests that Violet Trefusis's "perception of social behaviour was the idea that marriage was a socially acceptable cover for socially unacceptable sex" (Mrs Keppel, 137). The mores of class applied to sexual relationships and as such a different understanding between the upper and lower classes as to what was acceptable social behaviour had developed.<sup>25</sup> Whilst the upper classes appeared, within the bounds of conventional marriage, to have a greater amount of sexual freedom than the middle classes – bound by the image of the "Angel in the House" (Woolf, "Professions," 285) - it does not necessarily

---

<sup>25</sup> Souhami demonstrates how Camilla Parker-Bowles, the great granddaughter of Mrs Keppel, continued a family tradition with her relationship with the Prince of Wales (291). Mrs Keppel's view was that "things were done much better in my day" when referring to the abdication of Edward VIII (Souhami, Mrs Keppel, 291) and there is no reason to think that she would have thought differently about the relationship between the Prince and Princess of Wales and Camilla Parker-Bowles.

follow that the lower classes were unaware of their sexuality, or sexual desires. However, it is my contention that some women of the lower-middle and working classes had fewer opportunities to recognise and explore their sexuality.

Sonja Ruehl, using Foucault's argument of the development of a "reverse discourse", suggests that Ellis was instrumental in enabling women to define their lesbian identity (17), however much we may disagree with it today. This argument suggests that once lesbian sexuality was defined it could be used by lesbians to define themselves and to make themselves known to other women, creating their own "reverse" discourse. Radclyffe Hall demonstrated this in her representation of lesbians in The Well of Loneliness. The main character, Stephen Gordon, is based upon Ellis's theories of lesbian women having masculine characteristics in personality, looks and interests. The novel also included a foreword written by Ellis himself to support the scientific aspects of the novel.

I have read The Well of Loneliness with great interest because - apart from its fine qualities as a novel by a writer of accomplished art - it possesses a notable psychological and sociological significance. So far as I know, it is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today. (Ellis, "Commentary," n.p.)

As for the women I am researching and the impact that the sexologists had on

their understanding of their own sexuality, it is clear from the following quotation that Chris was very familiar with Ellis's work and looked to him for some enlightenment regarding her own sexuality, whether that was to support her own ideas or to disagree with his views. "Brought Havelock Ellis's new book with me, hoping to find something new in it, but it is in all his old books" (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1933). This raises the question as to what Chris was expecting to find in his book. The book in question was probably The Psychology of Sex: A Manual for Students, which was published in 1933.<sup>26</sup>

It would be untrue to say that women were not involved in the development of ideas about sexuality and lesbian sexuality. Two women who were involved in this discussion in the early twentieth century were Stella Browne and Marie Stopes both of whom helped to popularise many of the theories of the male sexologists in addition to promoting sexual education – and especially birth control information - to a much wider audience. Stella Browne's key paper entitled "The Sexual Variety and Variability among Women" was given in 1915. She tried to put right some of the assumptions that had been made about

---

<sup>26</sup> In the Preface to the book Ellis states:

I have frequently been told by readers of the seven volumes of my Studies in the Psychology of Sex that there is a need for a small book to serve as a concise introduction to Sex Psychology . . . After long hesitation I have decided to prepare the little manual here presented to the reader. There is scarcely need to say that it makes no claim to supplant, or even to summarize, my larger work (v-vi).

Among the eight chapters in this book one is entitled "Homosexuality" which, in thirty-two pages, deals with the diagnosis of sexual inversion, eonism or transvestism and the question of treatment. If this was the book that Chris was referring to it is no wonder that she did not find anything new in it.

women's sexuality, such as the lack of a "strong, spontaneous, discriminating . . . sex impulse in women" (Browne, 91) and that "sexual emotion in women is not . . . weaker than in men" (Browne, 93). Her acceptance of lesbianism was implicit in her principle of the right for a woman to have control over her own body (Browne, 101), although her primary concerns were for birth control, abortion, and the separation of sexual activity from reproduction (Weeks, Coming Out, 99). It is apparent from her papers that Browne's views on inversion were influenced by the sexologists, particularly by Ellis whom she mentions in her paper ("Sexual Variety," 104). In 1928 Browne wrote a paper entitled "Studies in Feminine Inversion." Jeffrey argues that in this paper Browne makes it clear that she had personal experience of lesbian relationships.

She explains that her case studies "would probably be much more illuminating had they been recorded by an observer who was herself entirely or predominantly homosexual." The careful wording here leaves plenty of room for Browne to see herself as at least partly homosexual. (Jeffrey, Spinster, 117)

However, Browne's work does little to promote a positive side to lesbianism, arguing that women have an

enormously wider range of variation; and much greater diffusion, both in desire and pleasure . . . arising from these two characteristics of variability and diffusion, it is extremely liable to aberrations and perversions, which I believe, under constant social and religious repression of normal satisfaction, have often



developed to a pathological extent, while sometimes remaining almost entirely subconscious. (Browne, "Sexual Variety," 93)

These "aberrations and perversions" she later goes on to define in part as "artificial or substitute homosexuality" (Browne, "Sexual Variety," 102). To some extent she proffers the view that older women, who have not experienced a heterosexual relationship, may experiment with homosexuality – but not in preference to it.

Marie Stopes is best known for her books Married Love and Enduring Passions. Married Love was "accorded sixteenth place out of twenty-five in a list of the most influential books of the previous fifty years by a group of American academics in 1935" (Jeffreys, Spinster, 119). Her first book was written following much research in which Jeffreys suggests that "she hoped to find the answer to the frustrations she felt in her unconsummated marriage" (Spinster, 120). Stopes, like Browne, promoted information about sexual issues and birth control that had not previously been available to women. However, in relation to lesbian sexuality Stopes was concerned that women would want to experience lesbian relationships if they knew about them.

If a married woman does this unnatural thing she may find a growing disappointment in her husband and he may lose all natural power to play his proper part . . . No woman who values the peace of her home and the love of her husband should yield to the wilds of the lesbian whatever her temptation to do so. (Stopes, Enduring, 29)

Stopes wrote about the needs of women within a sexual relationship and although she promoted a passive role for women, she encouraged a much more enjoyable experience. In addition to her writing Stopes opened the first birth control clinic. Whilst knowledge of contraception was limited amongst women of all classes, working-class women were much less likely to know about it than middle and upper-class women.

### **The Role of Women's Friendships**

Many writers of women's sexual history imply that women's friendships in the early twentieth century became stigmatised as a result of the theories of the sexologists. Melville suggests that

Lesbianism was by now attracting antagonism: in 1919, there had been a move to add a new clause to the Criminal Law Amendment Act to prevent "acts of gross indecency by females," which was over-ruled by the House of Lords on the grounds that it would only bring such behaviour to the attention of decent women. (252)

Lillian Faderman and Jeffreys (Spinster, 105) both argue that female sexuality and the emancipation of women were seen as allied to each other, threatening the social order:

the concern over the ramifications of women's increasing independence; the sexologists' theories which came along at a most convenient time to bolster arguments that a woman's desire for independence meant she was not really a woman; and the poetry

and fiction of the French aesthetes which provided anxiety-provoking images of the sexual possibilities of love between women - guaranteed that romantic friendship, which had been encouraged by society in the past, would now be seen in a different, and most antisocial, light. (Faderman, Surpassing, 238)

Looking back it seems obvious that the threat women posed to men's jobs and power was the real threat for which sexuality became an easy target with which to discredit women. In America, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes the phenomenon of the American "New Woman", those women who were educated, entered the professions and tended not to marry. In the course of sixty years she charts the progress of Boston Marriages, where two women would set up home together and live as a married couple, and Romantic Friendships (Smith-Rosenberg, "New Woman"). The emphasis regarding these relationships in both Smith-Rosenberg's and Faderman's accounts is on a non-sexual albeit loving relationship. However, by the early twentieth century these relationships began to be seen as aping masculinity and sexual inversion. It is within this context of a growing awareness of lesbianism that Chris and Edy set up home in 1899.

It was at the turn of the century that the "Sex Question" was raised by the women's movement. The "Sex Question" covered areas such as the inequalities within marriage (this led to the notion of "free unions", or "free love", or as we would understand it today, living together in common-law relationships), sex education and health promotion including the issues of contraception, venereal

diseases and the abuse of women and children.<sup>27</sup> This was an important turning point because it established women as sexual beings - albeit in a heterosexual framework (Bland, 258). For those women who did not want to risk losing their reputation by getting involved in a free union and potentially ending up as an unmarried parent of illegitimate children, something that was still unacceptable, despite the efforts of some people to reform moral thinking, or to marry, the only option was to remain a spinster. Jeffreys demonstrates how the middle-class spinster was generally portrayed as a woman desperate for marriage, but that in reality many spinsters made a deliberate choice not to marry as they saw marriage either as a source of slavery or they wanted to pursue a career and fulfil themselves in a way that would have been prevented by their husbands.

Some feminists were choosing before the First World War not to have any sexual relations with men. They were taking this decision in protest against the form taken by male sexuality, the way that women were oppressed in their relationships with men, and because some of them believed that the position of all women could only be improved in a society where there was a large class of celibate women. (Jeffreys, Spinster, 88)

Eva was especially supportive of the notion of free unions, feeling that in present day marriage we live too closely with one another - we do not give each other room to breathe, to develop, to possess our own

---

<sup>27</sup> Bland looks at the "Sex Question" in more detail in her book Banishing the Beast.

souls . . . yet I should strive if I were married always to conserve romance. I should like each to possess a bedroom and sitting room - each to continue their development in service to the community - the one to invite the other to evenings of work and enjoyment as in the days of pure friendship (Slawson, diary, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1913).

Of course it may also be that Eva was expressing her feelings about what she valued in her friendships with women (or men) rather than a positive wish to be within a heterosexual relationship, but the “sex question” was one that appears to have occupied the thoughts of both Eva and Ruth quite significantly.

From Eva’s diary it is obvious that she read a number of texts that dealt with the “sex question.” These included Carpenter’s Love’s Coming-of-Age which she found “full of suggestion, and as I read my mind wanders off along various lines” (Slawson, letter to Slate, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1911). Two years later she was reading Ellen Key’s Love and Marriage of which she wrote: “it is very fine indeed, and will, I think, be an immense help to me” (Slawson, diary, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1913). However, Eva also read contemporary fiction such as Grant Allen’s The Woman who Did which was one of the first of the “New Woman” novels and was condemned as immoral on the basis that it dealt with a woman – Hermione Barton – who rejected marriage on the basis that it was a form of slavery and had an illegitimate child. It may have been considered immoral, but it was also popular and nineteen editions of the book were brought out in its first year of publication (Richardson and Willis, 24). Eva’s comments were:

I am enjoying it – it is lightly and pleasantly written yet contains many thought suggestive sentences, and deals with troubles and problems – I do not agree with Grant Allen when he makes Hermione say “I wouldn’t so have spoken of my inmost feelings to another woman.” Have we not here Grant Allen the man speaking? Do I not know from experience the deep tender friendship and heart to heart communion possible between women? Indeed the sex Grant Allen alludes to as “a magic link” I have often felt to be a barrier to continuous intercourse between men and women.

(Slawson, diary, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1913)

A few days later when she had finished the book she writes:

some sentiments expressed therein I profoundly disagree with . . . I agree with Hermione that in present day marriage we live too closely with one another – we do not give each other room to breathe, to develop, to possess our own soul – although I should not like to live so apart as Hermione . . . The right of privacy in union appeals strongly to me – It is Ellen Key who says “Love is as sacred as Death - when we realise this we shall grant it the same privacy.”

(Slawson, diary, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1913)

Eva’s comments give us a clear picture of not only what she was reading but also what she thought of contemporary writings and through her diary and letters with Ruth she discussed the ideas they provoked. Eva also wrote about the discussions she had with Ruth and Minna about issues that related to their friends

or their thoughts about how relationships and women's lives could be.

We discussed the womans [sic] movement, and Minna said she thought if we could get an ideal man our difficulties would be solved. I cannot see how we are to get an ideal man until woman is spiritually and economically free - Sometimes I wonder whether such a man will ever exist – when character has evolved to seeming perfection. May it not be that fresh vistas, greater possibilities will open up – we must go from strength to strength – Oh! it is the urge of the spirit which should make woman desire and claim equal responsibilities with men . . . the very fact that man has the power to deny the vote to woman, is conclusive proof not only that he is material authority, but that he does not so recognise her right to freedom! (Slawson, diary, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1913).

Minna, having been married, had strong views about the myth of romantic marriage (Slawson, diary, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1913) and it is obvious from diary entries that she and Minna discussed this on many occasions. Eva

felt convinced that the highest form of marriage is where trust in one another is so great it enables each to accept the love of the other without legal or church band . . . I wonder whether we should arrive at greater strength of character and wisdom of choice if law (with regard to marriage) was destroyed and we were left absolutely free to form, dissolve and reform unions? (Slawson, diary, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1913)

However, despite Eva's desire "to be the receiver of some deep and special love" (Slawson, diary, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1913) she never had the relationship that she "craved" for.

At the turn of the century there were many more women than men and the rise in the numbers of spinsters was perceived as a growing problem that needed to be addressed (Jeffreys, 86). One solution that was put forward by W.R. Gregg in the late nineteenth century as this "problem" started to emerge, was that single women be forced to emigrate to restore the gender balance (Jeffreys, Spinster, 87), a proposal that was deemed to be too expensive, rather than unrealistic or inappropriate by some.

The context of the Sex Question was different for the two groups of women under discussion. Both Ruth and Eva were concerned with the range of issues raised by the women's movement, including the idea of free unions. Whilst Eva was attracted to Mr James - the congregational minister at Walthamstow Chapel - she did not have any relationships with men which, Thompson suggests, was as a result of the difficulty of reconciling the notion of free union with respectability, and maintaining some level of independence (T. Thompson, 14). Whilst Eva would appear to have been aware of birth control there was still some danger of pregnancy and the risk of becoming a "fallen woman". As Eva was herself illegitimate this was something she felt very conscious of and it is likely that she would not have wished to have a child out of marriage, having the personal



knowledge of her mother's experience. This is demonstrated by her diary entry for 25th February 1913:

Such an unpleasant incident at business this morning in connection with a very sad case - a young girl of nineteen has just given birth to an illegitimate child - her life has been despaired of, her nerves having completely given way. . . It is hard to understand why so much suffering, physical, mental and spiritual, should fall to the lot of the women in these cases. (Slawson, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1913)

### **Expression of Lesbian Identity**

Although Eva and Minna had a physical sexual relationship, Eva did not see this as a replacement for a heterosexual relationship. Faderman highlights the notion that during the eighteenth century the romantic friendship was not seen as a threat to heterosexuality, and was condoned if not encouraged as a way in which women could learn about marital sexual relations (Surpassing, 75).

Although Anne Lister's diaries show that some women might be quite clear about being only attracted to women, not all women were in the position of being able to positively choose this. The relationship between Ruth, Eva and Minna does not fit easily into our definition of lesbian relationships today, which is invariably defined by a sexual relationship as well as an emotional one. Neither do the women correspond to the notion of the invert and the mannish lesbian prevalent during their day, but as Thompson states:

Above all, the material bears witness to the love between the

women themselves: their relationships with each other were fundamental to all they managed to achieve. Ruth, Minna and Eva supported and encouraged each other when their desire for independence met with resistance from families and men friends, and in not infrequent periods of depression, and they had a capacity for emotional closeness that did not seem to exist as a reliable factor between men and women. (T. Thompson, 13)

For the Smallhythe trio the Sex Question was focused on their sexuality and lesbianism. The friends they had such as Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, Vera Homes and Evelyn Irons, were aware of their own sexuality and had put a name to it, Radclyffe Hall doing this very publicly in The Well of Loneliness (1928). In the naming of their sexuality some of them had also re-named themselves. For Chris this was the very formal process of changing her name from Christabel Marshall to Christopher St John. This is attributed to her change to Catholicism and liking for John the Baptist (Hamer, 31). However, it is also the case that she changed her female name for a male one. Others like Radclyffe Hall and Claire Atwood were known by the male nicknames "John" and "Tony" respectively. In October 1932 Chris wrote that "I am very glad I am one of those who easily forget what manner of man and woman I am" (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1932) which suggests that she was well aware of her sexuality, and references some of the popular arguments of the sexologists at the time about the conjoining of the male and the female within an "invert".

The Smallhythe trio were a "family," they were happy amongst themselves and yet happy to socialise or work. They were important for each other and when Edy died it appeared that part of the magic that they created as a whole died as well. Their relationship was much more than sex; it was about love, friendship, respect, support and it epitomises a description made by Simonetta Spinelli:

Living in a community of women was an extraordinary experience.

The most amazing discovery was the intense eroticism present there. *It was not lesbianism, but sexuality no longer imprisoned in masculine desire* (quoted in Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 16).

Obviously this raises the question that if this experience is not, or cannot be described as lesbianism, then what is it? If the definition of lesbianism is dependent upon physical sex, and essentially this is the difference between female friendships and lesbian relationships, then how can we reclaim relationships between women that remain unconsummated? If we look at it another way, all friendships are dependent upon mutual attraction at some level, which raises the question of the role of eroticism within friendships. Audre Lorde explored this notion of the erotic as a source of women's power and whilst she urged women to acknowledge desire, at the same time she widened its sphere to include other issues than just that of sexual identity:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical,

emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them and lessens the threat of their difference.

(Lorde, 56)

It is this elusive yet very potent experience that is both described as lesbian and yet denied to be such, dependent upon the (sexual) identity of the person discussing it, that interests me in the lives of these two groups of women.

Many authors (Hollidge, Melville, Whitelaw, Hamer, Collis) have written about the Smallhythe trio as a lesbian *ménage à trois* without questioning what they mean by this. The QED describes this as “a relationship or domestic arrangement in which three people (usually a husband and wife and the lover of one of these) live together or are romantically or sexually involved: (also) a sexual act involving three people” (QED, on-line 15<sup>th</sup> May 2003). Edy and Chris were not a married couple, and the definition is written in a context where heterosexuality is viewed as the norm. However, Chris did refer to her relationship with Edy as “a partnership of 46 years” (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 3 April 1947) and, in her novel Hungerheart she described their early days as “we were as happy as a newly-married pair” (St John, Hungerheart, 219). The implication of this comment is that their relationship was both a romantic and a sexual one as the expectation at that time was that women did not have sexual relationships until they were married. Just prior to this Chris made the comment: “Sally [Edy], who was soon to be my Sally in a very special sense” (St John, Hungerheart, 218) which again

implies that it was an intimate and sexual relationship as opposed to a close friendship. However, Chris's journal The Golden Book presents a slightly different picture. Here Chris, whilst referring to Edy as her beloved, suggests a reticence within their relationship, the implication being sexual reticence. Biographers such as Melville reinforce the notion that there was no sexual intimacy between Edy and Chris.

Because of the destruction of such evidence, it also cannot be proved whether Edy and Chris were sexual lovers. In *Hungerheart* Chris portrays herself as a congenital lesbian, but says that Sally (Edy) liked men "if they behaved well." She implies that "Sally" was sexually reserved and that their physical contact was confined to hand-holding. (Melville, 190-1)

However, Melville's interpretation may well have been influenced by a desire not to see a sexual dimension in their relationship. Whatever the reality of their intimacy, their relationship was a lifelong one. After seventeen years of living together Tony joined the household and whilst there is much discussion of the relationship between Chris and Edy, no-one appears to discuss the role that Tony played within the *ménage*, much less the sexual nature of this involvement. It could be that she was nothing more than a close friend or that the relationship between her and Edy remained discreet because of an acceptance that Chris was the primary partner despite the changing nature of their relationship. Whilst we look back upon this *ménage* with speculation it was not that unusual. Chris wrote a biography about Christine Murrell, a doctor, who also lived with two other

women, and Hamer suggests that much of this writing throws light on Chris's feelings about her own *ménage à trois* (128). Another well known trio were Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge and Evguenia Souline.

A reference to the trio's sexuality comes from Brittain, who - in making reference to Radclyffe Hall's friends - states:

other friends included such well-known personalities as Edith Craig, Christopher St John, Tony Atwood, Francis Yeats-Brown, and Naomi Jacob at Sirmione on Lake Garda. It is justifiable to assume that some of these men and women had homosexual interests or tendencies. (Obscenity, 42)

The predominant evidence of the lesbianism of the women I am researching is based on the ways in which they lived their lives rather than any overt evidence of sexual relationships. Today our assumptions, as with the English definition of a *ménage à trois*, place the emphasis on the sexual arrangements rather than the living arrangements. Whilst I do not want to diminish the importance of sexual practice within a lesbian identity, it is important not to define relationships in the present rather than their historical context. It is understanding that readings of relationships have changed which is critical. We cannot assume that the experience of Anne Lister for example, an upper-class, educated and independent woman, who was able to pursue her sexual desires, was the norm. Whilst her diaries make it obvious that she was attracted to other women and they to her, and that some of these friendships were sexual ones, we can neither

assume that this was an isolated incident nor that it was the experience of all lesbians.

With the exception of Christopher, at no point do any of these women Edy, Tony, Ruth, or Eva, make reference to themselves as lesbians and some of Ruth's writing deals with her troubles with men friends (Slate, diary, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1906; Slate, diary, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1907). However, in Chris's personal journal and in the letters she wrote to Vita Sackville-West that still survive there are a number of references to her lesbianism, either directly or indirectly. In this quotation from Chris's Love Journal she explains why she thought Vita found her attractive:

It is probable too that sated with a series of superficial Lesbian love-affairs with very feminine women, the relationship with a woman of a different type, capable of entering into her intellectual and spiritual life, fulfilled a need. (St John, Journal, n.p.)

Here I understand Chris to mean, not that she was not a lesbian herself, but that she does not fit into the mould of Vita's previous girlfriends, feminine and superficial; she sees herself as a different type and as more of an equal. This raises interesting questions about Chris's understanding of lesbian relationships such as the correlation she makes between "feminine women" and "superficial Lesbian love-affairs". It may be that Chris is speaking from the position of someone who is jealous of those women's intimacies with Vita rather than making a disparaging comment on feminine lesbian women. Chris appears to have seen her lesbian identity as a combination of man and woman, which reflects the

thinking of Havelock Ellis (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 27th October 1932), whose work she was well acquainted with. I shall discuss the issue of how Chris saw her sexuality or her “difference” in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident from the diaries and letters of both Ruth and Eva that whilst they lived “ordinary” lives at the same time they were extraordinary. Although they did not have the advantages of the Smallhythe trio they worked hard at developing any opportunity for self-advancement that they could. Ruth bemoaned the lack of opportunities that were available to her.

I could only think with a certain bitterness of that enormous difference, and of the unfairness of unequal opportunity. “I have the brains” I thought “and the willingness to use them, but I have never had the chance. Even now every little effort of self-improvement has to be made at the expense of rest and recreation. Why should it be so?” (Slate, diary, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1909)

How this differed with other people at that same time is demonstrated by how Ruth struggled with Randall’s family whom she saw “lounging about in easy chairs (when rest was not needed)” which she described as “demoralising” (Slate, diary, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1909). Their diaries show that Ruth and Eva were surrounded by like-minded women, but Ruth’s relationship with both her family and Randall indicate that her interests and views were not the norm. Of the Smallhythe trio it is likely that Edy would never have lived a conventional life –



how many women were born illegitimately to famous actresses? But both their *ménage à trois* and their artistic lifestyles were always going to mark the trio as an unconventional group of women.

## Chapter Two

### Establishing Difference

Integral to women in the early twentieth century developing a lesbian identity is the notion that they recognised themselves as different from other, heterosexual and spinstered women. The attribution of the sexual revolution to the 1960s<sup>1</sup> (a period largely connected with the development of the contraceptive pill and women's consequent increased control over their bodies) does not recognise that that revolution had started at least fifty or sixty years previously.<sup>2</sup> By the 1920's women were discovering and debating the "Sex Question" which, although it primarily concentrated on heterosexuality and the rights of women to retain their independence through a "free union" rather than marriage, raised awareness and discussion of a range of sexual behaviours that included lesbian sexuality.

In this chapter I shall examine the ways in which both friendship groups saw themselves as different and the ways in which they understood this

---

<sup>1</sup> By the 1960s knowledge of sexual behaviour and birth control was much more widely available with some schools introducing sex education (Holdsworth, 149). Many young women in the 1960s – Sheila Jeffreys included (Holdsworth, 154) – felt under pressure to lose their virginity and not only was the contraceptive pill available to unmarried girls, abortion was now also legal. A key difference between the "free unions" and sex equality of the 1960s was that the former were based on a committed relationship and the latter comprised a "sexual revolution philosophy . . . that you should be able to engage in sexual activity without falling in love or being tremendously emotionally involved" (Holdsworth, 155).

<sup>2</sup> Brandon and Bland have both discussed the development of sexuality at the turn of the century. They highlight the work of women such as Marie Stopes and Stella Browne who were championing the sexual rights of women at this time.

difference through an analysis of the life-writings of Chris, Ruth and Eva – as previously mentioned there is little written by Edy or Tony. I intend to use the works of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, sexologists who were contemporaries of the five women, to place their understanding into a contemporary theoretical framework. I shall also argue that the ways in which each group understood their sexual difference was influenced by the difference in their class positions. Fundamental to this class difference was economic difference; money opened up education and employment opportunities, especially for Chris and Tony, which were not available to Ruth and Eva and which in my view impacted upon both their knowledge of lesbianism, their subsequent understanding of difference and their ability to live a lesbian lifestyle.

### **The Idea of Difference**

In the context of this chapter it is important to comment on the use of the word “difference”. The OED defines difference as “the condition, quality, or fact of being different, or not the same in quality or in essence; dissimilarity, distinction, diversity; the relation of non-agreement or non-identity *between* two or more things, disagreement” (on-line 17<sup>th</sup> May 2001). Within the context of feminist or women’s studies difference has been defined differentially across time. As I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, “difference” at the beginning of the twentieth century was framed, largely by men, within the male discourse of science. This was especially true of the sexologists, for many of whom the subject of lesbianism was an aside from their main interest in male homosexuality. It has been argued

that the development of a language of sexuality enabled women to move away from the science of the sexologists and develop their own understandings of “difference.” As briefly indicated in the previous chapter, Ruehl suggests that Hall and The Well of Loneliness marked the start of a “reverse discourse” (“Inverts,” 27) whereby Hall took the work of the sexologists and used it to define the lesbian lifestyle and relationships that she and her friends experienced. The concept of “difference” has been further developed throughout the twentieth century and it is important to keep this in mind, as it is this change that influences the way in which we look back upon these women. Barrett describes difference as a “capacious hold-all of a concept, and [it is] unclear as to the meaning of the term in different contexts” (37). Thus, difference in itself does not give any indication about the extent or type of difference, it just indicates that there is a deviation from the norm. The ambiguity of “difference” and the ways in which theories have changed over time due to a variety of influences is something that I shall return to in the conclusion of my thesis.

### **Lesbians setting the scene**

In establishing the ways in which both the Smallhythe trio and the Ruth/Eva friendship saw themselves as “different” from other women it is worth asking about the extent to which lesbianism and lesbian identity were a subject that was freely discussed, and how that impacted on lesbian identity. Evelyn Irons (1900-2000), a friend of both the “Smallhythe trio” and a former lover of Vita Sackville-West, said that it was a topic that was not talked about (“An Age of

Innocence," video). If we consider that many historians, biographers and academics have either hedged round the reality of a homosexual identity on the basis that the evidence is circumstantial, or they deliberately disregard the individual's sexuality, or that they have misread their subject, then this may have been the case.<sup>3</sup> However, the fact that many personal papers, including letters, diaries and other private papers were destroyed,<sup>4</sup> suggests that there was a reason for this. The obvious reason for this may have been to protect someone's reputation, in which case, perhaps lesbians did talk about their sexuality and their emotional relationships with each other. In fact, it suggests that they were also writing about them. The reasons for the destruction of private papers may not only have been to "protect" someone's reputation, but also to change their story. Una Troubridge destroyed many of Radclyffe Hall's manuscripts and letters. Thus Troubridge clearly attempted to write Evguenia Souline out of Radclyffe Hall's life (Souhami, Trials, 354). Souhami demonstrates how, although Una's "tyrannical hold over John was common knowledge" (321), in the destruction of

---

<sup>3</sup> I am referring here to biographies of people such as Charlotte Brontë whose lifelong friendship with Ellen Nussey has been ignored whilst Arthur Bell Nicholls to whom she was briefly married, has been given a primacy that he did not perhaps deserve. Miller suggests of the relationship between Brontë and Nussey: "like most marriages and long-term relationships, it had its jealousies, rifts and conflicts. Compared with this attachment, Charlotte's relationships with Constantin Heger and Arthur Bell Nicholls both begin to pale into relative insignificance" (32). Biographers of Ellen Terry and her family have largely disregarded Chris except as a devoted friend (Manvell, M. Webster) and the relationship with Tony is mentioned even less. Lillian Faderman amongst others plays down the possibility of sexual relationships within these romantic friendships.

<sup>4</sup> As previously discussed, personal papers belonging to Chris, Edy and Tony were destroyed by themselves. Chris destroyed some of Ethel Smyth's papers (Marcus, 142). Una Troubridge destroyed letters that had been written to Radclyffe Hall from Evguenia Souline along with manuscripts and other papers.

Hall's personal papers and publishing of her own biography of Hall after the death of Evguenia Souline, she attempted to create the myth of a perfect relationship (353).<sup>5</sup> Amongst the destroyed texts is most notably the manuscript of The Shoemaker of Merano which apparently featured Evguenia in the role of the wife (Souhami, Trials, 303) and to whom Hall wished to dedicate it (Souhami, Trials, 310). Troubridge burnt all but thirty pages of The Shoemaker of Merano after Hall's death:

Una also burned all Evguenia's letters to John. She omitted to burn her own diaries, though when John was dying she had promised her she would do so. She could destroy John's work but not her own. She had a great conceit about her diaries and enjoyed rereading and annotating them. They were, in her view, on a par with Pepys and she wanted their publication. Here she thought was "a fine record of a deep, loyal and lasting inverted love" (Souhami, Trials, 354).

There are a number of texts that have only been published after the people

---

<sup>5</sup> Ormrod provides a different version of events from that of Troubridge. He claims that her "book is both 'expurgated' and 'idealised' and in a court of law some of her statements and omissions would amount to perjury!" (290). He continues that "it is a public relations exercise on John's behalf, and often distorts, minimises, or omits things in order to show John in the best possible light" (291). One of the ways Una does this is to gloss over John's relationship with Evguenia. She [John] expected the same tolerant "understanding" from Una that she had expected from Ladye in similar circumstances. Una was both generous and trusting, unable to believe that John would ever demean "her high code of honour." In a typical "wifely" protectiveness of that very honour, Una discreetly maintained in her Life of John many years later that "she [John] was incapable at all times of considering herself alone . . . ' but this was blatantly untrue in the matter of Souline" (230).

involved themselves had died; for example, the manuscript of Vita Sackville-West's diary included in Nigel Nicolson's book Portrait of a Marriage was only discovered after his mother's death and then only published after the death of Violet Trefusis. Una Troubridge wrote her biography of Radclyffe Hall after the death of Evguenia Souline. This demonstrates that whilst some women may not have discussed the subject of sexuality, others were certainly writing about it and wanted to bring both the subject and their own experiences into the public arena.<sup>6</sup>

Chris writes on two occasions about the difficulties she faced in writing a lesbian life without causing a scandal or directly "outing" someone, firstly in Hungerheart (89), and secondly in her biography of Christine Murrell (152). Interestingly she uses almost the same wording in both instances:

If the few hints, the "few diffused faint clues and indirections" that I have been able to trace out here, have done no more than show this in a glass darkly, some part of the purpose will still have been attained. (St John, Christine Murrell, 152)<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> I shall discuss issues about private and public personae in Chapter Five.

<sup>7</sup> Chris had taken this quote from Walt Whitman, a homosexual writer of whom Norton writes that Carpenter wrote to Whitman "in 1874 thanking him for legitimizing the 'love of men'" (71). It first appears in Ellen Terry's autobiography, The Story of My Life, which is later republished by Chris and Edy under the title Ellen Terry's Memoirs. The quote that Terry uses is:

When I read the book, the biography famous,  
And is this then (said I) what the author calls a man's life?  
And so will some one when I am dead and gone write my life?  
(As if any man really knew aught of my life!)  
Why even I myself, I often think, know little or nothing of my real life?  
Only a few hints—a few diffused faint clues and indirections I seek . . . to  
trace out here. (Craig and St John, vii)

So, the clues of a lesbian lifestyle are there in contemporary texts. For the heterosexual biographer the task of reading between the lines to discover the "truth" is made more difficult. As Terry Castle has said, "when it comes to lesbians many people have difficulty in seeing what's in front of them" (Castle, Apparitional, 2). In the case of Chris's autobiographical writing however, we have to beware of taking too much of it literally – the faint clues are sometimes misleading, as I have discussed in Chapter One.

### **An Historical View of Difference**

Jeffrey Weeks has suggested that it is not possible to try and make sense of past expressions of sexuality on the basis of our understanding today. He states that it is

almost meaningless to attempt to analyse this along the modern polarity of lesbian/heterosexual because for very few women up till the present century was such a polarity even conceivable . . . Many of the close relations might have become "physical" in a modern sense; others did not. To say more than this would be to push modern definitions on to an alien scene. (Weeks, Coming Out, 95)

Whilst this quote relates to Weeks' research on nineteenth-century lesbian history, it equally applies to the relationships that I am discussing at the beginning of the twentieth century. We do not know with any certainty to what extent these relationships were sexual or not. At the beginning of Chapter One I put forward the view that lesbian relationships today are clearly based around the erotic



interest in women by women. This was less clearly the case at the beginning of the twentieth century when there was less information available to women about sexuality generally. It is important, then, not to interpret the relationships and interpretations of lesbian identity at the beginning of the twentieth century with our definitions and understanding of relationships today. By the late nineteenth century, the polarity described by Weeks between homosexuality and heterosexuality was being explored and expressed in the work of a growing number of German and British sexologists.<sup>8</sup> There were two key theories developed by these men. The first was that homosexuality was a congenital condition that was biologically determined and therefore could not be cured, and the second was that there was a continuum of the sexes, including a "third" or "intermediate" sex.<sup>9</sup>

Carpenter and Ellis were two of the most influential sexologists of their time and as contemporaries of the women one may assume that there would be similarities in the ways in which they, the sexologists, and the women expressed their understandings of sexual difference. Edward Carpenter's The Intermediate Sex was initially published in 1896 as a chapter in his book Love's Coming-of-Age. He expanded this chapter into a book of the same title in 1908. It is obvious

---

<sup>8</sup> These included Krafft-Ebing, Ulrichs, Carpenter, Ellis, Westphal and Bloch.

<sup>9</sup> I do not intend to pursue the theories developed by the sexologists. Further information and analysis can be found in Jeffreys, Faderman, Bristow, Bland and Doan. Most recently the notion of a continuum has been used by Adrienne Rich in her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" where she introduces the "lesbian continuum" reflecting a continuum between homosexuality and heterosexuality which I discuss in greater detail in my conclusion.

from the title of his book that he supported the notion of a third or intermediate sex that had been developed in the nineteenth century by Ulrichs.

He [Ulrichs] pointed out that there were people born in such a position – as it were on the dividing line between the sexes – that while belonging distinctly to one sex as far as their bodies are concerned they may be said to belong *mentally* and *emotionally* to the other; that there were men, for instance, who might be described as of feminine soul enclosed in a male body, . . . or in other cases, women whose definition would be just the reverse. And he maintained that this doubleness of nature was to a great extent proved by the special direction of their love-sentiment. For in such cases, as indeed might be expected, the (apparently) masculine person instead of forming a love-union with a female tended to contract romantic friendships with one of his own sex; while the apparently feminine would, instead of marrying in the usual way, devote herself to the love of another feminine.

(Carpenter, 117)

Carpenter was a writer rather than a doctor like Ellis, and his books were therefore more readily available to the general public than Ellis's. He was a feminist and therefore received letters from many women who wrote to him for advice. As Hamer notes:

The letters Carpenter received from lesbians expressed gratitude: "I should like to take this opportunity to say what I have always

wanted to say to you, to try and express my gratitude for the splendid work you have done for Uranians." Kathlyn Oliver perceived him to be friendly and supportive to lesbians; she says, as she tells him the story of her life, that she hopes it "doesn't bore you, but I believe you are sympathetic." The letters Carpenter received were more than fan letters; lesbians saw him as a resource which they could use. (17)

Havelock Ellis published his Studies in the Psychology of Sex in 1918. It was based upon his analysis of a series of six case studies. One of these case studies was his wife, Edith Lees Ellis, referred to as Miss H. (Jeffreys, Spinster, 107; Brandon, 115).<sup>10</sup> Ellis suggests in his autobiography that neither he nor his wife recognised her lesbianism prior to their marriage (My Life, 233).

The masculine traits were indeed not obvious in Edith . . . most people, I believe, failed to see them, and I cannot too often repeat that she was not really a man at all in any degree, but always woman, boy, and child, and these three, it seemed, in almost equal measure. (Ellis, My Life, 263)

Ellis seems to be suggesting that not only is it difficult to recognise a lesbian, but that if they do not reflect the stereotype of the "mannish lesbian" this does not mean that "it" i.e. the "mannish lesbian," is not there waiting to be found. In other words, if the stereotype does not work, the lesbian may be concealing her

---

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Brandon analyses in some detail the relationship between Ellis and his wife.

masculinity. Within this quote he seems to go even further to subsume lesbian identity within manhood, suggesting that the lesbian is really a man. In Edith's case, he knows that she is not a man, and identifies her with boyhood rather than manhood, thus ensuring that the "mannish lesbian" who adopts male attributes can never really be a man but always a poor, or adolescent imitation. The other women in his case studies may or may not have been friends of his wife, whom he believed to be "inverted." Ellis supported the notion that homosexuality was a congenital condition that was biologically determined and therefore innate. Like Carpenter, he believed that homosexuality could be explained by the presence of a man's soul in a woman's body and vice versa. Ellis describes the inverted woman as having

a more or less distinct trace of masculinity. She may not be, and frequently is not, what would be called a "mannish" woman, for the latter may imitate men on grounds of taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion, while in the inverted woman the masculine traits are part of an organic instinct which she by no means always wishes to accentuate. The inverted woman's masculine element may, in the least degree, consist only in the fact that she makes advances to the woman to whom she is attracted and treats all men in a cool direct manner, which may not exclude comradeship, but which excludes every sexual relationship, whether of passion or merely coquetry. Usually the inverted woman feels absolute indifference toward men, and not seldom repulsion. (Studies in the

Psychology, 222-3)

Whilst Ellis argues that lesbians are likely to have masculine abilities including a “higher intellect” (Studies in the Psychology, 196), an interest in cross-dressing and smoking (Studies in the Psychology, 246), he claims that the true invert would not emphasise her masculinity precisely because she is aware of her “sexual perversion.” Ellis pursues a number of specific themes throughout the six case studies, including those of insanity or neuropathic tendencies, schoolgirl crushes and transvestism. These themes provide us not only with the basis of his argument but also show the flaws inherent in his work. Although Ellis pursues these themes, many of his subjects do not appear to display the characteristics he proposes.

Whilst Ellis put forward the stereotypical attributes that were associated with the “New Woman”<sup>11</sup> of the late nineteenth century to categorise the invert, at the same time he denied that such obvious stereotypes could identify the true invert who would not wish to make herself known. If, as Ellis suggests, it is not possible to tell who is a lesbian purely on the basis of stereotypes, he then has to categorise those lesbians who do not conform to the stereotype. He therefore suggests that there are some women whom Bloch has described as “pseudohomosexual” (Bloch, 489). These women are not true inverts, but are capable of being seduced into a homosexual relationship. It appears that whilst

---

<sup>11</sup>The stereotype of the “New Woman” was an educated and generally economically independent woman. This stereotype is associated with the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. I look at the “New Woman” and her stereotypes in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Ellis and his contemporaries could comprehend the notion that a woman might be “mannish” and in such circumstances be attracted to women as a man would be, they could not understand the idea that a woman could be feminine and be attracted to women. The only way in which they could understand this behaviour was that the feminine woman was passive rather than active in this relationship. In the same way that the popular opinion was that a woman’s sexual interest had to be awakened by a man, the “pseudohomosexual” woman’s interest had to be awakened by the true invert. It was inconceivable that the “pseudohomosexual” woman might be a true invert.

Ellis conflates the discourses of sexuality and feminism. The “New Woman,” educated and economically independent, is identified by lesbian stereotypes which then provide the basis on which to undermine the women’s movement, suffrage and the emancipation of women.<sup>12</sup> As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who has researched the “New Woman” in an American context suggests, the male physicians

had already begun to construct a second mythic figure in order to condemn the politically disruptive New Woman as sexually dangerous to her class and race. By 1900 male physicians, sex reformers and educators had unveiled their new construction. The New Woman who, while standing outside of conventional institutions and socially acceptable role, had proudly boasted of her

---

<sup>12</sup> I shall expand upon the ideas of sexuality and suffrage in Chapter Four.

sexual purity had lied. She was a secretly and dangerously sexualized figure. Her social liminality was rooted in sexual inversion. She belonged to an "intermediate sex." She embodied the unnatural and the monstrous. She was a "Mannish Lesbian." (Smith-Rosenberg, "Discourses," 268)

Both Ellis and Carpenter not only suggest that there is a subversive link between feminism and sexuality using the stereotype of the "mannish lesbian," but that the suffrage movement encouraged educated women to become lesbians:

These unquestionable influences of modern movements cannot directly cause sexual inversion, but they develop the germs of it, and they probably cause a spurious imitation. This spurious imitation is due to the fact that the congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in women of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily, influence others. (Ellis, Studies in the Psychology, 262)

We know that Chris,<sup>13</sup> Radclyffe Hall and Vita Sackville-West<sup>14</sup> knew of Ellis' work. When Radclyffe Hall wrote her novel The Well of Loneliness in 1928 she prided herself on its scientific basis which, was largely drawn from the theories

---

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter One, for reference to Chris and her knowledge of Ellis' theories.

<sup>14</sup> In her biography of Vita Sackville-West Glendinning writes:

here are the books on the psychology of sex that she had read with Violet, and then with Harold: six volumes of Havelock Ellis, with "V.N." written in each. In the volume Sexual Inversion Harold had inscribed a quotation from Verlaine "On est fier quelquefois quand on se ompare." There is Edward Carpenter's The Intermediate Sex, and Otto Weininger's Sex and Character, with "V.N. Polperro 1918" on the flyleaf, and passages about male and female characteristics heavily annotated (405).

developed by Ellis, Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing (Cline, 227). In order to ensure that her novel was taken seriously in its scientific representation of sexual inversion she asked Ellis to write a preface for her novel supporting the value of her work (Cline, 237). Both these texts were written at the time when Chris was producing her semi-autobiographical novel Hungerheart in which she makes reference to her sexuality and also to her relationship with Edy. What is not clear is whether Chris used Ellis' theories to understand her own sexuality or whether this was a language she had already developed for herself. It will become clear however, that their understandings were similar.

Sexologists such as Carpenter, who were homosexual themselves, had a vested interest in proving that homosexuality was normal. In order to make homosexuality acceptable biological or congenital theories of homosexuality were adopted by many. This was enhanced by a notion that somehow this development, the fusion of masculinity and femininity, was part of a "Darwinesque" evolution, which created a better, more noble and spiritual person. This was quite a well-known argument at the time as Stella Browne's strong reaction to it seems to indicate: "the homosexual impulse *is not in any way superior* to the normal; it has a fully equal right to existence and expression, it is not worse, no lower; *but no better*" (Browne, "Studies," 611, emphasis in original). This idea of the superiority of the homosexual nature is one that Chris describes in relation to Christine Murrell when she writes that she may be "too highly developed as a human being" (St John, Christine Murrell, 100).



Both male and female sexologists were concerned about the relationship between independence and lesbianism. Women like Marie Stopes and Stella Browne were advocating the benefits of sexual relationships and blamed the social conventions of the day for encouraging women to become lesbians in an attempt to maintain their independence.

*our present social arrangements, founded as they are on the repression and degradation of the normal erotic impulse, artificially stimulate inversion and have thus forfeited all right to condemn it.*

There is a huge, persistent, indirect pressure on women of strong passions and fine brains to find an emotional outlet with other women. A woman who is unwilling to accept either marriage – under present laws – or prostitution, and at the same time refuses to limit her sexual life to auto-erotic manifestations, will find she has to struggle against the whole social order for what is nevertheless her most precious personal right. (Browne, 611, emphasis in original)

Since it was very difficult for any woman to have a sexual relationship outside of the social order, two main issues that had to be faced were those of sin and shame. Ellis spends much time discussing shame within the case studies, although this does not appear to reflect how the Smallhythe trio felt. His case study of his wife Edith makes one reference that suggests she may have felt ashamed. However, it is not clear whether her shame was related to her sexuality or her choice of partner (Studies in the Psychology, 225). In fact, Ellis

notes that “the effect on her of loving women is distinctly good, she asserts, both spiritually and physically, while repression leads to morbidity and hysteria” (Studies in the Psychology, 226).

The key point regarding the notion of inversion and of the third sex was to move homosexuality away from an association with sin and crime. At the same time there was a growing amount of literature that was either overtly lesbian or had in it those “faint clues” that Chris talked about in her own writing. That writing included Henry James’s Turn of the Screw (1898); D.H. Lawrence’s The Rainbow (1915); Clemence Dane’s Regiment of Women (1917); Radclyffe Hall’s The Unlit Lamp (1924) and A.T Fitzroy’s Despised and Rejected (1918). In some respects it was perhaps easier to create lesbian fiction than it was to write a lesbian auto/biography. Like Chris, other women such as Renée Vivien and Djuna Barnes wrote autobiographical accounts within a fictional framework, A Woman Appeared to Me (1904) and Nightwood (1936) respectively. Radclyffe Hall was clear about her reasons for writing The Well of Loneliness:

I wished to offer my name and my literary reputation in support of the cause of the inverted. I knew that I was running the risk of injuring my career as a writer by rousing up a storm of antagonism; but I was prepared to face this possibility because, being myself a congenital invert, I understood the subject from the inside as well as from medical and psychological text books. I felt therefore that no one was better qualified to write the subject in fiction than an

experienced novelist like myself who was actually one of the people about whom she was writing and was thus in a position to understand their spiritual, mental and physical reactions, their joys and their sorrows, and above all their unceasing battle against a frequently cruel and nearly always thoughtless and ignorant world. (Souhami, Trials, 146)<sup>15</sup>

The Well of Loneliness was no more overtly lesbian than any of these other texts, in fact it was probably less so. However, James Douglas in the Sunday Express newspaper caused negative publicity through his vehement reaction to it and his oft-quoted comment, "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel. Poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul" (Sunday Express, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1928). The reason for the novel's infamy was the publicity it received courtesy of Douglas and the subsequent obscenity trial which is documented in Brittain's book.

### **Life Writings of Christopher St John**

Although many of the trio's papers were destroyed, Chris left a variety of writings including Hungerheart. She wrote at least two biographies of her lesbian contemporaries, one about Ethel Smyth, the female composer and suffragette, which had been commissioned by Smyth's brother (St John, Ethel Smyth, xviii), and one of Christine Murrell, a doctor whose biography was commissioned by

---

<sup>15</sup> This quote is from a letter by Radclyffe Hall to Gorham Munson, 2 June 1934. It is currently held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.

one of her partners (St John, Christine Murrell, xv). This suggests that she had been approached not only for her writing skills but possibly also because of her sexuality. These biographies, whilst subject to narrative conventions and what was publicly permissible in writing, provide an indication of Chris's views about lesbian lives. Some of Chris's most candid writing is the most personal, and includes the letters and "Love Journal" that were written by Chris to Vita Sackville-West. These give us an insight into her passion for Sackville-West and Chris' personal understanding of her own difference.

Chris is the only one of the five women discussed here who deals directly with her sexual identity within her writing. In analysing Chris's understanding of her sexual difference it is important to note that the writings that I am looking at span at least three decades, from 1915 and the publication of Hungerheart, to letters dated in 1948, some time after Edy had died. Over this period it is likely that Chris's understanding of her sexuality and her relationships changed. This is supported in a letter that Chris wrote to Sackville-West, to whom Chris had sent a copy of Hungerheart:

I certainly wrote that immature book with its monstrous pretension to be the history of a soul at the age of 38. Well I had forgotten all about it, until you came into my life. It hasn't been at all pleasant to be reminded of it but it has been salutary. It is not a bad thing for an idealist to see the baseless fabric of his aspirations dissolve. Know thyself! An impossible aspiration, as the self is always in a state of

flux. I don't know why I am writing this to you. Yes I do. The idea that you may think I am what I was, that things and people and God are what they were to me, is insupportable (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1932).

This quotation reflects some of the issues that were important to Chris. She emphasises the fact that she has changed over the past seventeen years, with regard to her relationships, her sexuality and her Catholicism, all of which are key themes in Hungerheart. Chris also suggests that her love for Edy is no longer what it was and that she is free to love Sackville-West, although it is unclear what that actually means. Finally, hidden away in the text Chris refers to herself with a male pronoun, which reflects an understanding of her lesbian identity that is based upon the notion, close to Ellis and Carpenter's ideas of a third sex, of a conflation of femininity and masculinity.

### **Hungerheart**

Hungerheart is divided into two parts. The first is entitled "The World of Ignorance", the second "The Cell of Self-knowledge." The first part traces the protagonist's childhood, her education, her experience of sexual difference from an early age, her early relationships, work and her relationship with Edy. In the second part she writes of her conversion to Catholicism which led to feelings of being reborn (278). The book was "published anonymously at the last from weakness" (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1932) and the autobiographical "truth" of her story she describes to Sackville-West as

a mixture, as you will easily discern, of truth and fiction. I hadnt [sic] the pluck to write an honest autobiography, not from fear of exposing my frailties but from scruples about wounding living persons. The truth is in essentials, the lies or fiction in details. Places are composed and persons too (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1932).

Whilst there are a number of biographies which mention Chris,<sup>16</sup> very little is known about her early life. Steen suggests that Chris liked to present a romantic image of herself as an orphan (Steen, 250) but what was behind the cultivation of this image or the lack of reference to her family is unclear. As indicated before, we know from Emma Marshall's biography that Chris had siblings and that the family appeared to be relatively close. It may be that there had been a family argument which caused the family to lose touch, which may have been about Chris' sexuality. However, this is pure speculation. It is also possible that Chris did have contact with her family but that we do not have any evidence of this. Some of her personal papers were destroyed when there was a fire in her flat of which she felt "an immense relief that these troublesome witnesses to my identity had been burned" (Hungerheart, 209).<sup>17</sup> There are no indications of what these papers were although it would appear that their destruction gave Chris the

---

<sup>16</sup> There is no biography of Chris herself but she, Edy and Tony are mentioned in many of the biographies about Ellen Terry (Manvell, Melville, St John). Holledge and Whitelaw also spend a considerable time on the trio in the context of Edwardian theatre and Cicely Hamilton who was a great friend of the trio, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> This fire is corroborated by her sister in their mother's biography although nothing in there suggests that the family relationship changed as a result of it.

opportunity to redefine herself.

As Chris narrates her childhood experiences we have little information with which we can verify the "truth" despite her explanations in her letter to Sackville-West. One important theme, especially in relation to sexual identity and the understanding of difference, is the way in which she renames herself and develops a male persona for herself from an early age.<sup>18</sup> Although it would appear that she lived with her parents, Chris describes the night when a mysterious man called, a man she presumed to be her father who names her "John-Baptist," writing, "perhaps the boy's name will protect the poor baby, and give her a man's strength to fight her way in this brutal world" (St John, Hungerheart, 5). This convention of naming a female child with a male name was also used by Radclyffe Hall in The Well of Loneliness when Stephen Gordon's father names her Stephen. "He insisted on calling the infant Stephen, nay more, he would have it baptized by that name" (Hall, 1991, 9). Later in the book Chris suggests that the papers that refer to her parentage - a man she calls Austin with whom her mother was infatuated (Hungerheart, 27) - were burnt at some point (Hungerheart, 150). She also makes mention of a woman she calls "the mysterious Miss Canning who came to stay with us, and for some reason extended her visit from weeks to months and from months to years" (Hungerheart, 23), and whom she believed to be her father's mistress (Hungerheart, 23). This scenario demonstrates how marriage and the sanctity of

---

<sup>18</sup> I intend to return to the subject of renaming and its importance in the expression of sexual identity in Chapter Three.

the family were viewed at the end of the nineteenth century by the majority of the upper-middle and upper classes; there was little opportunity for divorce and as a result people who could, developed a range of living options within the context of the Victorian family. The overriding concern within all these scenarios was to avoid scandal. Within the context of the Smallhythe trio, when Chris and Edy first started to live together it was probably unlikely that people saw this as anything other than an expedient option for two single working women. This had changed by the 1930's by which time knowledge of lesbianism had become more public, especially after the trial of The Well of Loneliness, and the attempt to legislate against lesbian sex in the Criminal Law Amendment Act. I am not suggesting that all women who lived together might be identified as lesbians, but that this became an increasing possibility in the context of greater sexual awareness.

In writing, or rewriting, her history Chris made a conscious decision not only to rename herself from birth, but to rewrite her emotional history with the language and understanding of her sexuality that she had when writing her book. Chris presents herself in her childhood as a girl who "was too much like a boy" (Hungerheart, 32). She enjoyed playing cricket with her brothers (Hungerheart, 53), although she had "no desire to be a boy" (Hungerheart, 33). In describing herself as "boy" she identifies herself with the theories that were propounded by Ellis and Carpenter in the suggestion that she has a male soul in a female body (Carpenter, 125). By building for herself an image of a "tomboy"<sup>19</sup> she implies, as

---

<sup>19</sup> In using this word it is worth noting that "tom" or "tommy" was a slang word for lesbian at the end of the nineteenth century (Straub, 150).



Ellis does in his case studies, that this could be an indication of her lesbian sexuality in later life (Studies in the Psychology, 230).

As previously indicated, there has been much academic discussion about whether or not lesbians did have sex and if they did not what that meant in terms of a sexual identity.<sup>20</sup> Chris is clear about her sexuality – both physical and spiritual – in her writing. Chris is attracted to people of the “intermediate sex:”

It has always been to men who are not ashamed to be womanly, and to women who are not afraid to be manly, that my heart has been attracted. The noble qualities of human nature are neither male nor female. (Hungerheart, 245)

However, after having had relationships with women – Edy was not her first partner – she becomes much clearer about her attraction to women.

Since I had tasted the joys of friendship with a woman possessing many attributes that are generally praised as “manly” I had lost all desire for the friendship of men, and for the love I had never cared. (Hungerheart, 245)

It cannot be pure coincidence that she uses the verb “taste” in her description of female friendship, which not only conjures up the senses, but implies their sexual nature. Chris thus does not seem to be talking about romantic friendship, but about a physical sexual relationship. Chris had “read all the literature of friendship and in every word my own experience seemed to smile at me” (St

---

<sup>20</sup> See Donoghue, Faderman, Jeffreys, Weeks.

John, Hungerheart, 226). Throughout her writing Chris understands sexual difference in terms of the combination of male and female attributes. She also introduces Carpenter's idea of nobility, that somehow the homosexual is a more highly developed human being than the heterosexual is. In explaining her early feelings of difference Chris acknowledges the difficulty of looking back and making sense of them. At an early age she describes these feelings as

something stirred in me, lying far deeper than the possibility that no suitors would come my way and I expressed it as well as I could.

"I've read things about marriages" I said. "It's a horrid thing. I would rather die." (Hungerheart, 35)

From an early age Chris saw herself in terms of masculinity, thus fitting the sexologists' stereotype. When Chris left home to go to Somerville College she "looked to it to make a man of me and to enable me to earn my living like a man" (Hungerheart, 110). For Chris as well as other women one important issue was to have economic independence in order to live the lifestyle they chose for themselves. This was not usually compatible with marriage.<sup>21</sup> At this point in time there were no, or few independent female role models to identify with, which meant that women appropriated male or masculine attributes to signify their independence. Chris's desire was the

idea that there may be women, neither wives nor mistresses, who are yet fulfilling themselves completely, who are not poor or starved

---

<sup>21</sup> Obviously there were exceptions to this. Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Vita Sackville-West were able to live more unconventional lives because to a large extent they were economically independent, and operated within a specific artistic upper-middle class.

in their singleness but rich and fed with angel's food, is one which the natural man rejects as incredible and the natural woman entertains perhaps for a moment in a lifetime and dismisses for ever as the folly of dreams. (Hungerheart, 90)

In Hungerheart, Chris refers to her relationship with Edy as being like a marriage (219) and herself as a son-in-law (221). Whilst their partnership persisted over their lifetimes, Chris suggests in her book that the relationship did not last that long. She suggests that Sally (Edy) loved her with a maternal love (219) but that she did not reveal much that was close to her heart (221). Chris suggests that they had similar attitudes to men, "she liked them if they 'behaved well' . . . but she had no special tastes for a man's conduct" ( 221). In Hungerheart and therefore in biographical accounts such as Melville's (Melville, 189) it appears that Chris and Edy's relationship changed dramatically following Edy's contemplation of marriage and Chris's subsequent alleged suicide attempt. "I still loved my friend, but my ideal of friendship had been tarnished. I saw that I was never to know a human relationship in which I was to be the 'only one' to the 'only other'" (St John, Hungerheart, 240). Chris appears to have identified with a certain masculine disposition including the desire for a relationship with a woman. However, to what extent was there any language to express this difference? Later she would claim "when you have learned a language, and can speak it easily, you find it hard to remember the days when you struggled in vain to express the simplest things" (Hungerheart, 36).

## Chris's biography of Christine Murrell

Christine Murrell lived in a lesbian *ménage à trois* with Honor Bone and Marie Lawson. In her biography Chris describes Murrell's relationships with these two women, explaining why the *ménage à deux* became a *ménage à trois*. Hamer suggests that her understanding of this relationship may have been influenced by her own relationship and the introduction of Tony into her relationship with Edy.

Honor Bone was hindered from supplying all that Christine Murrell needed in the companion of her rare hours of leisure by her disinclination for strenuous activity, and by reasons of health which, apart from this temperamental disinclination, prohibited it . . . The solution, the formation of a new friendship with someone younger, stronger, and more energetic than herself, might have been unwelcome to Honor Bone if she had been a selfish, jealous and possessive woman. As she was not, and was sensible enough to recognise that the new friendship was to her advantage as well as to Christine Murrell's, she adapted herself to the change it brought about in their domestic life together with something more than a good grace. That the transformation of a *ménage à deux* into a *ménage à trois* should have been affected without any friction was creditable to everyone concerned. (St John, Christine Murrell, 101, emphasis in original)

Hamer questions what the "energetic thing was that Chris Murrell liked to do in

her free time which required a female partner?" (128), suggesting a much more erotic interpretation of lesbian relationships than may have been the case. This argument suggests that Tony's relationship with Edy became the primary one rather than Edy's relationship with Chris – which was never the case.

Throughout Chris's letter to Sackville-West there are references to Chris's "shattered knee" or "stricken eye" which could suggest that Chris accepted Tony into the household because she could not keep up with Edy for health reasons. Certainly in one of these letters she writes, "love and I had become strangers until last August" (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1932). This was the date that Chris and Sackville-West spent the night together and could suggest that since Tony joined the household she had not been in an intimate relationship. Whatever the nature of it, the Smallhythe trio did successfully change their relationship from a *ménage à deux* into a *ménage à trois* as described in the above passage in which it is possible to read an element of pride in Chris's writing.

In tackling the subject of Murrell's sexual identity Chris makes a number of comments in her biography that may reflect her own beliefs, rather than Murrell's.

Christine Murrell never married, never even had a love affair, if I am to believe friends who were in her confidence and speak with authority, because she was not the kind of woman who has a natural chemical affinity with a man. It is possible that she was sexually undeveloped, or as I prefer to put it, too highly developed

as a human being, with a nice balance of male and female attributes and qualities, to be strongly sexed. (St John, Christine Murrell, 99).

Of course it may be argued that she had never married or had a love affair because she had not been seen with any beaux. It may also be argued that she was, in contemporary terms, of the intermediate sex, which is supported by Chris's own understanding of her sexuality as expressed in the second part of the quotation which echoes the writing of the sexologists. Chris writes that "a stable friendship between two women which often leads to their setting up house together is now quite common, and accepted as an alternative to marriage" (St John, Christine Murrell, 35). This suggests that Chris felt that lesbian relationships – in the guise of two women living together - were accepted, presumably where those women were unable to secure a heterosexual relationship. The reference to a "stable relationship" suggests that Chris was thinking of a loving or romantic friendship. It may be that in the years following World War I there was a lack of men to marry in which case it was perfectly acceptable for women to live and socialise together as this meant that their relatives did not have to accommodate their spinster relation. It may also be that Chris understood that people accepted lesbian relationships, although this meant that people would recognise them as such which was not necessarily the case. Radclyffe Hall said of her relationship with Evguenia Souline, that Evguenia should think of Hall in terms of having been married to Troubridge when they met (Souhami, Trials, 313). This implies that Hall intended to remain with Troubridge – whether this was because she had a commitment to her or because Troubridge

made it impossible for her to leave is debatable – but by default the relationship between Hall and Souline became that of a husband and his mistress. This notion of marriage and commitment could explain why there appear to be a number of lesbian *ménage à trois*. In the same way that Chris describes her parents' relationships in Hungerheart, where the marriage remained whilst they both pursued other relationships, especially in the context of Miss Canning who was introduced into the family home, it may be that lesbian couples stayed together within a household because of the mores of the day and notions of commitment and family. These lesbian relationships may have been modelled on heterosexual households.

### **Ruth, Eva and Understandings of Difference**

At no point did Ruth, Eva or Minna identify themselves with a lesbian sexuality. This was not because they were unaware of lesbianism, nor because they positively saw themselves as not being lesbian, merely that they did not associate the ways in which they felt their difference with their understanding of lesbianism. Ruth's comment on a friend's party that she attended highlights the difference she felt from the majority of women around her. "Last night Daisy and I went to Sarah Garnett's 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday Party . . . of course there were some odious, detestable kissing games, which we had to endure bravely" (Slate, diary, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1905). However, Ruth had not always felt like this. Earlier diary entries suggest that she was "rather fond of taking notice of boys (most of my companions do it)" (Slate, diary, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1897). Between 1897 and 1905, Ruth's

writing reflects a change in her opinions, moving from a traditional position of adolescent heteroromance to a more complex relation to heterosexuality which she rejects in many ways. Ruth's move away from an interest in boys demonstrates her personal development in moving from these early friendships and mutually shared ideas with peers to developing her own ideas and identity. This development is at the core of her sense of difference from other women that she frequently expresses.<sup>22</sup> Her changing views were given space to be explored by Ewart's death. If he had lived it is likely that they would have married as there had obviously been discussion about waiting until she was eighteen before they could get engaged (Slate, diary, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1900). However, Ruth's writing frequently mentions not feeling "natural" with the men with whom she had relationships. Early in her relationship with Wal she writes in her diary how he "said I would not be natural with him, and I said I was nearly always conscious of something between us which would not let me be natural" (Slate, diary, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1908). Despite this and the fact that she eventually married Hugh, she moved towards a lesbian lifestyle<sup>23</sup>, which did not entail a sexual choice.

The following quote from one of Eva's letters demonstrates how Eva felt that her and Ruth's experiences and feelings were allied to those of the "odd

---

<sup>22</sup> In a diary reference to a discussion with Elizabeth Brown she writes: "I found myself able to talk to her about things that had long perplexed me, as I had never spoken to anyone before – she seemed to understand me at once" (Slate, diary, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1906). Whilst it is unclear exactly what the nature of their conversation was, there is an implication of difference, i.e. that Ruth had felt unable to speak on some matters, concerned that other people would not understand her.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of what a lesbian lifestyle is in the context of this research.



women.”<sup>24</sup>

I fell in with another “odd woman” today at the picnic – Mrs Awes’ sister, a woman of about thirty-three or thirty-four. On our way home she opened her heart to me and told me the story of yearning and emptiness that you and I are getting so used to hearing and feeling. I have been quivering all day! (Slawson, letter to Slate, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1910).

This passage could be read to suggest that Eva identified with the feelings, possibly lesbian, expressed by this woman. Another reading could be that Eva understood the feelings expressed by this woman – but Eva’s needs and desires were different. But if it were the latter, why had she been “quivering all day”? Could it be that Eva had found someone whose feelings matched her own? Whatever the truth behind Eva’s comments it is clear that she identified herself with the feelings that were expressed by this woman whom she identified as “odd”. More specifically Eva identified a “yearning and emptiness” which she implies both she and Ruth had and continued to feel. A quote from Constance Maynard (1849-1935) in 1887 demonstrates how that feeling of emptiness was more easily linked to a lack of heterosexual relationships rather than a need for a

---

<sup>24</sup> There are two possible interpretations of this term. Firstly Tierl Thompson describes “odd women” as “single women who felt frustrated and redundant as a result of the position assigned to them by society” (152). However, the second option is in terms of a lesbian sexuality as established by Faderman in the title of her book Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers. Barbara Bell over twenty years later described how general understandings of lesbian identities were expressed: “you were just one that preferred women’s company. If you preferred men you were okay and if you were one of these other ones, you were just a bit odd” (42). Terry in Correspondence makes a reference to Edy as “odd” (St John, 85).

lesbian relationship:

It's all very well to call [my] loneliness "sex feeling," but I can honestly say my thoughts never strayed to a man. I wanted to live thus with my flock in a happy community, but I wanted one life to stand beside me, one heart to pour its fullness into mine, and then I should be amply content. (Maynard quoted in Vicinus "One Life", 617)

Maynard identifies that she wants a partner, but she does not identify that she wants a sexual relationship with a woman although she knows that she has no desire for a sexual relationship with a man. Eva expresses similar feelings in that she also feels a lack of the relationship, but does not overtly associate her feelings of emptiness and love of her women friends with a lesbian identity. Bland, with reference to Ruth and Eva, highlights that "sexual expression outside a heterosexual relationship, such as in the case of masturbation or homosexuality, was generally believed to be a *male* aberration" (170, emphasis in the original) and so consequently most women did not consider a lesbian identity as an option. This argument does not completely match the experience of Ruth and Eva as they were aware of homosexuality, just did not associate themselves and their feelings with it. Minna seems to recognise, perhaps having had the experience of marriage, that what Eva appears to desire in a heterosexual relationship may not satisfy the emptiness she feels. This suggests that Minna not only had much more experience in both physical and emotional relationships than Eva had. It may also be that she recognised, even if she did not have the

language to describe it, that Eva was looking for a lesbian relationship.

In their letters and diaries Ruth and Eva make reference to the “Sex Question.” In 1908 Ruth wrote in her diary that “Elizabeth and I sat in woods and talked during the morning, mostly on women and the Sex Question” (Slate, diary, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1908). During the next five years both Ruth and Eva’s ideas about marriage and free love developed with Eva wondering “whether ‘free love’ is really higher than monogamy?” (Slawson, diary, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1913) and a few days later:

I felt convinced that the highest form of marriage is where trust in one another is so great it enables each to accept the love of the other without legal or church bond . . . I wonder whether we should arrive at greater strength of character and wisdom of choice if law (with regard to marriage) was destroyed and we were left absolutely free to form, dissolve and reform unions? Society would be in a curious state of chaos for a time, but at least without deception (Slawson, diary, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1913).

On the one hand Eva advocates free unions but at the same time questions whether they are morally better than monogamy. This ambivalence reflects the debates of the period.

Ruth and Eva were both aware of the writings of Carpenter and Ellis. In 1911 Eva wrote to Ruth about Carpenter’s Love’s Coming-of-Age which she

found "full of suggestion[s], and as I read my mind wanders off along various lines" (Slawson, letter to Slate, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1911). Eva had a connection with Carpenter through David Thompson, a close friend of Ruth's who had had a relationship with Carpenter. Eva makes a reference to meeting "a man who lives with Edward Carpenter – because of that I looked at him with interest" (Slawson, diary, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1914). This indicates Eva's awareness of Carpenter and of his homosexuality. She also had a connection with Ellis, who set up home with Ruth's friend and former flatmate, François Lafitte.

Among the books held in the Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson archive, and therefore presumably having belonged to Ruth, are The Intermediate Sex and Love's Coming of Age by Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis's Dance of Life and Questions of our Day, along with The Mine of Dreams by Edith Ellis, Havelock's first wife. All this indicates that Ruth and Eva were aware of the work of the sexologists and had read much of it as the letters demonstrate. Bearing this in mind many of the comments both Ruth and Eva made either to themselves or each other raise questions about their understanding of their own sexual identity. Some of their comments, viewed today, can be construed as demonstrating lesbian desire. Ruth writes in her diary about a Mrs Horncastle<sup>25</sup>: "I fell in love with her. I believe I fall in love with a certain type of woman as easily

---

<sup>25</sup> Ruth was introduced to Mrs Horncastle along with Mrs Morris through her friend Eleanor Fairfax. Mrs Morris was a Christian Scientist and Ruth was hoping to find out whether Christian Science could help her sister Daisy who was suffering from tuberculosis. From the diary entry it appears that she lived with Mrs Horncastle (Slate, diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1908).

as some girls fall in love with men" (Slate, diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1908). Much later, when living in York, she writes about meeting a woman who

possesses an ardent and attractive personality. Our hearts went out to each other at once. . . . We went out for a walk in the afternoon and found some delightful meadows, in one of which we seated ourselves on the trunk of a fallen tree. I enjoyed her physical beauty too and loved to watch her boyish gestures. Such a lovely healthy face and figure; the face very delicate and intelligent. She was wearing a pretty, soft green hat, devoid of trimming and independent of hatpins, and ever and anon she lifted it and passed her hand through her hair in a delightfully expressive manner. . . . in the evening we sat telling each other the story of our lives, and as I felt the beauty of her a wonderful sense of healing and comfort stole through me. (Slate, diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1916)

Eva would appear to have had a physically close if not sexual relationship with Minna as these extracts from her diary suggest.

Once in the night Minna murmured, "How *close* we are, we can never grow apart now – we were near before, but not so near as *now*." We clasped one another, and Minna said, "It is worth living to love thus." Oh precious love, dear words. I treasure you in my heart and here, but you seem almost too precious to pen! (Slawson, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1914).

This intimate friendship obviously lasted some months as Eva wrote later that year: “before leaving Minna, we experienced again that merging of spirit. I came away stirred in my whole being – but I tremble to even write of such moments in their sacredness and intensity!” (Slawson, diary, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914). Perhaps more telling is the gesture that Minna makes prior to Eva going to Woodbrooke,

In bed Minna said she wanted to give me a ring if I went to Woodbrooke – I felt so happy then and ashamed of former feelings – it is not the *ring* really, but it is such a symbol of *love*. I felt so close to Minna tonight, and our love so deep and precious!

(Slawson, diary, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1915)

There are only a few letters from Minna to Ruth in the Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson archive. T. Thompson suggests that “Minna who had never written a word in her life, was prompted by the loss of Eva to write not only letters, but poems and “accounts” of her own and Eva’s life, which she sent to Ruth to ‘see and criticise’” (T. Thompson, 303). What she does write confirms the closeness of their relationship:

O Eva, never to feel your arms round me again, never to hear you say “O Minna,” never to sleep with you and hear you say “I do love you.” This is to suffer. (Simmons, Letters to Eva, no date c1916-17)

Also in the archive is a poem:

To Eva who left me March 4<sup>th</sup> 1916.  
Dear god, didst though need my love

That thou should take her from me  
I cannot feel 'twas good for me  
To be so rent in twain,  
Sometimes she seems so far away  
Sometimes so near  
At times the years so endless  
At times a moment  
Ere we meet again  
Abide with me sweet Eva  
In death, even as thou didst in life  
This is my hearts cry.

Dear God didst take my love from me  
So I should firmer stand alone?  
Is it thou art a jealous god  
And needst the whole heart?  
I cannot have it so  
Such love as this is sent to show us what love is  
And god is love  
O make my heart overflow with thy divinist Gift -

This is my hearts desire (Simmons, c1916, original spelling).

This poem could easily be interpreted as that of a lover. Early on in their relationship Eva wrote: "I told her [Minna] this evening if she were a man I should

feel absolutely completed – Minna says I rest her so and that I am a robber and a thief, for I have stolen her heart” (Slawson, diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1913). So despite the closeness of the two women, Eva did not appear to think of the possibility that she and Minna might have a lesbian relationship, still focusing on heterosexuality in terms of sexual and lifelong relationships.

We know that Ruth and Eva were conversant with the theories of Carpenter and Ellis. We also know that Ruth and Eva spoke in terms of romantic love about other women. We know that Eva had a passionate relationship with Minna, which was probably physical. But whilst they understood theories of difference, and despite the references that allied themselves to women who had a sense of sexual difference, they did not see themselves in these terms, so the question is how did they understand their difference? Both women recognised that they had feelings that were different from the majority of women that surrounded them. In 1913 when Eva attended a suffrage meeting at Caxton Hall Eva described it as “the moment I entered the room I had a sensation of being amongst my own people.” (Slawson, diary 10<sup>th</sup> July 1913) Obviously this statement could mean a number of things and she goes on to say “most of the ladies wore pretty pinafore gowns and reminded me of Letchworth!” It could be that she was making a reference about the class of woman represented at the meeting. She could also have been referring to the fact that she was probably surrounded by educated women, or women who were eager to improve themselves, a status she and Ruth aspired to. Eva could also have been



referring to the atmosphere generated by a meeting that was predominantly female rather than a mixed group and so women would possibly feel more empowered to speak. Her feelings may have been a combination of all of these things. But fundamentally she was acknowledging that this group of women offered something to her that she did not experience in other public situations, such as the Church, for example.

## **Conclusion**

All the women of my research – with the exception of Edy and Tony - made references to being different. For Chris that difference was defined in the language and theories of the sexologists. For Ruth and Eva that sense of difference was through a recognition that they were different from many of the women around them in both their interests and concerns but also through their life choices. However, all this can tell us is that these women were different from the norm. There is no identification with a specific difference that enables us to label these women as lesbian. This introduces a sense of ambiguity in both their understanding of their sexuality and our interpretation of it. In my next chapter I shall investigate how these women expressed their sense of difference, either consciously or unconsciously to others. Although it appears through their writings that there may have been an ambiguity in their understanding of difference, their expression of identity through clothing, for example, may provide a different reading.

## Chapter Three

### Expressing Identity

In the early twentieth century many women who acknowledged that they had a sense of "difference" believed that they were the only ones who felt like they did (Bell 126; National Lesbian and Gay Survey, 1,6).<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Irons, a friend of the Smallhythe trio, supports this view when she says that it was "an age of innocence . . . homosexuality was never discussed and even with my greatest friends we never mentioned it . . . passionate friendships did exist but were not a matter for discussion" ("An Age of Innocence," video). However, in order to find or recognise other women who felt as they did, these women had to become visible, at least to each other (Norton, 286). Women developed various language or sign systems in order to communicate their identity to other women. The disadvantage posed by this was that lesbians who were unaware of the relevant sign systems might neither recognise other lesbians nor make themselves known to them. Having found other lesbians, women could then create a community or subculture –with its own language - in which they felt safe to express themselves. But this raises the question of how, in this "age of innocence" as Irons describes it, did women find other lesbians? Looking back upon some of the friendship networks I have cited within my research they appear to be formed around

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this feeling of being the "only one" was not specific to this period. Many women since then have expressed this thought in the process of discovering their sexuality and "coming out." However, the idea of being "different" and the development of explanatory theories dates from the end of the nineteenth century and the sexologists.

common interests.<sup>2</sup> Most prominently these include artistic, literary and theatrical circles but also a political link through to the suffrage movement. There may also have been a link through Chris's university background where there were like-minded women, who were in a minority and shared a common experience.

Souhami demonstrates how this worked for Radclyffe Hall:

Radclyffe Hall wanted a place in London literary life. Her women friends helped forge this. Toupie was a pivotal figure in the London lesbian scene of the twenties. Literary and artistic lesbians gravitated to her house and to . . . [that of] Gabrielle Enthoven. . . . At Toupie's salon evenings, Radclyffe Hall talked of her work to the novelists Ida Wylie, May Sinclair and Vere Hutchinson. . . . Ida Wylie recommended her to the literary agent Audrey Heath, a Cambridge classics graduate who in partnership with a friend, May Drake, had set up in 1919 in an office in Soho. (Souhami, *Trials*, 121)

This networking enabled like-minded women to meet each other. It allowed women to express a sexual identity but also provided a space where they could express and explore their differences. The "salons" of Gertrude Stein and Natalie

---

<sup>2</sup>These networks include the group of women who were in the theatre and involved in suffrage activism such as Gabriele Enthoven, Cicely Hamilton and Vera 'Jack' Holmes along with the Smallhythe trio. Other women such as Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf had links to other writers. Radclyffe Hall's friendship networks included other writers such as Natalie Barney and Noël Coward; and Hall was also part of a group of women that socialised and enjoyed a good time such as Toupie Lowther and Teddy Gerard.

Barney were well known as places where lesbians could meet.<sup>3</sup> This was not an option for all women. Barbara Bell's experience much later, in the 1930s, was that "it was a silent world. They had no words for things then. Just deeds not words" (49). When she was given a copy of The Well of Loneliness,

It was a revelation to me. It was a light in my dark world, a sort of beacon. I thought, I must have a relationship like this. If only I could have a life like this. But it was a bit beyond me because the characters were rich people who had leisure and could please themselves what they did – nobody pointed a finger. They were just thought to be a bit weird, a bit arty. I thought that kind of life wouldn't come my way (Bell, 49-50).

Despite the fact that this type of lifestyle was out of the reach of many ordinary lesbians and even out of their language, in a similar way Bell met other lesbians through network groups. For her it was the Guide and Ranger movement where she talks of the "latent lesbians in the Rangers" (51), and later on the police force which she had joined in order to "find a partner or have some flutter" (65). The National Gay and Lesbian Survey showed that many lesbians were attracted to contexts which were all-female and uniformed (74-81). Whilst this was not in Hall's personal experience she sent her character Stephen Gordon in The Well of Loneliness to the Allied Front in France with a motor ambulance unit. She claimed that this unit "has never had any existence save in the author's imagination" (Author's Note), but the story is in fact loosely based on the

---

<sup>3</sup> The salons of the Paris expatriate community are explored in Hanscombe and Smyers, Benstock (1994) and more recently in Weiss.

experience of her friend "Toupie" Lowther (Souhami, Trials, 159). Indeed all-female contexts - the suffrage movement included which I return to in Chapter Four - would attract not only lesbian women wanting to meet other lesbians, but also those women who felt a strong affinity with women such as Ruth and Eva. Obviously there is a time difference between the experiences of Hall writing in 1928 and Bell's experience looking back at the impact The Well of Loneliness had on her life. However, the fact that twenty years after the publication of Hall's novel women from the lower-middle classes had less language to describe their lesbian identity and fewer opportunities to meet other lesbians in an acknowledged lesbian space is integral to the understanding of how women of different class backgrounds understood and expressed their difference.

In order that women could create spaces in which to meet, they had to make themselves visible and it is the sign systems that the women created in order to do this that I shall discuss in this chapter. The encoding of sexual identity is a complex issue. It is not a stable construction that remains the same over time; external forces such as fashion or politics have influenced sexuality and its expression as much as individuality.<sup>4</sup> In analysing the different sign systems that women employed I am concerned not to over-generalise the ways in which these were used. Many of the signs, such as the ways in which the "New Woman" or "mannish lesbian" used clothes, have to be set in the context of

---

<sup>4</sup> See both Weeks and Jackson for an historical background to this debate. See Kitzinger for a discussion of the social construction of sexual identity, and Butler on the notion of gender as performance.

contemporary fashion and politics. The suffragettes were satirised in publications such as Punch, masculinised, both in their dress and an ascribed lack of sexuality or womanliness. In some cartoons or photographs, men are depicted as feminised through their support for women's rights or shown in traditionally feminine roles as in fig. 2. In this way gender and desire for independence were



Fig. 2. "Is your Wife a Suffragette?" (Tickner, 35)

satirised and conflated with sexuality. Radclyffe Hall not only epitomises our image of the "mannish lesbian", but she was also considered chic, and extremely

fashionable with her short "shingled" hair and masculine clothes (Doan, Fashioning, 113).

It is by looking at the ways in which women were represented within contemporary media that we gain a picture of how women were seen by the general public. In defining the context, as Vicinus observes, when we look for lesbians in history we "privilege the visibly marked mannish woman or the self-identified lesbian" ("All Facts," 57). It is important to acknowledge that there may have been other ways in which lesbians expressed their sexuality that we know nothing about because we have not understood the signs. As Carol-Anne Tyler (227) points out, the passing woman is successful when we do not realise that she is "passing." Of course "passing" for a gay or lesbian audience may mean something different to the heterosexual audience. For example lesbian women who dressed to "pass" as men are not necessarily trying to conceal their lesbian identity or pretend to be men, but to demonstrate their lesbian identity through their "passing." Vita Sackville-West dressed up as a young boy<sup>5</sup> and called herself "Julian". This was not in order to pass as Julian permanently but because "it was marvellous fun, all the more so because there was always the risk of being found out" (Nicolson, Portrait, 105). Sackville-West also described a sense of freedom and naturalness in her masquerading as Julian (Nicolson, Portrait, 105). In this instance Sackville-West was "passing," not in order to be a man or even

---

<sup>5</sup> Sackville-West writes "I dressed as a boy" (Nicolson, Portrait, 105) rather than describing herself as a man. Hallett suggests that it was usual for lesbians at this time to describe themselves as boys (52).

necessarily to attract women, although she did talk of “being accosted now and then by women<sup>[6]</sup>” (Nicolson, Portrait, 105), but to attract Violet Trefusis creating a performance between them. Tyler discusses the fact that “passing” has to reference its own performance in order to be recognised as “passing.” In this case Sackville-West “passes” in order perhaps to create sexual tension between herself and Trefusis, the latter saying of Julian.

You could do anything with me – or rather Julian could . . . For me he stands for all emancipation, for all liberty, for youth, for ambition, for attainment. He is my ideal. There is nothing he can't do. I am his slave, body and soul. (Nicolson, Portrait, 143)

This suggests that Sackville-West's “passing” was something more than just dressing up as a man, but an expression of lesbian identity, freedom and also part of the sexual relationship between her and Trefusis.

Both the stereotypes of the “New Woman” and the “mannish lesbian” are images of lesbians and of lesbian lifestyles through the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. I intend to look at these two figures and then investigate how the two groups of women used the sign systems visible in these stereotypes to communicate their lesbian identity to other women.

### **The “New Woman”**

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards we start to hear about the “New

---

<sup>6</sup> The inference is that she is being approached by prostitutes as the context in which she describes this is when walking along Piccadilly late at night.



Woman.”<sup>7</sup> Whilst primarily a feminist image, the “New Woman” is often seen by academics as a forerunner of the “mannish lesbian”.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that all New Women were lesbians, but that the imagery was of vast importance to a whole range of women at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The New Woman constituted a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon. Eschewing marriage, she fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical, economic and social reforms, and wielded real political power. (Smith-Rosenberg, “New Woman,” 245)

For Smith-Rosenberg the “New Woman” was epitomised by those women attending the (American) new women’s colleges (“New Woman,” 247). They were educated, affluent<sup>9</sup> and once they graduated were disinclined to follow their mothers’ example and settle down to domesticity (Smith-Rosenberg, “New Woman,” 253). Esther Newton goes further than this to identify “the first generation of ‘New Women’ – such as Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Mary Wooley” (E. Newton, 283). However, as well as identifying them as new women, Newton states that one of their characteristics is the romantic friendship (283). Bland’s definition of the “New Woman” demonstrates the difference in emphasis between the “New Woman” and the feminist – a link

---

<sup>7</sup> Bland cites the novelist Sarah Grand as having invented the term (144) and Schaffer cites the *fin de siècle* feminist press, which included articles by Grand in the North American Review of 1894 (40).

<sup>8</sup> See Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s articles on the “New Woman”.

<sup>9</sup> Whilst this is a subjective term the reality was that women attending college were likely to have been funded by their family who therefore must have had a certain amount of disposable income.

that she suggests is less direct than that portrayed by Smith-Rosenberg or Newton.

The term "new woman" was not equivalent to the term "feminist," although a self-defined "new woman" was likely to hold certain feminist convictions. She was generally thought of as a middle- or upper-class young woman, concerned to reject many of the conventions of femininity and to live and work on free and equal terms with the opposite sex. She was given to reading "advanced" literature, smoking cigarettes, and travelling unchaperoned, often on a bicycle. Her hallmark was *personal* freedom. (144, emphasis in original)

Whilst the image of the "New Woman" at the turn of the twentieth century was primarily a middle-class one it was not exclusively so. Talia Schaffer suggests that

While there were some prominent leaders – women like Mona Carid, Lady Jeune, and Sarah Grand – most of the women associated with the new movement lived a much humbler life. Working as clerks, typists, teachers, college students, journalists, or perhaps even shopgirls, they often lived in painfully spartan flats, struggling to earn enough money for genteel gowns and living primarily on bread and tea. They walked without chaperones, carried their own latchkeys, bicycled, and the more daring ones

smoked cigarettes, cut their hair, or wore divided skirts and plain costume in accordance with the principles of rational dress.<sup>[10]</sup> (39)

Whilst the label "New Women" has been attributed to women such as Olive Schreiner and Eleanor Marx (Brandon, 2) it is clear that this was only one particular type of "New Woman". The "New Woman" of the media had various guises, but in these stereotypes are some common features, such as women's desire for education, learning and self-improvement; employment; their increased use of bicycles and later cars. All of this moved women into what had previously been seen as male preserves. Additionally there was the move away from overly feminine clothing, which in turn could be interpreted as women appropriating men's clothing. The "New Woman" was therefore someone more than the educated middle-class woman as portrayed by Smith-Rosenberg. As I shall go on to demonstrate in this chapter Schaffer's analysis suggests that both the Smallhythe trio as middle-class educated women, but also Ruth and Eva as lower middle-class working women, were part of this phenomenon.

As Lyn Pykett emphasises, the image of the (British) "New Woman" was varied, as the different stereotypes that were attributed to her demonstrate:

The New Woman was by turns: a mannish amazon and a Womanly woman; she was oversexed, undersexed or same sex identified; she was anti-maternal, or a racial supermother; she was male-

---

<sup>10</sup> The Rational Dress Society was formed in 1881. Its aims were to promote the use of the divided skirt and comfortable clothing and moving away from tight and restrictive clothing for women (Bland, 147; Richardson and Willis, 37).

identified, or manhating and/or man-eating, or self-appointed saviour of benighted masculinity; she was anti-domestic, or she sought to make domestic values prevail; she was radical, socialist or revolutionary, or she was reactionary and conservative; she was the agent of social and/or racial regeneration, or symptom and agent of decline. (Pykett, xii)



AT MRS. LYONS CHACER'S 'SMALL AND EARLY'

*Fair Enthusiast:* 'Look! Look! There stands Miss Gander Bellwether, the Famous Champion of Women's Rights, the Future Founder of a New Philosophy! Isn't it a Pretty Sight to See the Rising Young Geniuses of the Day all flocking to her Side, and hanging on her Lips, and feasting on the Sad and Earnest Utterances wrung from her indignant Heart by the Wrongs of her Wretched Sex? O, isn't she Divine, Captain Dandelion?'

*Captain Dandelion (of the 17th Waiters):* 'Haw! Affair of Taste, you know! Wather pwefer she-Women myself - wather pwefer the wretched Sex with all its Wongs - Haw!'

*Mr. Millefeurs (of the 'Ess Bonquet' Club):* 'Haw! Wather a grubby, skwubby Lot, the wising young Geniuses! Haw-aw-aw!'

Fig. 3. "Extremes that Meet." *Punch*, 110.

The stereotype of the "New Woman" - in whatever guise - was one Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis argue was largely established by journalists and cartoonists (13). A cartoon (fig. 3) published in Punch in 1874 shows two women, one the "Fair Enthusiast" dressed in a traditionally feminine style talking to two

gentlemen, described as Captain Dandelion and Mr Millefleurs. They are discussing "Miss Gander Bellwether, the Famous Champion of Women's Rights, the Future Founder of a New Philosophy!" who is surrounded by a group of men. As can be seen the idea of the "New Woman" as unfeminine and masculine is demonstrated in two ways. The clothes Miss Gander Bellwether is wearing are plain and tailored, her neck and arms are covered, she seems to have no jewellery and does not use a fan; the gentlemen "speaking" about her in the cartoon refer to preferring a "*she*-Woman" implying that Miss Bellwether is a *he*-woman. But what is interesting is that this cartoon also demonstrates how appealing this figure is to other women. The "Fair Enthusiast" calls her "divine" which suggests a hero-worship response. Ironically, it is not only the "Fair Enthusiast" who focuses on her. Between the images of traditional femininity and the new, fashionable severity, it is worth noting that the traditional female image is not the one attracting male attention.

One of the most clearly visible signifiers of the "New Woman" was the way in which she dressed.

Dress has long been accepted as a medium of both expression and communication, a silent language through which, consciously or unconsciously, we "speak" our race, age, class, sex, occupation, . . . the components of identity are endless. (Rolley, 54)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a much more sober influence entered women's fashions as women had increased opportunities to education and

employment. Clothes became a way to express intelligence, education and to demonstrate that women had more interests than dresses, hats, and the latest fashions, so could be relied upon by their employers.

Constitutionalists and militants alike were touchy on the question of personal appearances because of its damaging effects. They eschewed the fashionable extremes of feather and furbelow, which it suited them to associate with a representation of their opponents as wealthy, ignorant and careless of matters more serious than the choice of a hat. But they went to some lengths to distinguish themselves not only from the image of the dowdy spinster with large feet and shabby clothes, but also from the dress reform movement with which they might have been expected to share some generally emancipatory goals. (Tickner, 166)<sup>11</sup>

In The Unlit Lamp, Radclyffe Hall identifies and gives credence to the shared history and significance to lesbians of the "New Woman". The protagonist, Joan Ogden, is a woman who has spent her life supporting her demanding mother. Her opportunities for leaving home to go to university or to live with her governess and later friend are prevented by her mother and arguably Joan's own fears. In the latter part of the book, when both mother and daughter are elderly, they are on their annual holiday. Sitting in the hotel Joan overhears the conversation of two young girls.

---

<sup>11</sup> This is further explored in Stella Mary Newton, Health, Art and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century.

"I believe she's what they used to call a 'New Woman'," said the girl in breeches, with a low laugh. "Honey, she's a forerunner, that's what she is, a kind of pioneer that's got left behind. I believe she's the beginning of things like me." . . . [Joan] saw the truth of this all around her, in women of the type that she had once been, that in a way she still was. Active, aggressively intelligent women, not at all self-conscious in their tailor-made clothes, not ashamed of their cropped hair; women who did things well, important things; women who counted and would go on counting; smart, neatly put together women, looking like well-bred young men. (284)

Hall combines the imagery of the stereotypes of the "mannish lesbian" and the "New Woman" by her reference to behaviour and clothes. Through this passage Hall implies that there is a continuum of experience, between the primarily nineteenth-century stereotype of the "New Woman" and the twentieth-century "mannish lesbian". Included within this is an acknowledgement of a shared sexual identity. This is not to say that all New Women were lesbians but that Hall recognised and identified with this earlier stereotype.

### **The "Mannish Lesbian"**

The primary public lesbian identity at the turn of the century was that of the "mannish lesbian." In understanding their (sexual) difference at this time some women identified themselves as neither man nor woman (see Chapter Two). However, at the same time they appeared to assume a male persona - to a

greater or lesser extent - that included using men's clothes, names, language, habits, economic and intellectual activities. In reality, the "mannish lesbian" was not the only lesbian identity available to women, but it was identifiable because of the visible appropriation of masculinity. This is not to suggest that only women who appropriated symbols of masculinity were lesbians or feminists.<sup>12</sup> As Gilbert and Wheelwright have both demonstrated, historically many women have used men's guise, for a variety of reasons. In the case of Christian Davies this was in an attempt to find her husband who had disappeared (Wheelwright, 167). For Dorothy Lawrence, dressing as a man was a means to further a journalistic career (Wheelwright, 168-9). For some women this was to earn a better wage.

If she had been a daughter of the lower classes, she might well have donned men's clothes on growing up and gone through the world passing as a man . . . Then she would have been able to do working-class men's jobs (and get paid double what she would have received had she worn skirts). (Faderman, Ploys, 318)

As Cora Anderson, an American Indian woman said when defending herself for passing as Ralph Kerwinnio:

---

<sup>12</sup> Garber investigates the notion of sumptuary dress codes and the way in which clothes in different periods in history have been associated exclusively or primarily with men or women (Vested Interests, 21-32). More recently she notes that:

Many readers of the New York Times were startled recently to learn that one of their most cherished assumptions about clothing and gender was, apparently, without ground. Baby clothes, which since at least the 1940's have been routinely divided along gender and color [sic] lines, pink for girls, blue for boys, were, said the Times, once just the other way about. (Vested Interests, 1)



Do you blame me for wanting to be a man, free to live life in a man-made world? . . . In future centuries, it is probable that woman will be the owner of her own body and the custodian of her own soul. [But] the well-cared for woman [now] is a parasite, and the woman who must work is a slave. . . . Do you blame me for hating to again resume a woman's clothing and just belong? Is it any wonder that I determined to become a member of the privileged sex, if possible?  
(San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project, 186)

In the case of Dr James Miranda Barry her motivation may well have been intellectual rather than economic, as she was only ten years old when she went to university (Rose, 21).

Some of the women who dressed as men will have done so for reasons of gender and sexual identities. Both Colonel Barker and Billy Tipton married women who may or may not have known about their true identity and Tipton had three (adopted) children. Tipton's last wife Kitty, claimed that "she had never been physically intimate with Billy because of her own poor health" (Wood Middlebrook, 5). Of his other wives Wood Middlebrook goes on to state that "at least one of these women knew that Billy was a woman; at least two of them made love to Billy thinking that Billy was a man" (10). Whilst it is not possible to say exactly why women like Tipton and Barker chose to pass as men, the fact that they had relationships with women points to something more than an economic or educational reason.

Wilson highlights the intricate relationship that existed between sexuality, fashion and politics in the early twentieth century.

By the Radclyffe Hall period of the 1920s, masculine garb was a clear indication in a woman of a preference for her own sex. Yet mainstream fashion was also extremely boyish – the *garçonne* look was one of the major fashions of the twenties. (E. Wilson, "Making an Appearance," 54)

Radclyffe Hall is looked back upon as the archetypal "mannish lesbian" not only because of the way she dressed but also because of the creation of Stephen Gordon, the protagonist in her novel The Well of Loneliness. Hall attributed to Stephen all the stereotypical characteristics of lesbians that both she and sexologists such as Ellis identified. By the 1920's, Elizabeth Wilson demonstrates, mainstream fashion had been influenced by women who used symbols of masculinity to express their ability in the previously male dominated areas of education and employment. As women were not regarded as having a sexual impulse of their own but one that had to be stimulated by a man, the appropriation of masculinity could also be seen as a desire to take control of their own sexuality, whether that was heterosexuality or homosexuality. If women adopted male dress as a way of expressing identity, whether that was in terms of sexuality or economic and intellectual independence, after the trial of The Well of Loneliness it was firmly established as an expression of sexuality.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> See Vera Brittain for a contemporary analysis of the trial of the Well of Loneliness and further references in Testament of Friendship.

Whilst the image of the “mannish lesbian” was the primary public image of lesbians in England this was not necessarily the experience of women in Paris. Natalie Barney, a wealthy American lesbian who hosted a salon, did not accept this view.

Barney herself objected to modes of lesbian behaviour that seemed to confirm the scientific theories then prevalent. In particular, she objected to any form of dress or behaviour that suggested homosexual women were really men trapped in women’s bodies.

(Benstock, Women, 11)

So, whilst the prevalent figure of the lesbian was stereotyped as mannish, some women chose to express their sexuality in different ways. Barney did this, like many of the “Women of the Left Bank” as they became known, through her writing but primarily through her salon. Barney looked to Sappho for an “alternative lesbian culture, one defined by women themselves rather than by a dominant patriarchy, one that repudiated the view of lesbianism as ‘sick’ and ‘perverted,’ its members outcast as ‘the third sex’” (Benstock, Women, 281). She believed that “lesbian love preserved and honored the female body, beautified it, sanctified it, and kept it safe against the ravages to which heterosexuality subjected it” (Benstock, Women, 290). One image of her salon shows women participating in a “theatrical,” inspired by Greek influences (fig.4).<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> This may have been a photograph of a scene from Actes et entr’actes which were theatricals specifically written to be performed in Barney’s garden (Benstock, 291).



Fig. 4. "Pagan rituals and 'theatricals'" in Natalie Barney's garden. (Weiss, 103)

Barney's view was in direct contrast to that of Hall. However, it is evident from pictures of both friends and lovers that Barney was surrounded by women who preferred the "mannish lesbian" look, for example Romaine Brooks, one of whose perhaps best known portraits is that of Una Troubridge (Fig. 5).

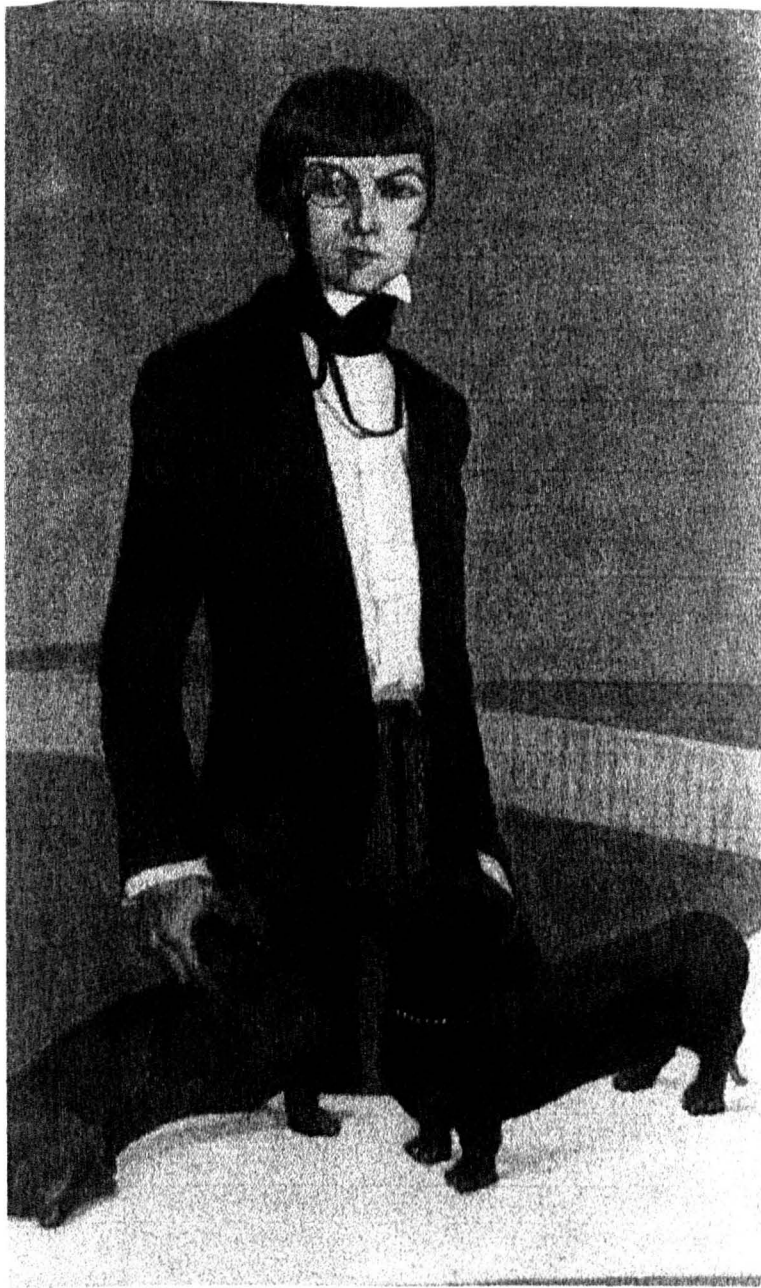


Fig. 5 Una Troubridge painted by Romaine Brooks 1924 (Souhami, [Trials](#), n.p.)

### **Signifiers of a Lesbian Identity**

From both the “New Woman” and the “mannish lesbian”, we can see that both groups of women are appropriating what had been seen as men’s prerogatives, firstly through education and employment, and then latterly through

their clothes and social identifiers such as smoking, riding a bicycle or driving a car. Evelyn Irons, a journalist and friend of the Smallhythe trio,<sup>15</sup> described the habit of wearing men's clothing to identify as a lesbian, as wearing the "uniform" (Jivani, 40). She describes a conversation with her mother, after the publication, and subsequent trial of The Well of Loneliness, which perhaps demonstrates the level of public awareness of homosexuality, and the recognition of the "uniform".

We were making a bed and my mother stopped and said: "You're a friend of Radclyffe Hall's, aren't you?" and I said "yes" and she said "Well that sort of thing can carry on in Paris but certainly not here," and we went on making the bed. And there I was in collar and tie and everything – dressed in the uniform – and she didn't realize what the hell it was about (Jivani, 40).

Unlike Irons, I am not sure that her mother was innocent of the subject of lesbianism. This conversation might have been her mother's way of saying that she did know about Irons' sexuality but did not want to hear anything about it.<sup>16</sup> As Irons indicates in this interview, the "uniform" was a way in which items of clothing and accessories enabled other lesbians to identify each other. Jivani describes how Irons started to wear her father's clothes from an early age and would go out with a friend dressed in plus fours, a shirt and tie (27). Irons discusses the regular dress that was worn by herself and friends.

---

<sup>15</sup> In addition to being a friend of the Trio, Evelyn was a one-time lover of Vita Sackville-West and a friend of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge.

<sup>16</sup> This is based on the number of women I know today who are not "out" to their parents, but whose parents keep trying to broach the subject as it is perfectly obvious that no boyfriends have appeared on the scene but their daughter has been living with the same woman for years!

"It was really outrageous because John and I – of course Radclyffe Hall was always called John - always wore dinner jackets and skirts with striped braid down the side, not trousers," Evelyn recalls. "And I had a shirt and black bow tie and she always wore jabots and ruffles which I thought was rather effeminate. Then we had Spanish cloaks, a very dramatic sort with scarlet linings which you flung around you. Una and John both wore monocles and at one point I had a monocle too but I didn't need one, so it was plain glass. I didn't wear it all the time because I did think it was a bit silly."

(Jivani, 28)

Here Irons demonstrates how clothes and other signifiers of sexuality were influenced by fashion and/or peer pressure to conform to a particular identity for a variety of reasons. In this instance Irons is talking about creating a entrance in the theatres and fashionable night-spots in London, for more mundane events she sported plus-fours (Jivani, 28). It would appear that over time Irons became more relaxed about the identity that she put forward. By the time she met Vita Sackville-West it appears that she was no longer wearing the "uniform" as Irons recalls "Vita didn't like the butch get-up at all – I think I got out of it pretty well before I met her " (Jivani, 49). It could be that peer pressure from Hall and Troubridge influenced Evelyn in her decision to wear the monocle that she thought was rather "silly." Another friend of Hall's, Toupie Lowther did not get off so lightly. Una apparently "berated" her (Rolley, "Sixth Sense," 8) for not wearing the uniform and seeking "to conceal her homosexuality, according to Una, by

shunning the company of 'her own ilk' and by wearing 'scarlet silk "confections" in the evenings with accordion pleated skirts and low necks" (Baker, 247). The notion of there being a lesbian "uniform" demonstrates how clothes and mode of dress gave out signals to other women who were, as Barbara Bell suggests, in the "club" (Jivani, 40). But whilst some women were in the "know," and were able to read signs and act accordingly, the general population did not "know."

The "mannish lesbian" was a highly visible stereotype, and it is hard to look back upon this image and understand why people generally could not see or read the signs that it portrayed. However, it also makes it possible to see how biographers may have dismissed lesbian aspects of someone's life, through either a lack of understanding through the non-recognition of signs or by blatantly ignoring those signs. It seems to me that Evelyn, having established herself within a lesbian community or friendship network, had no further need of her "uniform" to make herself known to other lesbians. Her sexual identity could be inferred by her association with this community, or perhaps having found this community she did not have to "advertise" herself to find like-minded women. This left her free to pursue an identity that reflected her individuality rather than specifically her sexual identity.

By 1931 Evelyn and Vita Sackville-West had become lovers and  
by now, [Irons] was no longer the butch young thing who attended  
first nights with Radclyffe Hall. She covered event[s] like Ascot and



the Paris couture shows and had to dress appropriately. Vita Sackville-West was particularly fond of Evelyn's Ascot dress which she thought "absolutely ravishing". She wanted me to wear that dress all the time . . . (Jivani, 49)

Evelyn's decision to move away from masculine dress is an interesting one that can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Rolley suggests that the adoption of a visible identity adds authenticity to "coming out" ("Sixth Sense," 7). It may be, as suggested above, that Evelyn no longer felt the need to conform to a dress code, perhaps because she was already visible within the lesbian community.<sup>17</sup> It may also be that Sackville-West preferred her lovers to be more feminine and influenced Evelyn to some extent in the way that she dressed and image that she presented.

Whilst considering clothes and the way in which women in the early twentieth century used them, it is worth looking at the Music Hall and the role of the male impersonators who were extremely popular at this time, with both men and women. Indeed, although everyone knew that they were really women, the actresses had to demonstrate both on, but especially off, stage that there was no suggestion of lesbianism.<sup>18</sup> A contemporary song demonstrates the line between cross-dressing on stage and cross-dressing to act out a lesbian sexuality,

---

<sup>17</sup> I am thinking here about Vita Sackville-West, Chris, Edy and Tony and all their friendship networks.

<sup>18</sup> One of the most popular vaudeville actresses was Vesta Tilley. She published her autobiography in 1934 under her married name of de Frece. More recently Sara Maitland has produced a biography about her.

*She is mannish from her shoes to her hat,  
Coat, collars, stiff shirt and cravat,  
She'd wear pants in the street,  
To make her complete,  
But she knows the law won't stand for that. (Jivani, 22)*

Whilst lesbian sexuality was unheard of by many people, demonstrated by the fact that it was never made illegal, this did not stop women being attracted to the actresses. Cline notes the impression Tallulah Bankhead,<sup>19</sup> a friend of Radclyffe Hall, made on young women:

Tallulah had a unique following amongst young working-class women, mainly shopgirls and typists, who stormed the gallery to see her – a cult the press condemned as “The Hysterical Gallery Girl Syndrome”. What they found threatening, John [Radclyffe Hall] found intriguing: hundreds of young women publicly idolizing a sensationally sensual woman who smouldered though her stage parts. (Cline, 187)

This behaviour demonstrates that whilst these women, both performers and audience, were not necessarily lesbian, women were being seen as an object of sexual or emotional attraction by other women.<sup>20</sup> As already suggested at the

---

<sup>19</sup> Tallulah Bankhead, an actress and friend of Radclyffe Hall, was well known for her bi-sexuality and outspoken approach about sex. See Lavery's biography for further information about Bankhead.

<sup>20</sup> A television programme Under the Sun shows a Japanese club where women, known as “onnabes,” are paid to dress as men and flirt with the women who come to the club. In some cases this includes ‘dates’ although there is no sense that the women who come to the club are lesbian.

beginning of this chapter, identification with masculine attributes was important not only in the demonstration of sexuality, but also with feminism. The fashion for tailored clothes represented a desire to be acknowledged within education and employment as equals.

Vicinus suggests that the search for a lesbian identity with which we can identify, by default depends on some kind of "coming out." We restrict the possibilities of lesbian sexuality and lesbian relationships by only acknowledging those that are visible (Vicinus, "All Facts," 61).

These limitations have shaped both how we know and how we imagine the lesbian. I want to argue for the possibilities of the "not said" and the "not seen" as conceptual tools for the writing of lesbian history. (Vicinus, "All Facts," 58)

It is by looking at that which is not named that we find the key to understanding relationships such as Ruth and Eva's. As Vicinus points out, there were "several unconsummated marriages among middle-class intellectuals" ("All Facts," 59). The marriage or relationships of people such as Virginia and Leonard Woolf; the trio Vanessa and Clive Bell and Duncan Grant; Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey best illustrate Vicinus's argument. More obviously and closer to the Smallhythe trio were Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson who both had homosexual relationships and yet were broadcast on radio discussing their marriage and the happiness of marriage (Jivani, 47). All of these people have, generally speaking, retained a certain heterosexual status, as Vicinus suggests,

even Vita and Harold. This may have more to do with class and a seemingly acceptable eccentricity that is associated with artistic people. It questions the nature of these relationships, since it is not clear that they were based on sexual attraction. They may have been about friendship and companionship or, and at this time more likely, discretion and conformity. These couples may have married because it was expected and there were very few respectable alternatives. It is worthwhile considering *Violet Trefusis* in this context. After the scandalous relationship with Vita Sackville-West,<sup>21</sup> Violet refused to settle down with her husband, Denys Trefusis in a hypocritical and sham marriage. She had seen her mother, who had “viewed adultery as sound business practice, a woman’s work” (Souhami Mrs Keppel, 21) conduct a long-term relationship with King Edward VII whilst married. Violet Trefusis was not prepared to live with this “convention of infidelity” (Souhami Mrs Keppel, 262). All of these examples are of well-known people whose lives have been recorded in biographies, photographs, films and through the preservation of properties such as Sissinghurst and Charleston.<sup>22</sup> It is impossible to say how many other less prominent people had relationships that were not heteronormative.

---

<sup>21</sup> This relationship is recorded in Nicolson’s Portrait of a Marriage in which he combines his mother’s record of events with his own analysis; the edited letters between the two women in Mitchell A. Leaska and John Philips book Violet to Vita as well as Souhami’s account in Mrs Keppel and her Daughter.

<sup>22</sup> Sissinghurst was the home of Vita Sackville-West and her family. Today her son Nigel Nicolson lives there. The property is owned by the National Trust and the gardens and Vita’s study are open to the public. Charleston was the summer home of Vanessa Bell, her family and friends. It has been bought and restored by a private trust and is also open to the public.

## **The Smallhythe Trio and Expressions of Identity**

One view of Chris is as a “mannish lesbian”<sup>23</sup> and there are references to her wearing men's clothes, which support this opinion.<sup>24</sup> Baker cites a dinner at Radclyffe Hall's home in Rye:

it was the first time they had dined out in all the years they had lived at the Priest's House. (Chris appeared in a black velvet smoking jacket with enormous bell-bottom trousers “and bearing an offering of all the best zinneas from their garden”.) (Barker, 272)

However, among the photographs in the Edith Craig archive, Chris can be seen wearing long white smocks, rather than trousers. There is little biographical material about Tony. However, one of the few things that we do know was her habit of wearing a “white duck jacket and trousers and over large Panama hat.” (Melville, 252) Baker describes her “in old age never without her Panama hat” (264). This presents us with a question. Did she wear these clothes habitually to identify her sexuality or is this one account simply repeated in the many biographical references to her because it is the only thing that we know about

---

<sup>23</sup> Hamer, in discussing the affair between Chris and Vita Sackville-West, describes Chris “and her lesbian circle [as] shaven-haired dykes in boiler suits to the ‘lipstick lesbian’ version of Vita that has been promoted” (124).

<sup>24</sup> Baker makes a reference to Chris wearing a blue boiler suit (271). Steen also makes a reference to the trio wearing trousers, but is neither specific about who or in what context (325). This leads me to suppose that Steen is suggesting that the trio conformed to the mannish lesbian stereotype but without any specific evidence to support her statement.

her?<sup>25</sup> Terry Castle suggests that lesbians become invisible because people do not want to see them and therefore they explain their self-representation and behaviour within a different discourse. Bearing this in mind, whilst there is a danger of taking one particular comment about Tony out of context, identifying her as a “mannish lesbian” because we do not have any other information about her, there is also a danger of not seeing her sexuality for the same reasons. Barbara Bell, although younger than the women I am researching, introduces the idea that even though someone might identify themselves in stereotypical ways, for example as a “mannish lesbian”, this did not mean that they would wear the relevant clothes all the time (Bell, 74). It is possible that Chris had various different types of dress styles. Radclyffe Hall for example – despite popular opinion – only wore trousers in private (Cline, 151). In fact, rather than mannish, the description that could perhaps be more apposite is that of bohemian.

Bohemian dress, like that of the “mannish lesbian”, was a means of expressing an identity (E. Wilson, Bohemians, 161). The identity portrayed might change and develop over time<sup>26</sup> and have different emphases such as political, theatrical or artistic statements. Two aspects where the bohemian had

---

<sup>25</sup> There are references to the Smallhythe trio in a variety of biographies albeit more usually in their relationship to Ellen Terry or other well-known lesbians such as Radclyffe Hall. See Baker, Hamer, Holledge, Melville, Whitelaw. It would appear that much of this material stems from earlier texts such as Manvell and Steen.

<sup>26</sup> In her analysis Wilson suggests that the rise of bohemianism starts from the eighteenth century following the Industrial Revolution (E. Wilson, Bohemians, 15). By the end of the nineteenth century she suggests that bohemian districts existed in some major cities in Europe and America (Bohemians, 38).

similarities with lesbian expressions of identity were in the use of clothes and hair. Wilson notes that the bohemians at the end of the French Revolution introduced the use of trousers to signify equality with men (E. Wilson, Bohemians, 162). In 1912 a fashion developed among the female Slade artists – Tony’s former art school - to cut their hair in a bob. “They were known as ‘cropheads,’ and the crop signalled that the wearer was an artistic, radical woman” (E. Wilson, Bohemians, 169). Other more artistic themes among the bohemians included Japanese influences – an effect Edy’s father introduced within their home (see the Introduction). Yet another example of how Chris and Edy may have appropriated a socialist bohemian stance rather than specifically mannish attire was their wearing of red scarves and being referred to as “the Bolshies” (M. Webster, 282). Certainly the artistic and theatrical people with whom bohemianism is associated would clearly include the Smallhythe trio. However, it should be remembered that identity is not an either/or situation - Wilson describes Barney’s salon as a subculture that had merged with Bohemia (E. Wilson, Bohemians, 130). It seems to me that the relationship between bohemianism and lesbian identity at the turn of the twentieth century is an area still to be fully explored.

Unlike Chris, Tony and their friends, Evelyn Irons and Radclyffe Hall, some women wore masculine clothes throughout their life. Writers such as Prosser have suggested that the way in which lesbians at the turn of the century expressed their lesbianism has been misinterpreted and that they were in fact

describing a transsexual<sup>27</sup> identity, although at that time they had no language with which to explore this (Prosser, "Transsexuals," 116). This is a compelling argument as the emphasis on lesbianism being a man's mind trapped in a woman's body corresponds to the notion of gender dysphoria expressed today, and it would certainly "fit" with those women who chose to wear men's clothing for the entirety of their lives. However, this disregards the fact that some of these women did identify themselves as lesbians, and certainly their description, if not their understanding of lesbian desire, rings true with some of us today. Perhaps these theorists who are trying to explore their own history do not explore the area sufficiently of those women who lived as men and successfully "passed" as men. Perhaps the understanding of inversion and the difference between sexuality and gender is better expressed by Chris when she said "it provoked in me no desire to be a boy, at least not the kind of boy I knew" (Hungerheart, 33).

Perhaps more important to the Smallhythe trio in the expression of identity than clothing were names. All three women had a number of nicknames, whether these were references to gender and sexuality or a reflection of their personalities and relationships to and between each other. Gever and Magnan highlight the importance of naming when they describe it as

not neutral: it establishes categories, a hierarchy, a place for the lesbian within the social order. Names carry moral judgements. In

---

<sup>27</sup> Doan however, points out that the term transsexuality was not used until 1940. Additionally she also highlights that at the time of The Well of Loneliness obscenity trial the general public had not associated sexual identity with clothes (Fashioning, 90).



the medical definition of the word "lesbian" the *inversion* of desire is central. (Gever and Magnan, 69)

Whilst the context in which Gever and Magnan write refers to the label of lesbian, their argument is appropriate to the individual names that these women adopted. The ways in which Chris and her friends used names and nicknames, illustrates how they saw themselves within the "social order." Amongst friends they were able to create a culture in which they did not have to hide their sexuality and could express their difference freely. Specifically male names such as John, Christopher and Tony would suggest masculinity.

Olive Chaplin . . . lived in a cottage opposite The Priest's House with a large woman over twenty years her junior who "wears a man's lounge suit & looks like hell in it, she being fat. Her name was Lucy once upon a time, but of late she has become Lucien!" (Baker 319)

Other friends included Radclyffe Hall, who was known as John. In France, where there was a significant community of lesbian women, they also used male names: for example, Thelma Wood was known as Simon (Turner, 61).<sup>28</sup> Through genderless versions of male and female names women were able to both publicly acknowledge sexual difference, and make themselves known to other women, such as the name Chris. Additionally, the use of certain names enabled some women to suggest an understanding of sexuality that reflected the principle of inversion, that is they were neither a man nor a woman, and this is best

---

<sup>28</sup> For more information about the Paris lesbian community see Weiss and Benstock.

expressed in those women, like Chris, who used primarily a genderless name.

For Chris, who had renamed herself Christopher legally, the adoption of a masculine name was fundamental to her expression of identity and her understanding of difference. With the exception of having a male pseudonym under which she could write - and at the beginning of the twentieth century I do not think that this would have been necessary, especially as her mother was well-established as an author - there was no other reason for taking this step.<sup>29</sup> Unlike nicknames, which are often transitory and a reflection of a particular period in someone's life, for Chris the adoption of a name of her own choosing was a life-long commitment to a changed identity. This choice unites both her intellectual and emotional sense of difference and its expression.<sup>30</sup> Her birth name Christabel, and her chosen name Christopher, are names that are usually associated with different genders, which reflects her understanding of being neither a man nor a woman. Chris spends considerable time in Hungerheart explaining the reasons for changing her name which I have discussed earlier (see Chapter Two). In biographies her reasons for changing her name to Christopher St John are religious ones, being a supporter of St John the Baptist. However, as Hamer points out, not even Radclyffe Hall had a female baptism name (31)<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century women who wrote and wanted to be published had found it necessary to use male pseudonyms, for example George Sand, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë.

<sup>30</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Chris understood her sexual difference in terms of inversion, yet she did not identify herself as either a man or a woman.

<sup>31</sup> Radclyffe Hall's baptism name when she converted to Catholicism in 1912 was Antonia St Anthony (Hamer, 31).

and as such it seems clear that Chris deliberately chose a male name, not dissimilar from her birth name.

In 1932 when Chris was 59 she wrote to Vita about her name:

You are wrong, my lord – only in a trifle. Few people call me by that objectionable abbreviation of the name my father insisted on giving me, despite the protest of a priest - “Chrissy” is a sure proof of no real intimacy with me. I never protest, it isn’t worth it, when I am addressed by that detestable perversion of Christopher – but how it pains on [sic] my sensibilities. (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 1 November 1932)

In this letter, written seventeen years after Hungerheart, Chris makes it apparent how relationships or intimacy are affected by names. The name Chris is not gender specific, it can stand for either Christabel or Christopher. It is obvious from her letter and what we already know of Chris that whilst the name most people knew her by was Chris, the inference being that her preference was the shortened version of Christopher rather than her birth name of Christabel.

However, this does not sit easily with the second part of her letter.

Christopher! I consecrate that name to you, and as I consecrate it all the humiliation and revolt I have known from having no other name (except the Marie the priest tacked on, which I don’t mind as it is associated with [unreadable] and many other titles of the Queen of Heaven. (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 1 November 1932)

Here Chris references humiliation and revolt, which she experiences as a result of her male name. This does not fit easily with the fact that she chose her name. If she chose her name as is suggested by most biographers, then why feel humiliated by it? Is Chris making reference to the fact that by having a male name she had openly made herself visible as a lesbian – which may not be something that sits easily with Sackville-West? As Gever and Magnan suggest, language depends on who speaks (71) and whilst within a network of friends, where the norm is to be associated with male names and nicknames is acceptable, outside of this arena the association may have been much more difficult to account for. Perhaps this explains why Chris suggests in Hungerheart that she was named by her father. Chris can then absolve herself of personal responsibility for making what was a very public statement about her identity.

Early on in The Well of Loneliness Hall describes how the protagonist, Stephen Gordon, came by her name. This process bears a remarkable resemblance to Chris's story.

He christened the unborn infant Stephen, because he admired the pluck of that Saint. . . . He insisted on calling the infant Stephen, nay more, he would have it baptized by that name . . . The Vicar said that it was rather unusual, so to mollify him they must add female names. (Hall, 8-9)

This presents an interesting connection between Chris and her friend John, although The Well of Loneliness was published in 1928, two years before they

appear to have met when Hall and Una Troubridge came to live in Rye (Souhami, Trials, 241). This does not mean that Chris's history of her life was unknown to Hall. Edy already knew Hall as they had attended the same school (Souhami, Trials, 241) and they had a number of mutual friends including Toupie Lowther and Gabrielle Enthoven. In addition to this, in 1915 Hall and her partner Ladye visited an exhibition of war paintings at the Royal Academy (Souhami Trials, 66). Tony had been commissioned to paint war paintings and exhibited at the Royal Academy. Could Hall have met Tony at this time? It may be that there is little but coincidence to place Hall's description of Stephen Gordon's naming with the lived experience of Chris. However, this does demonstrate that the ways in which women came to use male names may have been for similar reasons. As Chris's book was published in 1915, and would appear to have been a lesbian book of some merit,<sup>32</sup> it is highly likely that Hall had already read it. However, there is also evidence to suggest that Chris was quite happy to use a name with which she could "pass" as well as one that reflected her sexual identity. Whilst she felt herself to be neither man nor woman and named herself as such, there are indications that she wanted to remain within the bounds of social acceptance, an example of which may have been her decision to publish Hungerheart anonymously.

In addition to the names that women chose to suggest their sexuality,

---

<sup>32</sup> Steen suggests that: "If it had not foundered in the war tempest it might well have made the kind of sensation made by Marie-Claire, and, in these days, of Bonjour Tristesse. As a first novel, it is superior to either" (251).

reflecting the view of homosexuality as inversion at the beginning of the twentieth century, the trio had a range of nicknames that reflected their individuality, community and "roles" within that.

"Chris" and "Tony" described themselves as "the Matka's Boys", the Matka being Edy. "Chris" was also known as "Master Baby" and "Tony" as "The Brat". (Melville, 325-6).

Another nickname for Edy that Chris used in a number of her letters to Sackville-West was "Boney" (27<sup>th</sup> October 1942; 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947), this may have been after Napoleon Bonaparte, as Chris makes a reference to their likeness (St John, "Close-up," 28). These names highlight the role of Edy within the *ménage* as being both in charge but additionally as a matriarchal figure. Chris and Tony are child-like figures that need keeping in order, but are also seen within a "pecking" order where Chris comes first. Similar names by which they were known were the "serfs" or "boys" and Una Troubridge referred to them collectively as "Edy Craig and 'the Boys'" (Baker, 271). Throughout all of these nicknames there is a very strong sense not only of identity but of the familial relationship between the trio.

### **Ruth, Eva and Expressions of Identity**

Ruth and Eva neither reflected the stereotype of the "mannish lesbian", nor were they associated with groups of self-identified lesbians as the Smallhythe Trio was. However, the stereotypes attributed to the "New Woman" could also be applied to Ruth and Eva. The "New Woman" was generally acknowledged to

be an educated and/or intelligent woman (Smith-Rosenberg, "New Woman" 247). Although Ruth and Eva both left school before the statutory age, much of their spare time after leaving was spent in either learning or teaching others. This was initially organised by the church through leading Sunday School classes; latterly it was in more formal settings, either teaching at Toynbee Hall (Slate, letter to Slawson, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1910) or attending Adult Education Classes (Slate, letter to Slawson, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1912) or through their attendance at Woodbrooke College. For many young women this self-improvement was the only way in which they could assert some independence from their family in an acceptable way and even then it could meet with disapproval as in Ruth's case. There are a number of references to disagreements between Ruth and her mother and it is evident that Ruth's self-improvement, which I discuss further in Chapter Four, was one of them.

This morning the old grievance broke out again, and I was told I had no business wanting to go out – that classes were foolish – that they (Dad and Mother) are out of pocket by keeping me here . . . I can write no more about it except that I have written [sic] Miss Ryan for the address of a lady she mentioned to me once who let – I am determined to go this time. (Slate, diary, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1909)

Benstock, looking at the Paris lesbian scene, suggests how those women who had economic independence could remove themselves from situations similar to that which Ruth and Eva found themselves in and in doing so go one step further and express a lesbian identity.

Separated from home and family, expatriate lesbians could act upon their sexual preferences, no longer finding it necessary to submerge their sexuality in the late-nineteenth-century ideology of “ennobling commitment” to community service or self-discipline. (Benstock, Women, 334)

For Ruth and Eva, of a lower social class, the “ennobling commitment” was still very much a part of their lives. Work, Chapel and night classes were essential for Ruth and Eva's independence. These activities were perhaps the only legitimate ways of doing something for themselves, enabling them to break away from the family and responsibilities that they would be expected to assume.<sup>33</sup>

Nonconformist religious culture was supportive of ongoing education and both Ruth and Eva were able to develop their teaching skills there. The Chapel they attended ran active discussion groups, where issues of the day – social as well as religious - were discussed. The Chapel also provided a social life, which is where Ruth met her first beaux Ewart and Wal. From reading Ruth's diaries it would appear that the relationship with Wal was a troubled one and that by the time Ruth became engaged to Wal she had already developed an independence that he found difficult to accept. For example, Wal did not agree with many of Ruth's beliefs, which he actively demonstrated through his involvement in the anti-suffrage movement. This breaking away from traditional roles increasingly set Ruth aside from her family to the extent that in November 1909 she moved

---

<sup>33</sup> This would include domestic work in the house or caring for other children.



out of the family home to live in a flat in Commercial Street.

More fundamental to my interest in Ruth and her relationship with Wal are her own observations that she did not feel “natural” with him (Slate, diary, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1906). This poses the question, why did she feel “unnatural” with Wal? It may have been because he was not interested in the same issues and worked positively to undermine her, or perhaps Ruth felt “unnatural” with him because she did not have the same feelings for him that she did for her female friends. Certainly there are indications that they were unable to communicate effectively, as Ruth wrote:

We parted as usual, Wal saying that we seemed only to understand one another when we were saying Goodnight. I would be content if he never touched me, if only we understood each other. Until we do, caresses seem almost a mockery. Yesterday Wal spoke of next year – of our marrying. It seemed to me he spoke from an idea of Duty” (Slate, diary, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1907).

These feelings contrast with those that she expressed about Eva and her other friends such as Miss Brown, suggesting an affinity with women that she did not feel with men. Her frustration with the lack of mutual understanding with Wal contrasts with her relationships with women, recounting a day spent with Miss Brown. Ruth wrote: “Eventful day . . . Elizabeth and I were left alone for a few minutes. She kissed me very tenderly – calling me ‘a dear girl.’” Even with Ewart and later with her husband Hugh, Ruth had ambivalent feelings towards marriage.

Whilst she and Hugh did marry, they were more interested in the ideas of “free love” and independence, marrying mainly to maintain respectability (Thompson, 308).

As I discussed in Chapter Two it appears that both Ruth and Eva had a number of friends and relatives who may have been lesbians.<sup>34</sup>

I wonder if Miss Martin told you anything about her friend Miss Randle? She is such a mysterious looking being and makes me think sadly of the Odd Women . . . She lives with a woman friend, and was very pleased to have the children at the house – indeed, she was heard to say that no house is complete without children and a piano! I want to know about her, if that’s not being unduly curious. (Slawson, letter to Slate, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1914)

This seems to suggest that not only did Ruth and Eva’s circle of friends include new women - who may or may not also be lesbians - but that she was able to identify these women in social situations. This suggests that there were signifiers about Ruth and other “odd women” which enabled them to recognise each other. It also suggests that she and Eva discussed feelings that were akin to those expressed by these “odd women.” Eva described Minna as a “woman of the

---

<sup>34</sup> Specifically I am referring to Miss Brown, Minna Simmons, Eva’s Aunts Edie and Emily. There is also a reference in a letter from Ruth to Eva that may point to an accusation of lesbianism having been made in some way; however the letter does not specify what the event referred to was. “You did puzzle me a bit that last evening we were together, we have always been so free, in our friendship from any disturbances like that, but none of us must think any more about it” (Slate to Slawson, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1909, emphasis in the original).

future" (Slawson, letter to Slate, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1911) which suggests that she thought of her as a "New Woman," someone who had quite progressive ideas. Together with what we already know of the intimate relationship between Eva and Minna, and the fact that Gertie described Minna as an "urning" it would seem reasonable to assume that Eva made a connection between lesbian sexuality and the "New Woman".

A journal entitled The Freewoman, edited by Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpe, was first published in November 1911 (Bland, 267). One of the subjects it wanted to discuss openly was the sex question. But it caused outrage amongst other "New Women" such as Olive Schreiner, who wrote in a letter to Havelock Ellis:

almost all the articles are by men and *not* by women, and the whole tone is unlike even the most licentious females or prostitutes . . . It is unclean. And sex is so beautiful! It can be discussed scientifically . . . philosophically . . . from the poetic standpoint . . . from the matter-of-fact standpoint . . . from the personal standpoint . . . and it is all beautifully clean and natural and healthy (quoted in Bland, 265).

Although the journal was only published for a short time, a number of discussion groups known as the "Freewoman discussion circles" were established (Bland, 269). The London one was based at the International Suffrage Shop and met fortnightly. There is no record as to how often Ruth attended the discussion

group but it must have been quite regularly as it is here that she met and became friends with Françoise Lafitte, with whom she shared a flat from 1913.

Ruth and Eva discussed the sex question in some detail in their writing and when they were together. They had read a number of texts that suggest that they were well acquainted with the arguments.<sup>35</sup> Eva's relationship with Minna developed after she moved into Minna's home when the latter had been widowed, to help her with her three children. However, it would appear from their writings that although both Eva and Minna valued this relationship above many others, they still expected to meet and love men.

Minna and I talked a little of the possibility of two wives to one man – jealousy would be the stumbling block. Still Minna felt she could share a man with me – neither of us felt we could share a man with Lily or Ruth – I think because we recognise they are essentially lovers, and I suppose would in some way possess a decided advantage over us (Slawson, diary, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1914).

Was the reason that Eva and Minna were prepared to “share” a man and did not see themselves as “lovers” imply that they were not physically attracted to men, but did not seriously think that they could have a relationship without a man?

---

<sup>35</sup> I made reference in Chapter Two to the books in the Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson archive. In addition to this a number of books are mentioned in their diaries and letters as they read them and discussed them together. This emphasises the knowledge of sexuality and issues around the Sex Question that both Ruth and Eva had. I return to Ruth's friendship with Françoise Lafitte in Chapter Four.

As there are only a few photographs of Ruth and Eva it is not possible to draw many conclusions about how they dressed in order to express their identity. From the evidence we have (figs. 6 and 7) it is clear that they did not dress in the style of the "mannish lesbian". A photograph of Eva in 1915 (fig. 7) shows a portrait in which she is dressed in white with frills at her neck. This is a much more feminine style than the photographs of Ruth or any of the trio suggest. However, it is probable that she was dressed in her best dress for the photograph. It would appear that Ruth's dress style was plainer than Eva's, although a similar caveat applies (fig. 6). There are slightly more photographs available of her so it may not have been such an occasion for Ruth to get dressed up. The plain clothes are suggestive of the "New Woman" style, but unlike Edy in fig. 8 there is no evidence of the cravat style tie or jacket.

Naming for the trio was important and more indicative of their lesbian identity. However, this was not the same for Ruth and Eva. There is no evidence in their writing of nicknames and as I have already discussed in Chapter Two it was more usual to refer to someone by their surname. Being on first name terms was reserved for friends. However, Ruth and Eva did talk about each other in such a manner that their love for each other was evident. After Eva's death Ruth wrote: "friendship has been the breath of my life – and Eva was its crown" (Slate, diary, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1916).



Fig. 6. Ruth photographed in York c. 1917  
(T. Thompson, n.p.)



Fig. 7. Eva c. 1915 (T. Thompson, n.p.)



Fig. 8. Edy (Tickner, 24)

## Conclusion

To summarise this chapter, it is clear that all five of the women could have been described as “New Women.” The trio could equally be described as “Bohemian” and it is perhaps indicative of their class that they had more identity options open to them. The style of the bohemian was more applicable to artists and those who had a degree of economic independence. The “New Woman” was a less unconventional figure in comparison. Neither group of women appears to have dressed in the style of the “mannish lesbian”, although there are a few references to Chris wearing trousers. However, as I demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter the stereotypes of the “New Woman” and “mannish lesbian” are closely related to each other. The key feature of expression of lesbian identity from the trio is through their use of masculine names and familial relationships. For Ruth and Eva the expression of lesbian identity comes more through political affiliations and friendships than a personal style. This raises the question, why look at the stereotype of the “mannish lesbian” in relation to these women if the tradition of the mannish style was not really applicable to them? The “mannish lesbian” was a key figure at the turn of the twentieth century for lesbian history and it would not have been possible to look at lesbian identity at this time and not discuss the women in relation to this style. Sexologists like Krafft-Ebing had embedded the idea that clothes were synonymous with an expression of sexual identity as Smith-Rosenberg explores through her discussion on the “New Woman” (“New Woman”, 272). Hall promoted this idea to a wider public in The Well of Loneliness through her character of Stephen Gordon

and her own style, albeit less severe, reinforced this image. The relationship between sexuality and modernism is problematic and Doan concludes in her book Fashioning Sapphism: “Hall, Troubridge, Gluck , and Allen<sup>36</sup> probably never imagined that, decades later, their visual images would be associated *exclusively* with lesbianism and lesbians” (194). However, the image of the “mannish lesbian” is a prevailing one and those images have been used to authenticate its existence. The reality for the five women who are the focus of my research is that the mannish style was not a means by which they expressed their sexual identity.

---

<sup>36</sup> Doan is referring to Mary Allen (1878-1964) who was a pioneer of women's policing. She wrote three autobiographies, The Pioneer Policewoman, Woman at the Cross Roads and Lady in Blue.



## Chapter Four

### “No self-respecting woman could be other than a Suffragist”<sup>1</sup>: The Role of Political Activism in the Expression of Sexual Identity

Class differences played a key role in the political motivations of the Smallhythe Trio, as middle-class women, and in those of the lower middle-class-working women Ruth and Eva. Whilst both groups of women were committed to the women’s suffrage movement and fought for women’s rights, their political differences, as I shall analyse, were based on class difference and their consequent understandings and expectations of the movement.<sup>2</sup> I shall place this chapter in the context of a relationship between sexual identity and political activism that has already been established (Bryson). Then I shall show, through examining their political activity, how their personal and class experiences shaped and motivated the political beliefs of the women discussed in this thesis. Ruth’s experience, for example, as a lower middle-class working woman seeing at first hand the poverty in which women in her own neighbourhood lived, was very different from that of Edy. Whilst the latter herself experienced periods of poverty as a child, evidenced through the presence of the bailiffs in the family home (Melville, 61), theirs was a different concept of poverty – when Ellen Terry started to act again, for instance, they were able to sustain two houses. I shall then

---

<sup>1</sup> Edy quoted in Cockin (Edith Craig, 82).

<sup>2</sup> For further reading on the Women’s Movement prior to the early twentieth century see Jeffreys for a brief overview, Kingsley Kent, Puvis and Holton or Pankhurst and Strachey for personal views.

demonstrate that the lesbian sexuality of these women was important for their political motivation.

## Activism

There has been a long association between lesbianism and feminist political struggle. Valerie Bryson traces feminist politics back to the fifteenth century and the earliest British feminist she cites is Aphra Behn (1640-89), now viewed by some as a lesbian dramatist (Faderman, Chloe, 24-5). Behn's plays contain themes such as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism and sexual desire between women (Donaghue, 57, 104, 130) which clearly demonstrate alternative sexualities and more specifically lesbian relationships.<sup>3</sup> In 1692 she made a reference to lesbian desire in a poem entitled, "Verses design'd by Mrs. A. Behn to be sent to a fair Lady, that desir'd she would absent herself to cure her Love. Left unfinish'd" (Donaghue, 115. Original spelling.) Behn identifies herself as both the author of the poem, and with the sentiments it expresses. Like the suffragists in the early twentieth century she was concerned about women's role in society. However, Behn does not get the accolade of being the "First English Feminist." This honour goes to Mary Astell (1666-1731) (Hill). Her writings, whilst not consciously lesbian, clearly demonstrate a rejection of men that is not dissimilar from the ideas of many radical feminists and lesbians in the twentieth century. She suggests that women should reject marriage as a form of domestic

---

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the lesbian writer Maureen Duffy produced a biography of Aphra Behn, The Passionate Shepherdess, which was first published in 1977.

slavery, and that women should develop female communities to live and work in (Bryson, 16).

Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the relationship between lesbianism and feminism has become increasingly complex. On the one hand we know that many lesbians were involved in the suffrage movement. Hamer suggests that

the militant suffrage movement attracted large numbers of lesbians: Mary Allen, Rachel Barrett, Eva Gore-Booth, Vera Holme, Evelina Haverfield, Ester Roper, Chris St. John, Micky Jacob. They were not alone. (23)

On the other hand, the suffrage movement was trying to avoid accusations of lesbianism and masculinity, which were used to undermine the suffragettes' political demands (Hamer, 25). So lesbians, who were key figures in the political struggle, as Hamer indicates, may have had to be guarded about their sexuality for fear of losing their political credibility. However, the evidence does not suggest that Chris and her friends consciously hid their lesbianism. Rather, it was not "seen" by the majority of the population.<sup>4</sup>

For many women "the vote became both the symbol of the free, sexually autonomous woman and the means by which the goals of a feminist sexual

---

<sup>4</sup> I have previously discussed Castle's concept of the "spectral lesbian" (Chapter Two).

culture were to be attained" (Kingsley-Kent, 13). Its importance was synonymous with their right to live a financially as well as sexually independent life. Rosen (in Kingsley-Kent, 6) implies that it was primarily lesbians, "unmarried WSPU members," who fought for the vote in order to legitimate their status. Whilst this was certainly an important issue for lesbians, the suffrage movement attracted support from many other women as well. The opportunity to influence politics was seen as a means for changing many aspects of women's lives and as such attracted women irrespective of, as well as because of, their sexuality. Some women, perhaps like Ruth and Eva, may also have been drawn to the movement because of its involvement with *women*, a cause to which they felt drawn, whilst not recognising this as a specifically sexual option or choice.

The women's suffrage movement ran alongside the struggle for male suffrage to be extended to working-class men. As such many of the women involved argued that they were better educated than many of the men who had or were to be given the vote and that they were therefore better able to understand the political issues than those men, and use their vote in an informed way. However (in)appropriate such a viewpoint was, it is the case that there was a strong influence within the suffrage movement from middle-class women who expressed hostility towards the working classes as part of their demands for suffrage (Bryson, 90). Since the women I am studying had different class positions and different perspectives upon life, they also had different reasons for their involvement in the suffrage movement.

## Ruth

Within the Chapel culture of which Ruth and her family were stalwart supporters<sup>5</sup> there was a philosophy of improvement both of the self and the community. "Its ethos had always been particularly suited to the ethic of self-help and self-improvement: it did not satisfy to the same extent those who had achieved their social ambitions" (D. Thompson, Nonconformity, 15). Ideas of education and self-improvement were central to Ruth's life. She finished school in February 1898 at the age of 14, the age when compulsory education ended. But she chose to attend night classes and lectures until she was able to go to Woodbrooke in 1914 on a full-time basis at the age of thirty.<sup>6</sup> On signing up for an evening class in 1900 she described herself as one of eight ambitious students, demonstrating her strong desire to learn and improve herself (Slate, diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1900). It would appear from Ruth's writing that the chapel she and her family belonged to was an active and stimulating one which helped to

---

<sup>5</sup> Ruth attended Chapel along with her sister and father on a regular basis wherever they lived, although it was the Manor Park Chapel that appears to have had the most influence over Ruth. Ruth and Daisy both attended Sunday School here, and later started, with others including Ewart Johnson, a Christian Endeavour group. This group promoted active involvement from everyone in the meetings and in its organisation; Daisy was on the social committee and their father on the prayer committee meeting (Slate, diary, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1897).

<sup>6</sup> It is likely that Ruth did not stop her education at this point. However, after Eva died in 1917 Ruth did not write as much as before, so we do not know much about her activities after this time.

kindle this interest in education.<sup>7</sup> Although the chapel maintained an emphasis on education and equality for women they still held the belief that the proper place for a woman was within the home. Wilson charts a history through the nineteenth century of women moving from their role as the "Angel in the House" to the "Angel out of the House" (L. Wilson, 190) whereby certain women moved their role from a private sphere to a public one through the intermediary of the Chapel. Focusing on issues of social improvement was an ideal way for women to develop political and social interests, as they were perceived as legitimate concerns for women.

The idea of women as "moral protectors of the home", while ideologically contributing further to women's domestic confinement, simultaneously gave women a sense of mission, spiritual worth, and strong incentive to engage in philanthropic works – to morally protect others' (the working classes') homes. This moralizing role for women was a crucial component both in the inspiration of many women *into* feminism, and also in the very nature of their subsequent feminist mission. (Bland, 52)

The notion that women's role was as important out of the home as it was inside was a theme taken up by the women's movement to demonstrate how important their influence was, and to justify why women should be part of the democratic political structures. Many women started their move to feminism through the

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1906 when Ruth and her family moved areas, Ruth wrote about the new chapel that they started to attend. Her writing suggests that there was less debate and intellectual discussion in the new chapel than she had previously been used to (Slate, letter to Slawson, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1906)

church and the social work that it advocated, translating this into a feminist and political stance.

Most of the clubs and organisations that had grown up were not self-consciously feminist, but they produced a generation of women with experience in campaigning, organising, fund-raising and public speaking. For such women, their right to vote. . . appeared both as an obvious entitlement and the one key right they lacked. (Bryson, 87)

It is evident that Ruth's desire for learning marked her out as different from her family and some of her friends, and this formed the basis of an ongoing argument between Ruth and her mother.

I sat with sore heart listening as she told me I was getting away from them all at home, going beyond my station and a lot of things too painful to dwell on. One remark especially painful was that I made friends with impossible affected girls, who wanted all their nonsense knocked out of them, both Eleanor Fairfax and Eva . . . this was not the first time mother had so spoken. (Slate, rough diary notes, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1904)

There seem to be two perceived betrayals here that fuelled these arguments within the family, firstly that of class betrayal through education and secondly, the betrayal of the feminine role by associating with liberated women. As Ruth developed her ideas and pursued an education that the family had been unable to

provide for her, she was seen to remove herself even further from them. Thus David Thompson suggests of the influence of the church, especially within non-conformist religions: "religious affiliation often went hand in hand with a mood of self-improvement that led to upward social mobility" (Nonconformist, 15).

However, despite pressure from her mother and her beau Wal, Ruth was not deterred from pursuing knowledge and developing friendships with like-minded women. As Smith-Rosenberg suggests, "education constituted the New Woman's most salient characteristic" ("New Woman," 247). Bryson maintains that "education . . . becomes an essential part of the process of emancipation" (62). Ruth was thus pursuing a route that would almost inevitably lead her to take a political stance through her personal decisions.

One sense in which Ruth perceived herself as different from other women around her was through her growing social conscience, which fuelled a desire to action. This was shared by her friends like Eva and Elizabeth Brown, and was fundamental to the suffrage movement. This sense of difference may have been nurtured first within the chapel.

The nonconformist religions tended to have more direct implications for feminism, not least because nonconformists' sense of being different and at odds with the world was likely to have fostered an awareness of injustice (Bland, 51).

Ruth's early activity in the "missions" (Slate, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1905) and process of "giving herself to God" (Slate, diary, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1899) demonstrate the



influence religion had on her from an early age and the commitment it engendered.

The religion of commitment and action associated with Nonconformity has played an important part in national and religious life. It is practically impossible to be an uncommitted or casual Nonconformist . . . This commitment was also carried over into a commitment to live one's religion in everyday life. For some this meant social action; for others it meant political action. (D. Thompson, Nonconformist, 17)

Ruth's political motivations stem from a desire to "do good" (Slate, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1905), an expression that she used often in her diaries and letters. Whilst this does not specifically suggest any particular political intent, it was the impetus for motivating Ruth to "improve herself." Her subsequent education raised her awareness of social issues and brought her into contact and discussion with other women.

Ruth's first attempts at "doing good" were focused on the work of the chapel. In 1905, when Ruth started to become actively involved in the Chapel's work the emphasis was on temperance, "mission" work, and attracting new members to the congregation to be "saved." In her diary she recalls a revival meeting where they were encouraging people, mainly working-class people, to sign the pledge.

I think the refinement and difference struck them, they seemed to

appreciate it even. . . . I am glad we have at last begun some really "good work," but I am not sure what is the attitude of my mind toward mission. (Slate, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1905)

Despite her obvious excitement, this early experience suggests that she realised even then, that mission work was not necessarily the best way in which to help "the poor."<sup>8</sup> It also demonstrates the development of an independent and enquiring mind, which later caused some conflict within her family. There was an emphasis on promoting temperance, and within the non-conformist religions especially, there were strong feelings about alcohol as a cause of poverty and as a means of perpetuating it. It was not just the Chapel that perceived alcohol as a major issue:

feminists cited male alcoholism as a major instigator of men's violence towards women . . . The emphasis of the temperance movement earlier in the century had been on women using their influence at home to turn their husbands, brothers and sons away from drink. Now feminists called for women to move their temperance campaign into the *public* sphere, both in defence of the home (a "maternal struggle"), but also in the quest for greater safety for women on the streets. (Bland, 111)

The Church, however, could not offer anything more tangible than its teachings to

---

<sup>8</sup> Much has been written about poverty and the early twentieth century. B. Seebohm Rowntree was an important contemporary researcher. A Quaker, he founded a tradition of research that continues to be funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation today. It was also by the same Rowntree's factory in York that Ruth was later employed as a Welfare Worker.

put right the social wrongs that alcohol was a contributing factor to and marker of. Ruth's view of the drunken working classes, who appreciate the refinement of the lower-middle classes offering them salvation through religion, was one that her comment suggests she was uncomfortable with.

There is an association between the notion of goodness and the doing "good" Ruth describes, and love or more specifically, spiritual love. When it came to sexuality there was a

belief that the majority of women, those not belonging to the prostitute class, [feel] neither curiosity, nor desire on these matters, while they are maidens. And that when their sexual life has begun, its physical side is quite subordinate and merely a *response* to their husbands. (Browne, "Sexual Variety," 92)

At a time when a woman articulating her sexuality was considered to be less than respectable, emotions and feelings were often channelled into spiritual love or religion, which were viewed as acceptable and "noble" ways in which women could express their needs:

genteel women, barred from work and confined to the family circle, sublimated through religion, "the only channel" through which the sexual emotions could be expressed "freely without impropriety."

Women realized ideal-love in the religious sense. (Cominos, 163)

Even when sexuality was expressed, religion offered support. When Chris' love for Vita was not returned, for example, she turned her adoration into a sacred act.

A little thing in which I am faithful is carrying your blue beads in my pocket by day, and at night having kissed them, putting them on the table by my bed. My first act when I wake is to kiss them again. A little thing truly, but a sacrament helping me to remain in a state of grace. (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1932)

Indeed, some women consciously expressed this relationship between religion and sexuality:

Beatrice Potter feared that spinsterhood would starve the physical and emotional side of her nature: "God knows celibacy is as painful to a woman (even from the physical standpoint) as it is to a man." She recognized that if she remained a spinster, her sexual and emotional feelings "must remain controlled and unsatisfied, finding their only vent in one quality of the phantom companion of the nethermost personality, religious exaltation" (Jalland, 257).

Initially, Ruth saw "doing good" or "good works" in the context of religion and working through the chapel. She undertook teaching within the Sunday School, and along with Eva also tutored a young disabled girl, Emma Clover. When Ewart<sup>9</sup> moved to Manchester, she looked to religion to take his place or the place of romance.

We said "Goodbye" and that is all I wish to be written, as memory will not fail for the rest . . . Did not go to Sunday School in the

---

<sup>9</sup> Ewart Johnson was Ruth's first boyfriend. He died of consumption a few years after he and his mother moved back to Manchester.

morning, but did to Chapel . . . I could not sing a note, for a most tremendous lump seemed to form in my throat, and I am sure they chose all the miserable hymns. . . In the park on Saturday, I made up my mind to begin afresh to serve God and I hope Ewart has done the same. (Slate, diary, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1900)

Whilst Ruth was very involved with the church, and the work that the church undertook with the poor, she saw that there were fundamental social problems that were not, and could not be, addressed by the church. This realisation marked a turning point for her, moving from religion as a means to solve social issues instead to socialism and feminism.<sup>10</sup> Her understanding of the misery faced by many women through poverty, the result of alcoholism and consequent violence, was brought into the family home through the experience of her next door neighbours.

Edie, Hebe's sister, had been round, sobbing bitterly, & declaring her father was murdering her mother. Hebe & mother went at once, getting a policeman to accompany them, but the silly woman refused to own she had been beaten & they were obliged to leave her, with the two children, to her fate (Slate, diary, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1905).

Violence against women and girls was commonplace, and it was one of the first issues taken up by the Woman's Movement. Ruth saw that women shouldered

---

<sup>10</sup> For further comments on class, women and poverty see Leonore Davidoff and Judy Giles.

most of the suffering caused by poverty. Domestic violence was not uncommon and it was usually the women who took the responsibility for protecting the children and for trying to keep the family from the workhouse.<sup>11</sup> Feminists' anger at (sexual) crimes against women was exacerbated by the obvious bias of the judicial system towards men.<sup>12</sup>

The leniency of sentences and the clear bias of the male judges were backed up by the covering up of offences by the police and the connivance of men of influence in concealing offences. (Jeffreys, Spinster, 55)

If they could not expect justice from the police and the courts, it is small wonder that women like Hebe's mother chose not to inform on their husbands, as they must have had real justification for fearing reprisals in a system which did not protect them. This was one reason for women looking for alternatives to conventional marriage, such as "free love" or "free unions." These offered women an opportunity to retain their independence. Despite the obvious disadvantages to women of potentially being abandoned with children, no job and no money in

---

<sup>11</sup>There is a significant amount of research on the family and poverty. See Jalland, Davidoff and Hall. Evidence of the stigma associated with the workhouse can also be found in one of Ruth's diaries, where she writes about her Aunt Amy, who was in the workhouse. There is no explanation as to why her aunt was there, but despite Ruth's wish to see her, the family "would not hear of it" (Slate, diary, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1909).

<sup>12</sup> The focus of "first wave" feminism (Banks, Becoming, 48) was primarily on the legal rights of women, culminating in laws such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, the Custody of Infant Acts 1886, and most notably the Contagious Diseases Acts supported by Josephine Butler. The impetus for campaigning for acts such as these was the inequality in the judicial system, which placed no onus on men to treat women fairly, but encouraged their treatment as marketable property.

addition to a "reputation," not being legally married ensured that a woman did not become her husband's possession and that she did not forfeit any of her own property. This meant that women with independent means – who were in the main the women advocating these relationships – by retaining their independence were able to leave a heterosexual relationship with some economic security.

The success of "free unions" also relied on women having control over their own bodies and therefore understanding and using birth control. This information was available to educated middle-class women. Through the writings of women such as Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger,<sup>13</sup> it became more available to working-class women. Birth control became a key issue of the Women's Movement, precisely because of the control it gave women over their own bodies and ultimately life choices. Ruth, who advocated free unions, appears to have married Hugh on the basis of family pressure rather than from a desire to marry (T.Thompson, 308). Ruth's views on sexual activity are mixed and as a subject that was not discussed in the same way as it would be today, it is difficult to know at what point her feelings changed. During a holiday with Wal in 1908, Ruth wrote the following:

We stayed at Churchfield House – a boarding Establishment - and were very comfortable. The only drawback was the lateness of the

---

<sup>13</sup> In the 1920's Marie Stopes' writing was becoming more widely available. Married Love and Enduring Passion became best sellers. Other writers on sexuality and birth control during the early twentieth century include Margaret Sanger and Stella Browne.

hour for returning – the party being somewhat gay. One or two girls made themselves extremely cheap and I felt very sorry. (Slate, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1908)

My interpretation of this is that some women – but not Ruth – did have some sexual experiences during this holiday. Ruth appears not to have approved of this. However, her views changed, evidenced by the programmes for lectures on Free Love<sup>14</sup> found amongst her papers dated 1909 and Tierl Thompson's reference to Ruth and Hugh as lovers (308). It may also be that it was not the principle of free love that Ruth objected to on this holiday, but the nature of the relationships between the people it concerned. A committed relationship was a very different issue from a casual holiday romance.

Ruth saw that the church could only offer limited support to those people who were less well off and turned to socialism and the Women's Movement to find the answers. She had already shown an interest in politics; her father had been active in canvassing for the liberal party prior to the 1906 election. Comments in her diary indicate that she was not only interested in what was happening but questioned it as well.

The Liberals are gaining the day, and Dad is jubilant. I have just heard that our Liberal candidate has been returned with a huge majority. . . . How will it be I wonder a few months hence? How will the promises, the glowing pictures of better things in store, appear

---

<sup>14</sup> "Journalism (Free Love)" TG Lectures 1909.



against results? (Slate, diary, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1906)

Ruth, however, did not rely on her father's beliefs, and developed her own thoughts and political ideas. One of her first heroines was Josephine Butler (1828-1906). In 1907 Ruth attended

the Josephine Butler meeting, at Caxton Hall, where my hero-worship cravings found food in plenty - & my interest ever since in a movement which must do some good. I had been so ignorant hitherto of much which goes on in the great cities. (Slate, diary, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1907)

It would appear that Ruth saw this meeting as an important milestone in the development of her feminist politics. Butler may have appealed to Ruth for a number of reasons. She was best known for her promotion of the rights to higher education for women and of economic independence,<sup>15</sup> issues that were important to Ruth. In addition to this Butler "target[ed] the middle and upper-class men who were in the habit of sounding off about the immorality of the 'lower orders' whilst hiding behind a mask of respectability" (Jeffreys, Spinster, 9). Bearing in mind Ruth's concern about inequality within relationships between men and women and her knowledge of class differences she may have felt equally strongly about the inequalities and hypocrisies of the upper classes who exploited the working and lower classes.

---

<sup>15</sup> For further information about Josephine Butler see Crawford for an overview and G. Johnson and L. Johnson for a contemporary account.

Ruth's interest and indeed her constant desire for education and self-improvement meant that she spent many of her lunch hours and spare time attending lectures, either at Caxton Hall where there was a public meeting at least once a month<sup>16</sup> or at St Ethelburga's. Over the next two years she heard speakers such as Mrs Fawcett<sup>17</sup> (Slate, diary, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1907), Miss Macauley<sup>18</sup> (Slate, diary, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1908) and Dr Cobb<sup>19</sup> whom she increasingly admired (Slate, diary, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1907). However, an extract from her letters to Eva suggests that she may have had other interests in these meetings in addition to her interest in politics. "My capacity for worship has had to be still further enlarged, to take in Mrs Despard, whose looks and gestures and words have been in my mind ever since" (Slate, letter to Slawson, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1909). In this particular instance, Ruth was attracted not only by the politics of the speaker, but by the woman herself.<sup>20</sup> It would be easy to make more of this statement than is perhaps meant. It would be possible to suggest a romantic

---

<sup>16</sup> Votes for Women features a programme of events in each edition. This was initially a monthly, then weekly paper. Caxton Hall held at least one public meeting a month in addition to major events such as the meeting prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1908 "Rush the House of Commons" demonstration (Atkinson, 76). These are all listed in Votes for Women as are many of the "at home" meetings which Ruth refers to.

<sup>17</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847-1929) was the president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S.)

<sup>18</sup> Florence Elizabeth Macaulay (1862-1945) was an organiser for the WSPU, speaking and working on their behalf across the country (Crawford).

<sup>19</sup> Dr Cobb was the Rector at the Church of St Ethelburga the Virgin, Bishopsgate. He was interested in the "New Theology" and was an important influence on Ruth.

<sup>20</sup> Mrs Despard (1844-1939) had been the joint Honorary Secretary of the WSPU and then, after their split, she became the President of the WFL. She was a social reformer who lived among the working classes, seeing at first hand the poverty and effects of the Poor Law Administration (Atkinson, 26).

crush, providing evidence of Ruth's lesbian disposition. Charlotte Despard had put her energies and her considerable private wealth into alleviating the effects of poverty in the inner London districts of Wandsworth and Nine Elms. She had funded clinics, set up young people's clubs to keep them off the streets, and helped individuals whenever their needs were brought to her attention. Most unusually for a late-Victorian philanthropist, she lived among the people she helped, not in a "settlement" like those set up in the East End, but in an ordinary working-class house in Wandsworth Road. (Whitelaw, 58)

It is easy to see why Ruth admired her so much. She was "doing good" in very practical ways, working across class boundaries to achieve it. It was evident that Ruth saw the Women's Movement "doing good" in a much more tangible way than religion was able to do and whilst religion remained important to Ruth, she became increasingly political and practical in her actions.

Ruth had joined the Women's Freedom League (WFL) by 1912.<sup>21</sup> Its political interests were wider than those of the WSPU. In addition to demanding the right to vote, the WFL believed that there would not be equality until the

---

<sup>21</sup> Along with a number of flyers for the WFL in archive there is a letter to Ruth which starts "Dear Comrade" inviting her to attend a lecture at which Mrs Despard was to be the main speaker suggesting that by that time she was a member of the league (Phillips, Morris and Beman, letter to Slate, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1912). The letter also reminds members that the yearly subscription is now due, suggesting that Ruth had been a member for at least a year.

gender relationships between men and women were resolved. Some of their goals were concerned with education and employment, and they even mooted the idea that women should be paid for their work as wives and mothers (Whitelaw, 58). Ruth, who believed wholeheartedly that women should be educated to enable them to live independently, upheld these ideals. "I really must learn something thoroughly dear – a woman needs a profession or trade as much as a man, and I know nothing well" (Slate, letter to Slawson, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1908). From her personal experience, as well as through her reading and the lectures she attended, she believed that the only way in which women were able to gain independence, and improve their lives generally, was by being economically independent of men, separating relationships from economics. Ruth's desire for independence brought her into conflict with her partner Wal on many occasions.

[Wal] soundly rated on my obstinacy, independence – the latter quality I intend ever to cultivate, and Wal must learn my intention. I am sure it would be better for many, many people, if conventional ideas concerning the dependence of women upon men, could be altered – they are a hindrance to the true progress of women, and are not altogether good for men. I believe so strongly in the possibilities and powers of my own sex, that I deprecate all customs, though rooted in ideas of chivalry once admirable and even necessary, that would retard their emancipation. (Slate, diary, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1907)

Ruth here verbalises her desire for independence and the certainty that she

should continue to fight for this in spite of what Wal might think or however he might try to persuade her otherwise. Ruth expresses her views passionately, suggesting an almost militant stance towards the relationships between men and women, although this was not her preference in terms of activism:

Up to City 12 o'clock. Hyde Park Demonstration by Women's National and Political Union. Most marvellous sight, out-reaching the procession of the previous week<sup>[22]</sup> in numbers – I should think by thousands, but my sympathies are more with the others (Slate, diary, 21st June 1908).

Like Eva perhaps, her reasons for allying herself with the WFL rather than the more militant WSPU was that

I am afraid I felt rather weary of it all – not because I have not the cause of women at heart, but because I notice the militant suffragettes so seldom discuss the fundamentals of progress amongst women - it is always "the Vote" (Slawson, diary 18<sup>th</sup> June 1913).

Ruth's and Eva's views are unusual as we do not often hear women from the lower classes discussing their thoughts on political issues in general. We are more used to associating this with women from the middle and upper classes than the lower classes.

---

<sup>22</sup> This was a reference to the procession held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1908 organised by the WFL (Fulford, 158).

Feminist historians in the 1960s and 1970s routinely had to contend with criticism from socialists to the effect that the suffrage movement was a middle-class movement, in which working-class women were absent or had at best had [sic] been co-opted and manipulated (like the W.S.P.U's Annie Kenney), but often at the price of severing their connections at the roots (Joannou and Purvis, 4).

The work of Liddington and Norris has shown that working-class women were politically active, especially in the industrial areas.<sup>23</sup> The focus for these women was to improve working conditions for themselves and women like them. Sarah Dickinson,<sup>24</sup> "from her own experience of low pay and bad conditions in factories . . . went on to press for the vote, and was soon enrolling other women into the suffrage campaign" (Liddington and Norris, 23-4).

Liddington and Norris found that researching working-class women in the suffrage movement was very difficult and many of the active Lancashire suffragists are now only names (20). By virtue of a greater independence through economic advantage and more opportunities for education, records of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Liddington and Norris focus on the textile industry in the Lancashire area. Much of the opportunity for discussion and activism was through their trade unions and Women's Co-operative Guild branches.

<sup>24</sup> An example of the experience shaping her campaigning was following a factory inspector's visit to her workplace and his insistence that the women be given stools to sit on. Whilst the firm agreed to his demand they deducted 2d a week from the women's wages, Sarah Dickinson brought the women she worked with out on strike (Liddington and Norris, 22).

suffrage movement have primarily come from middle-class women and focus on their issues. The women from the middle and upper classes were more able to access further education and the universities, and in these arenas, being surrounded by like-minded women, they were afforded the luxury of considering the issues that affected them. This difference is evident through the different roles and involvement that the "Dear Girl" duo and the Smallhythe Trio had within the Suffrage Movement.

Spending time in the presence of a group of people with similar views is important in sustaining a particular identity. Ruth developed friendships with a number of women who were able to sustain her through intellectual and emotional support: Eva, Miss Brown and later Françoise Lafitte.<sup>25</sup> She also developed some friendships with women she worked with, such as Miss Nimmo with whom she went to a drawing-room Suffragette meeting (Slate, diary, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1908). Miss Brown and Françoise held similar views on politics, the woman question and "free love".

Through reading, Ruth developed her ideas and gained validation for many of her views. In 1908 she read The Story of an African Farm by Olive Schreiner, of which she wrote to Eva,

---

<sup>25</sup> Françoise Lafitte had become known to Ruth through "The Free Woman or other meetings" (Delisle, 209) and on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1913 Ruth finally moved out of the family home to share a flat with her in Notting Hill (Slate, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1913). Françoise later had a relationship with Havelock Ellis as described in her autobiography Friendship's Odyssey.

how glad I am dear that we can understand so well in each other this longing that has come upon us for a larger way of living. I am sure it is right, yet at times it brings much pain. I found so much of what I have been feeling interpreted in "The Story of an African Farm" – I was almost frightened sometimes as I read it – I felt it so intensely. (Slate, letter to Slawson, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1908)

Ruth expresses two important themes within this quote, firstly a sense of kinship and understanding with Eva, and secondly a desire for a different way of living. For Ruth this desire includes a choice in lifestyle as well as in the desire to implement change. Some of Ruth's deepest feelings she did not commit to paper<sup>26</sup> and so her suggestion that the Story says much of what she feels perhaps gives us an insight into some of her silences. The feelings expressed by Schreiner were unconventional when she wrote her book in 1883, and remained so twenty-five years later when Ruth read the novel.

Although I am using Ruth's interpretation of The Story of an African Farm to demonstrate how unconventional her views were at that time, the novel apparently "did not precisely create a sensation: its unorthodox and rather shocking stance prevented it being widely enough reviewed for that" (Brandon, 8).

---

<sup>26</sup> She writes: " I cannot write of it here in case this book ever gets before other eyes than my own" (Slate, diary, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1909). This is further proved by the fact although we know that she broke off her engagement with Wal we do not know the precise reasons for this, merely that she "had been deliberately deceived and misrepresented. . . . Little by little I began to realise that I have been duped and fooled and a dark anger has begun to rise" (Slate, diary, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1909).



Whilst it was hugely popular and ran into three editions in 1883 when it was first published, the subject matter did not easily find a publisher. The key figure within the novel is Lyndall, penniless cousin to Em, the owner of the farm where they grew up together. Lyndall dreams of a life beyond the farm, of getting an education and of achieving great things. The scandal created by the novel concerns Lyndall's situation and subsequent actions when she returns to the farm unmarried, pregnant, having no wish to marry the father of her child. Of the father she says: "I cannot marry you . . . because I cannot be tied; but, if you wish, you may take me away with you and take care of me; then when we do not love any more we can say good-bye" (Schreiner, 220). This fits with the ideology of free love that was expressed by Schreiner, Havelock Ellis and other intellectuals,<sup>27</sup> and which Ruth also believed in.

The other aspect of the novel, which may have interested Ruth, was the way in which gender behaviour is subverted through love. Gregory Rose, Em's intended husband, falls in love with Lyndall. Whilst this love is not returned, Lyndall considers marrying him because she knows that as she does not love him he would be unable to change her. However, she runs away before the marriage can take place. Gregory is portrayed as a hard-working farmer; it is Waldo, forever in a world of his own, who conforms to the stereotype of the sensitive

---

<sup>27</sup> Schreiner, along with Havelock Ellis, was a member of the "Men and Women's Club" organised by Karl Pearson who handpicked fourteen middle-class men and women for monthly philosophical discussions. A key theme in their discussions were issues of sexuality and sexual morality (Bland, 4-5).

feminised man. However, there are number of references in the novel to Gregory's womanliness.

Rose with shining spurs, an ostrich feather in his hat, and a silver-headed whip, careered past . . . "There," said Lyndall, "goes a true woman – one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it. How happy he would be sewing frills into his little girls' frocks, and how pretty he would look sitting in a parlour, with a rough man making love to him . . ." (Schreiner, 180)

Lyndall's perception of Gregory's womanliness appears, on the surface, to be an effect of his fashionable affectations. However, in these comments she reads much more into both their sexualities. Later on in the novel Gregory tries on clothes belonging to Em's mother stored in the attic (227). Finally, in the chapter entitled "Gregory's Womanhood" (245-65), after he has pursued Lyndall following her disappearance, he cross-dresses to pass as a woman in order to care for Lyndall whilst she is dying. Gender roles are reversed as he cares for her, asking for nothing from her in return – a love such as that felt by Em, whose "idea of love was only service" (162). By comparison, Lyndall's behaviour demonstrates a masculinity that is emphasised in its contrast to Em. Lyndall desires education, traditionally a manly pursuit; she wants independence and freedom. After her return to the farm she continues to pursue a desire to learn, and fights any attempt to conform to social stereotypes.

You must teach me to drive. I must learn something while I am here. I got the Hottentot girl to show me how to make "sarsarties"

this morning; and Tant' Sannie is going to teach me to make "kappjes." I will come and sit with you this afternoon while you mend the harness. (182)

Lyndall is dissatisfied with her "woman's lot":

I never find anyone I can talk to. Women bore me, and men, I talk so to – "Going to the ball this evening? – Nice little dog that of yours" . . . and they think me fascinating, charming! Men are like the earth and we are the moon; we turn always one side to them, and they think there is no other, because they don't see it – but there is. (182)

This conflation of gender identified behaviour and the possibility of behaving in different or untraditional ways must have struck a chord with Ruth who was also driven by a desire to learn, and for freedom, and also perhaps for a different expression of sexuality.

In reading Ruth's diaries and letters it is hard to understand why she and Wal ever developed a relationship or why it lasted for so long, as it would appear that their beliefs made them incompatible. Ruth was fiercely independent and her interest in the suffrage movement did not sit easily with Wal who was actively anti-suffragist.<sup>28</sup> Although they attended some suffrage events together<sup>29</sup> the

---

<sup>28</sup> Wal displayed posters advertising anti-suffrage events in his window and attended their meetings (Slate, diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1908 and 21<sup>st</sup> July 1908).

<sup>29</sup> They attended the Hyde Park demonstration together (Slate, diary, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1908).

focus of their interest was obviously different. Even if we consider that he may have wound Ruth up deliberately on women's issues to tease her, Wal clearly did not expect her to continue her activities after their marriage. Upon their engagement he "left me a gift which shall be nameless, & which I would only accept after much persuasion, & a pamphlet to read, entitled "Woman – or Suffragette!" written by Marie Corelli" (Slate, diary, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1907). Evidently Wal subscribed to the popular view<sup>30</sup> that to be a supporter of the women's movement was about women wanting to be men, and that the suffrage movement was about the emasculation of men.

One of the important aspects of public display by suffragettes was the determination to appear feminine to confound this notion that they wanted to be men. Hence the processions of women wearing white symbolising purity, with purple and green, symbolising dignity and fertility or hope for the future: "suffragettes were to be the living embodiment of the values behind this unusual colour scheme" (Atkinson, xvii). At times it appears that Ruth saw the differences between her and Wal's opinions in a positive light, looking upon their discussions as a healthy debate rather than a fundamental difference in their beliefs. However, as in the following quotation she defends her opinions and yet also tries to appease him.

We enjoyed all but a talk on the Suffragette question, during which I

---

<sup>30</sup> Popular in the sense that this view was regularly portrayed in the cartoons in Punch and other magazines or newspapers. See also Chapter Three for further discussion on this subject.

rather upset Wal . . . I tried to disperse the clouds by telling him I do think a great deal of men as well as women that, whatever my wishes & thoughts, I only want to be a – woman! (Slate, diary, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1907)

For Ruth, “thinking a great deal of men” does not imply anything other than thought for fellow human beings, as women were her first priority. In this debate she felt strongly moved to defend herself, alluding to “wishes and thoughts” that demonstrate that she recognised that her beliefs may have marked her out as outside of perceived “normal” womanly behaviour and thought. The hesitation before she says that she wants to be a woman suggests that whilst she did not really entertain a wish to be a man she may have had misgivings about what womanhood entailed. She thus did not want to be a woman as heteropatriarchy defined her, sensing that the notion of “woman” was a construction.

Unlike Ruth, the Smallhythe trio did not have to justify their belief in women’s rights to anyone. The majority of Ruth or Eva’s involvement in the suffrage movement as we have seen, was through the attendance of events, lectures and discussion. A key difference between the political activities of Ruth or Eva and the Smallhythe Trio was the level of their activity within the movement. Edy, Chris, and to a lesser extent “Tony”, were much more active at the level of organising committees and events, and especially - as has been well documented by other writers (Cockin, Holledge, Whitelaw) - theatrical events. They even provided a “safe house” “to women who were on the run from the police, or just

out of prison" (Hollidge,122).<sup>31</sup> This difference in their experiences is largely due to their class experience and both their expectations of what women could do and the economic reality of what time they had available to attend or organise such events. The trio had much more time to be involved in the suffrage movement, their chosen careers allowing them the flexibility of determining how they would spend their time. In contrast, Ruth and Eva attended events in order to learn and expand both their knowledge and their views. They were not able to take their activism into the work place in a practical sense as the others were.

### Edy

"When I was at school<sup>[32]</sup> . . . I lived in a house of suffrage workers . . . As to joining Suffrage societies – yes, I belong to ten now, but I don't seem to be able to remember more than seven" (Votes For Women, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1910). As Edy's comments suggest, the idea of women's rights was instilled in her from an early age. This is entirely different from the school experience of Ruth and Eva.

According to Olive Banks, both Edy and Chris were "ardent converts to the suffrage cause" (Biographical, 57), but their activities within the movement and

---

<sup>31</sup> Cockin writes about similar comments made in Webster's biography about the trio's support of the militant suffragettes that "no documents survive to support this assertion, except perhaps a couple of letters from Joseph Pennell who lived in the flat above, and who wrote to complain about noises on the roof" (Cockin, Edith Craig, 88).

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Malleson, a founder member of the Central London Committee for Women's Suffrage and later a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), was one of Edy's teachers (Cockin, Edith Craig, 83).

their reasons for involvement were entirely different from those of Ruth and Eva. Primarily Edy was a feminist, which was her motivation for supporting the Women's Movement, but within it she also saw the opportunity to use her theatrical skills in a way that enabled women to learn new skills, or showcase the ones that they had. In addition to this, marginalised from mainstream theatre, Edy saw work opportunities among what was essentially a new audience.

Holledge maintains that whilst Edy was a very talented theatre director and producer, she never got the critical acclaim she deserved (Holledge, 162).<sup>33</sup> Edy also had a reputation for demanding perfection and control (H. Williams, 49). This is evidenced in the words of Lillian Baylis - a well-known and successful mainstream female theatre director at the Old Vic - when she was asked to give her the job of stage director: "we don't want another woman here. And anyhow we don't want Edy. She would upset the staff" (Melville, 237). Whilst some people have argued that the reason for Edy being unable to break into mainstream theatre could have been on account of her sexuality (Holledge, 153), this quotation provides an alternative explanation, namely that Edy's forthright

---

<sup>33</sup> Holledge cites two instances where this is indicated. Firstly George Bernard Shaw, comparing her work to that of her brother, said that "Gordon Craig has made himself the most famous producer in Europe by dint of never producing anything, while Edith Craig remains the most obscure by dint of producing everything" (Holledge, 162). Secondly:

"Edy had that mysterious quality none of us can put a name to," replied Sybil Thorndike when asked about her work with the Pioneers, "but when we meet it in a director we call it genius. I adored working for her. Marvellous woman. Always breaking the mould and moving on to something fresh" (Holledge, 151).

manner did not always make her an easy person to work with. This was echoed by Chris, who described Edy as “no appeaser, and demanded more of a staff than most producers”, suggesting that Baylis felt threatened by Edy (Cockin, Edith Craig, 12).

The contribution to the suffrage movement for which Edy is best known is her involvement with the Actresses Franchise League (AFL) and subsequently the Pioneer Players.<sup>34</sup> I do not intend to go into any great detail of this work as it is well documented by Cockin and Holledge. However, this was only a part of her involvement in the suffrage movement. Edy was active at branch level politics as the Literary Secretary of the Central London Branch of the WFL (Cockin, Edith Craig, 87). She sold newspapers on street corners (Cockin, Edith Craig, 86), provided her and Chris' home as a safe house (M. Webster, 248), and supported the International Suffrage Shop (Cockin, Edith Craig, 87). She was an activist and it was her energy that made things happen, many of which have been attributed to other people and her involvement forgotten (Cockin, 129 “Suffrage Women’s”). To be credited with these achievements was not important to Edy; she was content to make them happen – and then move on to her next “project.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> The Pioneer Players were a political theatre company started in 1911, who were concerned with issues of contemporary interest which included the women’s movement (Holledge, 123).

<sup>35</sup> In her essay on Edy Tony describes her work as “projects” (Adlard, 142).



The AFL was established in 1908 and aimed to "offer support to all suffrage organisations, impartial over . . . tactics" (Hollidge, 53). At that time it was commonplace for meetings to be interspersed by music or a recital and as such the AFL were in much demand to provide entertainment at the meetings of various suffrage groups (Whitelaw, 78). The League had three aims:

1. To convince members of the theatrical profession of the necessity of extending the franchise to women.
2. To work for women's enfranchisement by educational methods.
3. To assist all other Leagues wherever possible. (Whitelaw, 78)

Whilst there are a number of high profile events that the League masterminded it is unclear as to exactly how many performances they gave since many were low-key and undocumented. As with many of the Leagues, especially those allied to the WFL, the main emphasis was not on the vote itself, but on a range of issues such as employment and education that highlighted the difficulties faced by many women and provided solutions which, women believed, could be addressed if they were given enfranchisement. As with the WFL (Purvis and Holton, 181) the focus of much of the drama produced by the AFL questioned gender relationships as is suggested by one of Cicely Hamilton's dramas, Marriage as a Trade.

There are two events for which the AFL was best known and which were produced or masterminded by Edy. These were the plays A Pageant of Great Women and How the Vote Was Won, both written by Cicely Hamilton, the latter adapted for the stage by Chris (Whitelaw, 83). The Pageant drew on a form of

production that had recently become popular. It also provided a spectacle that Edy recognised had been part of the appeal of suffrage rallies and demonstrations (Whitelaw, 86). The Pageant was a celebration of women throughout history and had fifty-two characters. There were only three speaking parts, so that the production could be reproduced in a variety of towns and venues with a minimum of experienced actresses. Edy had ownership of the production rights which meant that when the play was performed it was done under her guidance.

In the Pageant Woman pleads for freedom while Prejudice argues that she is unworthy of it. As he puts forward each argument against Woman's right to freedom she calls up before him a host of women distinguished for their learning, for artistic achievement, for their qualities as rulers, spiritual leaders or warriors (Whitelaw, 86-7).

Within this scenario there were ample opportunities for self-expression. The characters Edy, Chris and their friend Cicely Hamilton chose to play enabled them to dress up in male costume,<sup>36</sup> Edy as Rosa Bonheur, Chris as Hannah Snell and Hamilton as Christian Davies.

One of the important aspects of the work of many suffrage societies and perhaps especially one such as the AFL was the time which women spent working

---

<sup>36</sup> I say more about the choice of clothes and representations of lesbian identity in Chapter 3. I also look at the photographs of Edy as Rosa Bonheur (fig.9) and Chris as Hannah Snell (fig. 10) in Chapter Five.

together. Stanley and Morley in The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison discuss the importance of friendship to the suffrage movement, citing many shifts within the history of the WSPU as being influenced by informal friendships as much as formal organisational changes (175). Edy was well known for enlisting the help and support of her family and friends and this was especially so in her theatrical work (Hollidge, 159-60).

In 1911 after her involvement with the AFL, Edy went on to establish the Pioneer Players, "a subscription society which put on single performances of plays which would never receive a run in the commercial theatre" (Whitelaw, 124). The focus of these plays expanded from issues related to women's suffrage to include other political concerns that were deemed radical at the time (Cockin, "Women's Suffrage", 129). Shaw thought that the Pioneer Players "by singleness of artistic direction and unflagging activity, did more for the theatrical vanguard than any of the other coterie theatres" (St John, Close-up, 24).

### **Christopher St John**

It could be inferred that Chris did not immediately support the suffrage movement as she writes in her semi-autobiographical novel Hungerheart:

"Woman's suffrage" was to me only a discordant expression, standing for a dull and ugly Thing [sic], a Thing connected with "politics"; and "politics" in their turn conjured up grotesque memories of my childhood when grown-up people used to fly into a rage at the

bare mention of the name of Mr Gladstone. (258)

More specifically she confessed that "Sally [Edy] was quickly converted. I lagged behind" (Hungerheart, 262). However, despite this allegedly rather ambivalent start, Chris became very committed to the cause. She was active, along with Edy, in the Actresses Franchise League and was part of the Women Writers Suffrage League under whose banner she can be seen standing along with Edy and Cicely Hamilton in 1910 (Women's Library). Her writing included an adaptation of Cicely Hamilton's How the Vote Was Won for the stage. The critics from "The New Age" are quoted on the back of the text of the play as saying:

Logic is such a useless sort of weapon against the dull-witted, so the women are going to try laughter . . . It is the most rippling piece of fun which has been put on the boards for a long time, and the sooner it is put on for a regular run, the better for the public gaiety.

This is one of the suffrage dramas which is most quoted and obviously caught the public imagination, featuring on the front of the Daily Mirror (Cockin, Edith Craig, 83). Eva wrote to Ruth that "Aunt Edie and Gertie are going to Walthamstow to see a play 'How the Vote was Won'" (Slawson, postcard to Ruth. No date but c.1910). There is no reference to how they enjoyed it. Chris also translated a number of plays that were performed by the AFL and by the Pioneer Players.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Cockin discusses the plays translated for the AFL by Chris in greater detail in her article "Women's Suffrage Drama." One of the plays she worked on, The Theatre of the Soul, has a long foreword by Chris in which she goes into great detail about the cancellation of the planned performance of this play. The play was to have been performed as part of a Russian festival of drama but had been thought inappropriate for the audience, although it was not clear why this was.

She also wrote about the suffrage movement in her biographies of Christine Murrell and Ethel Smyth.

In her biography of the doctor Christine Murrell, Chris entitled one chapter "The Feminist." It principally concentrates on the Suffrage Movement in relation to Christine Murrell. With much of Chris' biographical writing, it is not always clear whether or not the views that she expresses were those of her subjects. Certainly Chris had a tendency to place her own views in the biographical text, blurring the relationship between subject and author.<sup>38</sup> For my purposes however, this is very useful, as demonstrated in the following text, which reveals probably more about Chris than it does about Murrell.

This brief view of the suffrage Movement has been interpolated with a view to making it easier for the reader to understand Christine Murrell's attitude towards militancy. All professional women who were convinced that it was necessary and that they could not withhold their support had a special problem to face. Ought they to take an active part in the fighting, expose themselves to arrest and imprisonment, show that they could not be cowed by imprisonment, and defeat its effectiveness by going on hunger-strike which forced the Government to choose between their death or their release? Or ought they to go on with their work, and confine themselves to supporting militancy in a way which would not lead to their capacity

---

<sup>38</sup> This is also the case in Chris' biography of Ethel Smyth.

for work, and their health, being gravely impaired? Christine Murrell decided, rightly in my opinion, on the second course. (56)

This quotation appears to deal with Chris' dilemmas about militant action, as much as those of Murrell, giving reasons as to why she (Chris) personally did not take a more militant stance. Despite her claims within Hungerheart that "I had enrolled myself as a member of the most advanced of the 'militant' organisations" (267), she appears to offer her work and health as reasons for not attempting any militant action that would put her in prison. It may have been that she felt that her work would be jeopardised if she was seen to be militant, and certainly she faced more money problems than Edy and Tony, who at times financially supported her (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1933). In her later letters to Vita Sackville-West she concentrates on her health and it may be that she had a genuine concern.<sup>39</sup> Indeed many, such as Lady Constance Lytton, irreparably sacrificed their health,<sup>40</sup> or their work in support of the movement. In Hungerheart Chris talks about an incident in which she grabbed a policeman's horse and escaped prison on a legal technicality.

I seized hold of a bridle . . . horse reared and I carried off my feet.

---

<sup>39</sup> There are a number of references to her "shattered knee" which was probably due to an accident which she refers to in Hungerheart but is also mentioned by Beatrice Marshall: "In November dear Chrisabel met with a bicycle accident in London; she fractured her knee-cap" (287).

<sup>40</sup> Lady Constance Lytton used the false name of Jane Warton, so that she could not be given any "special treatment," when imprisoned which meant that she was subjected to force-feeding (Pankhurst, 144-6). This treatment which exacerbated a heart condition, ultimately led to her health deteriorating and she had a stroke in 1912. She is consequently seen as a martyr of the suffrage movement (Mulvey-Roberts, 159-61).

Three policemen arrested me. "I rejoice to this day to think that the Japanese lacquer armour that I was wearing underneath my coat prevented them from handling me." Sentenced to 1 month in prison but appealed on a point of law (St John, Hungerheart, 271).

However, as the aim of many of the militant suffragettes was to be sent to prison, thus raising the profile of their campaign, they would have been unlikely to argue on a technical point to keep themselves out. It may be that this event demonstrates Chris' desire to be seen as someone who would go to prison for her political beliefs but as she did not, gives her an opportunity to claim that she could have done. Edy in fact later claimed that she herself would have felt better had she gone to prison for her beliefs (Cockin, Edith Craig, 106). In fact, the truth of the story of Chris' militant actions is probably more likely to be that the event Chris talks about was based on the experience of her friend Vera "Jack" Holme who

in November 1911 went to prison for assaulting a policeman – on horseback herself, she charged the mounted officer and snatched his horse's bridle. It took three policemen to rescue their colleague, arrest Vera and take her to the police station (Atkinson, 33).

It does appear that Chris was arrested as the Weekly Despatch features an article relating to her arrest and subsequent discharge for "wilfully obstructing the police in the execution of their duty." She appealed against the charge on the basis that she had gone to Whitehall as a dramatist and journalist, not as a suffragette. The accuracy of this report however, is put into perspective by the

fact that it states that "Christopher St. John is the pen name of the daughter of Miss Ellen Terry" ("Playwright's Arrest," 21<sup>st</sup> February 1909).

Of course there may also be another dimension here in that Chris did not want to put herself in a position where her sexuality was likely to be publicised. If she were to be imprisoned as a result of some militant action, it is conceivable that details of her living arrangements would be published in the newspapers and questions might have been raised about her relationships. Whilst Chris, Edy and later Tony did not appear to suffer any problems, Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge did encounter hostility when they lived in nearby Rye. Melville suggests that this was because they were visibly lesbian and behaved in a manner which brought attention to themselves. The trio did not appear to do so (252).

There was a very strong line within the WSPU about the images projected by women in pursuing the cause. I have made brief reference to this earlier in this chapter and discuss it further in Chapter Five. A common way of undermining the women's cause was to call women lesbians or make reference to their unmarried and undesired state, something that Chris later made reference to:

I decided that the attempt to represent them as an insignificant body of disappointed and soured spinsters who had manufactured this agitation by way of venting their spite on a world where they were



not “desired” would not do. It seemed to me to speak well for the agitation that its enemies had to resort to such an unworthy weapon as misrepresentation to fight it. (St John, Hungerheart, 263)

Like Edy, Chris’ view of women’s rights was underpinned by a fundamental belief in the equal rights of women. Chris writes in her biography of Murrell: “it was Christine Murrell’s keen sense of justice, rather than a special sympathy with women, inclining her to take their part against men, which was at the root of her ardent feminism” (53). The comment about a “special sympathy with women” is an interesting one. What does “special sympathy” mean and why would Christine Murrell have one or not? It perhaps alludes to the fact that she did have a “special sympathy” or in this case relationship with women, although this was not the primary basis of her feminism, or at least not the one she wanted to admit to the world.

An interesting dimension to Chris’ thoughts on the suffrage movement were those about the other women she came into contact with, including those from other classes – women like Ruth and Eva. Again, these comments come from Hungerheart and should be treated with some caution. However, they refer to her impressions of events rather than referring to events themselves and so may well reflect her opinions of other women and their involvement in the suffrage movement.

There is nothing more tragic about “woman’s suffrage” than its dullness. I went out to see martyrs in “shirts of flame.” I found poor

little shrieking women, dressed in ill-fitting clothes, whose "violence" was as drab as anything about them. No-one will ever know what it cost me to take a part in violence which was derided rather than feared (St John, Hungerheart, 268).

Again the romantic or perhaps imaginative side of Chris' nature is reflected here.

Rather less dramatic is the observation:

Old women, young women, clever women, steady women, excitable women – I recognized them all, as I might have done at a large evening-party, or at a concert, or at any place where women gather together. There was nothing at all exceptional about them - which was in a way disappointing. There were some who regarded "the movement" as a more exciting game than hockey, there were others to whom it meant only the serious side of life; to some it was a movement towards better wages, to others a movement towards better morality. There were a few who did not see beyond "a vote" in the purely political sense, and a few who were dominated by a desire to prick the bubble of male superiority. (St John, Hungerheart, 263-4)

This latter quotation seems to accurately describe what the vote meant to the women that got involved and it is unclear from some of Chris' comments quite what her feelings about it were. She was certainly very active, as demonstrated through her involvement in the AFL and her translation of plays for the Pioneer Players, and yet in Hungerheart she claims that the vote was not important to her.

It probably was not as important to her as to someone like Ruth and Eva and the working-class women who saw it as a real opportunity to make a difference.

## **Conclusion**

The different experiences that both groups of women had of the Women's Movement can be explained in terms of class expectations. Edy was brought up surrounded by strong women with strong views about the rights of women. She therefore grew up having equally strong expectations that were her *raison d'être* behind her involvement in the Cause. This background allowed her to lead both in the theatre and through her involvement in various committees. The very fact that she could not remember how many committees she belonged to was indicative of her class (Cockin, Edith Craig, 85). She got involved because she believed in the rights of women, and as such she did her bit, but at the end of the day this did not stop her living her life in the way that she had always done. Ruth and Eva on the other hand were followers. They went to lectures, or the demonstrations, they were inspired by the women and the arguments that they heard – but they had to fit that around their normal working lives.

As we know women were given the vote, but as Chris describes:

England gave the vote to women absent-mindedly. She was absorbed in other matters, which seemed to everyone of greater importance, when the Sex Disqualification Removal Bill was passed in 1918. Conscious that a measure which had been so obstinately

denied for years needed some defence, our legislators said that it was justified by the patriotic services of women during the War. The vote was a sort of good conduct prize. (Christine Murrell, 56)

What was important to both groups of women involved in the suffrage movement, and was the sustenance of the movement, was the role of friendship. For Ruth and Eva their friendships with each other and with others enabled them to grow in, as they saw it, a spiritual as well as in an intellectual way. They went to the pageants together, they went to the suffrage meetings at Caxton Hall or someone's drawing-room, they read books such as The Woman Who Did and discussed them. Without their friends to enable them to go to events, introduce them to new ideas, they would not have been able to become involved in the movement. For the trio their friendships were also fundamental to the ways in which they became involved in suffrage work. The committees that Edy sat on in many cases involved her friends – as did her theatre work. Chris worked with Cicely Hamilton. Other friends such as Vera Holme, who was WSPU chauffeur (Atkinson, 132) also “worked” as Edy’s “Chief of Staff” (St John, Close-up, 28). It was also through the work of the Pioneer Players that Tony and Edy met or at least got to know each other better. As Melville writes: “one of those helping on set designs was Clare Atwood, an artist who had painted portraits of the Terry family” (228). This would suggest that Tony was introduced to Edy and the Pioneer Players through her contact with the Terry family. As can be seen in this instance political activism, friendship and sexual identity were inextricably linked.

## Chapter Five

### Identity in the Public and Private Spheres.

Debates on lesbian identity through the 1980s and 1990s have increasingly focused on the importance of visually documented identities. Books such as What a Lesbian Looks Like started to look at lesbian identity and attempted to explain the visual clues associated with that identity. Taking an historical stance, Julie Wheelwright in Amazons and Military Maids investigated the ways in which women have used visual imagery to “pass” as men over the last three hundred years, either to obtain work, travel or to express their sexuality. Jo Spence and Del Lagrace Volcano,<sup>1</sup> for instance, have used photography as a tool to reveal or explore sexual identities.<sup>2</sup> As Liz Stanley points out:

in our everyday reading lives we are accustomed to, we surrender to, the power of visual representation, photographs in particular, of auto/biographical subjects . . . Photographs of auto/biographical subjects and our readings of them are importantly involved in constructing characters and biographies, lives with meaning (Auto/biographical, 20).

In this chapter I look at the visual evidence left by the two sets of women I am

---

<sup>1</sup> Del Lagrace Volcano’s identity has shifted from butch lesbian, to hermaphrodyke, to a drag king as discussed in her book The Drag King Book. Currently she identifies as a “transgender man” (11) and is working towards a sex change.

<sup>2</sup> This builds on specific psychomedical traditions of photography, which had been used by the sexologists as means by which they could evidence their theories (Broster).

researching, comparing them with the evidence of their contemporaries. I examine this material to determine the extent to which that evidence can be used to comment on the women's identity.

It is widely recognised that people use a variety of sign systems to present their identities, for example through the use of dress or jewellery.<sup>3</sup> Grahn describes how "an earring worn on a particular ear, for instance, or a handkerchief of a certain color in the back pocket tell watchful, in-the-know strangers what type of sex the bearer desires" (212). As Grahn suggests: "I have often used stereotypes, even derogatory ones, very deliberately, as points of entry into the history, for *something* about the stereotypes is usually true and therefore open to study" (xiv). It is also true that many of these stereotypical sign systems have become integrated into mainstream fashion such as the earring as described by Grahn. Many of these stereotypes have embodied masculinity, such as the Doc Martin boot.

By becoming more visible through the embodiment of a masculine identity lesbians have not only attracted attention from other – interested – women, but also from those people concerned about their appropriation of male power. I have already referred to the dilemmas faced by women with regard to representation in relation to the suffrage movement in Chapter Four. Both men

---

<sup>3</sup> In Chapter Three I have looked at the way in which clothes and jewellery have enabled lesbians to communicate their sexuality to each other (Bell, Grahn, Jivani).

and women accused those women who supported the movement of becoming more masculine and it became a deliberate policy of the suffragettes to project an image that contradicted this.

I have heard Mrs. Pankhurst advise very strongly against what she considered eccentricity in the matter of dress; her reason being that it would shock male prejudice and make the vote harder to obtain.

After the vote was won, she said, we could do as we like in the matter of garments – but till then . . . (Hamilton, Life Errant, 75).

Of course this raises the question of what Mrs Pankhurst was referring to when she talked of eccentricity. The reference is set in the context of all “suggestion of the masculine” and whilst Hamilton never links this specifically to lesbianism, this is one implication inherent in her references. In gay culture the use of clothes as a means of expressing sexual identity have come to be read as stereotypes. In this final chapter what I try to do is use visual images of the women to read sexual identity, looking not only for stereotypical clues but also for evidence of their public and private relationships.

All sign systems require “readings” to decipher them. Rolley refers to a “Lesbian Sixth Sense” as the readerly disposition that enables lesbians to read signs of lesbian identity. In viewing photographs at the National Portrait Gallery she became aware of signs within the photographs which were suggestive of the lesbian sexuality of the women portrayed. She argues for two distinct factors,

firstly "the existence of certain symbols" (7)<sup>4</sup> and secondly, "a Lesbian Sixth Sense which allows us to recognise or think we recognise, 'sisters' both present and past" (7). Her suggestion is that this "Lesbian Sixth Sense" does not rely on anything other than a gut feeling about a person, a recognition of their "difference." However, she goes on to analyse this gut feeling as the "multifarious aspects of any woman's dress and appearance" (7). In other words, this gut feeling or sixth sense relies on the existence of the symbols to which Rolley has already alluded. It should be noted that there is no guarantee that the presence of a particular signifier denotes a specific sexuality and vice versa so whilst we may think that we have "claim[ed] yet another 'sister' after a sidelong glance at the supermarket checkout" (Rolley, "Lesbian Sixth Sense," 12) this is not necessarily the case. In the photographs I shall be analysing of Chris and Edy, we can see evidence of their intimate relationship, which has not always been seen or recognised by the biographers who have written about them, either because they could not see it, did not want to see it, or were too tactful to mention it! However, we must also be careful that in a desire to see evidence of this relationship, we do not rely on this "sixth sense" which is by no means infallible. As Boffin writes: "we cannot just innocently rediscover a lesbian Golden Age because our readings of history are always a history of the present, shaped by

---

<sup>4</sup> These symbols could include the little finger ring, its meaning having come from occult tradition where each finger was given the name of a God, in this case Mercury whose written symbol is the same as that for a woman (Grahm, 15). Or having short hair, which Grahm sees as moving from trying to look like men to women trying to look like lesbians (157). I have investigated the use of sign systems in greater detail in Chapter Three.



our positions in the present" (49).

In reading the photographs in this chapter I am looking for the existence of signifiers such as dress that I have already discussed in Chapter Three as one way in which women could signify and communicate their difference to others who recognised the signs. For exactly this reason Rolley has suggested that clothes "take on a heightened significance for lesbians. Self-presentation allows the expression and communication of an otherwise invisible identity" ("Lesbian Sixth Sense," 11). Over and above the signs present within the images I shall look at the relationship between the people in the images, how they relate to each other and how the women choose to present themselves. In doing this I shall investigate the impact of the different media of portraiture and snapshot photography on those presentations.

### **The Public and Private Spheres**

At the turn of the century there was a great degree of formality in how one behaved both in public and private. Formality was an important indicator of respectability in Edwardian England, and strict codes of behaviour were the order of the day.<sup>5</sup> These codes were also class-based. Davidoff demonstrates how

---

<sup>5</sup> More information about the formalities of Edwardian life can be found in Davidoff and in Veblen. Souhami's biography of Alice Keppel is very informative about the etiquette surrounding marriage and extra-marital relationships and the expectations of the upper classes in particular. Her views are interesting in this context as her daughter, Violet Trefusis, caused a scandal when she eloped with Vita Sackville-West. She was eventually ostracised and lived for most of her life in Italy, refusing to live within a loveless marriage because it was "the done thing".

these codes operated in the nineteenth century.

The justification for their way of life, partially derived from the renewed emphasis on a Christian ethic, was in terms of a vague but complex idea of “social duty”: duty to themselves, their families, their social strata and the community as a whole. One strand in this ideal derived from simple economic ideas about the benefits of middle-class consumption in providing work for other classes. But beyond this, it was the duty of the middle- and upper-class family to maintain an establishment on the most elaborate scale they could afford, in order to entertain and interact in a civilised way, as an example to the barbarous customs of their native lower class and natives overseas (Best Circles, 39).

It was this type of understanding which formed the basis of the ethos and values held by the women I am discussing. The correspondence between Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson evidences the class distinction described by Davidoff. Their son Nigel Nicolson writes, in the introduction to their edited diaries, that “they shared a seam of racism that could be uncovered not far beneath the surface, and the Sackvilles’ ‘bedint’<sup>[6]</sup> shibboleth, to which one clue was accent, often clouded their judgement” (Nicolson, Vita and Harold, 13).

A contemporary of the trio, Cicely Hamilton, also comments on the nature

---

<sup>6</sup> Glendinning in her biography of Sackville-West describes the term “bedint” as the “Sackville family word for ‘servant’; by extension, anyone or anything not of the upper classes; common, vulgar” (5).

of a formal Victorian upbringing in her autobiography Life Errant.

This silence with regard to my faults and failings is, I honestly believe, not only due to vanity and desire to stand well with those who read me; in part it is due to the tradition of manners in which I was bred, the Victorian tradition of reticence. My youth knew nothing of inhibitions, or the urge towards self-expression; we did not wash dirty linen in public, and our emotions, for the most part, were for private control and consumption; it was not yet esteemed a healthful process to stir up wriggling little thoughts and impulses from the muddy depths of your soul (290).

In contrast to these, Françoise Lafitte-Cyon's autobiography Friendship's Odyssey<sup>7</sup> is remarkably frank about her sexual relationships and views on

---

<sup>7</sup> Françoise Lafitte-Cyon published her autobiography under the name Delisle. She chose this name herself not wishing to use her married name:

I wished to guard against my husband's possible reappearance into my life. I thought it the best policy not to write under my married name; nor under my maiden name which he knew, of course. I therefore sought a *nom de plume*. I was then living peacefully with Havelock Ellis. So I coined my pen-name from his surname. Slightly altering the order of its letters, and using before them the French "de" (meaning "of"), I secured a name which not only means "of Ellis" but also has the advantage of being as good an English name as it is a French one (Delisle, 1964: 318-19)

In the 1964 edition, which encompasses only Book Two of the original edition there are revisions as well as rewriting and people's real names have been used (Long, 1964: 307). Thus Muriel Farr becomes Ruth Slate in the 1964 version. Interestingly Ruth Campbell, who invited Françoise to stay with her family to have her child and would appear to be Minna Simmons from the information within the Slate/Slawson archive, becomes Lottie Camebus in the later edition. Lafitte-Cyon maintains that she probably met Ruth through the Free-Woman Circle (Delisle, 1946: 209). She describes Ruth as a "young sensitive woman, of exactly my age, hard working and a dreamer as myself . . . we shared many views in common and remained friends our lives long" (Delisle, 1946: 209).

marriage and free love.<sup>8</sup> Her autobiography was first published in 1946, seven years after Havelock Ellis had died and many years after the period of time I am looking at, and it may be that these were factors which enabled her to be so candid in her opinions. She comments on why she saw this openness as important, starting with Havelock Ellis' autobiography: "I think none the less that, even for a spiritual biography, My Life is too reserved. One must be more daring if one attempts to help other fellow beings" (Delisle, 422).

Class distinctions were implicit within the codes of behaviour in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. These were strictly regulated through marriage, keeping those distinctions intact. Jalland describes how it was difficult for women to marry out of their class because there was little opportunity to meet men outside of their

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1916, through Edith Ellis, Lafitte met Havelock Ellis with whom she had a free-love relationship for over twenty-two years. Lafitte-Cyon describes the "pomp and vanity" of marriage and the "filth and vulgarity" of divorce (Delisle, 1964: 278). She had no desire to legalise her union with Ellis (Delisle, 1964: 279). Initially this would in any event not have been possible as she was married to Serge Cyon. However, she discovered years later that he had never divorced from his first wife (1964: 278). Interestingly Vincent Long, in his Editorial Notes, feels the need to comment on the content of the book.

Reviewers and readers of Françoise expressed concern that Delisle Limited, who have a reputation for responsible books on personal and social problems, should publish a work which appeared to advocate a free lover-relationship [sic]. Lest Friendship's Odyssey awaken this same doubt it may be well to quote in advance Sir Stanley Urwin's comment . . . Referring to "the all-too-prevalent idea that a publisher must, or should, approve of all the options expressed in his publications", he writes: "This is an absurd notion, and if carried to its logical conclusion would reduce a publisher to issuing nothing but multiplication tales and books written by himself" (319).

own social circles (52). There was also an understanding that the upper classes were not only separate from but had a responsibility for setting examples to those people lower down the social scale. As Souhami suggests, there were

codes of perceived behaviour for families of the ruling class. . . that a ruling class deserved by rights to be served and deferred to by an underclass, that jewels, tiaras, castles and vast tracts of land should by birthright go to the titled few (Mrs Keppel, 291-2).

Davidoff, in her research on class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, demonstrates how courtship (Best Circles, 49) and visiting rituals (Best Circles, 41) maintained the class divides and also how the lower classes emulated those of the higher ones (Best Circles, 13). Women who ignored social barriers faced being ostracised from society. Women such as Beatrice Potter "by the rules of Society, accepted that Sidney Webb's humble social status meant that she could not marry him during her father's lifetime 'without grieving the old man past endurance'" (Jalland, 53).

One example of the formality with which social interaction was constrained can be seen in the way in which the women addressed each other. It is obvious from both Ruth's and Eva's writing that to be on first name terms was reserved for family and very close friends. It is some time after their friendship had developed for example before Miss Brown is referred to as Elizabeth in Ruth's diary (Slate, diary, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1908). Considering that this example was contained in a private document it demonstrates the extent to which formal patterns of behaviour were ingrained into the everyday lives of people. Indeed it is possible that Ruth did not

know her friend's first name until some time into their friendship. In a similar vein broaching some topics of conversation that we think very little of today may have been issues which could break friendships. In a letter to Eva some six years after their friendship began,<sup>9</sup> Ruth implies that her opinions on the "sex instinct" may have been considered too controversial to put in writing lest Eva misconstrue them or that Eva may not wish to have a conversation on the subject.

But my dear I ought not to have touched on a subject like this – it is one of the things I had wanted to talk over with you. I expect I have just said enough to make you misunderstand me – but one day perhaps we shall be able to talk of many things (Slate, letter to Slawson, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1908).

In the context of a close friendship, this comment is unusual. One would expect that it would be possible to say what you wanted to a friend without too great a danger of it being misconstrued, or of causing offence. Interestingly Ruth describes the process of developing close friends as "stepp[ing] over the hazy border-land into real friendship with Jessie Marsh. . . on Monday she asked me to kiss her Goodnight!" (Slate, letter to Slawson, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1914). It is not clear here whether by this stage Ruth and Jessie are calling each other by their first names, which would appear to be the first noticeable shift in a friendship or whether this is denoted by the kiss, the latter implying a much closer friendship. The process of asking for a kiss is also interesting – did the formality of friendships of the day mean that you had to specifically ask for a kiss in this way, which can be inferred

---

<sup>9</sup> Ruth first mentions Eva in a diary entry dated the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1902.

from Ruth's letter, to become closer so that there could be no misunderstandings? Or was it unusual to ask a friend for a kiss at any stage within a friendship unless it was an invitation to take a friendship further? It is not clear whether exchanges such as this were commonplace or extraordinary in the context of the reputed lesbian friendship between Ruth and Eva.

### **The Use of Photographs in an Analysis of Representation**

Photography gives us a unique perspective in an analysis of self-representation as it provides us with a visual image, rather than a verbal description where there is a greater need to create the image for ourselves. As I shall go on to demonstrate, the opportunity to take photographs and when they are taken are important issues when considering the "truth" of an image. Barthes describes photographs as a message. Whilst he refers specifically to the press photograph, much of what he says regarding the ways in which this photographic message can be read and how it can be constructed, can also be applied to other photographic genres (Barthes, Image, 15) including the domestic snapshot and the formal portrait. Holland takes this line up in looking at how we view private photographs.

There comes a point when private photographs become public documents; when personal memories reveal, with startling clarity, the movement of social groups and the ways in which they understand their lives; when the individual emotions called up by the snapshots seem to secure political changes unthought of by those who took and treasured them (Holland, "The Old Order," 91).

In this chapter I take what were primarily private photographs, some of which have made their way into the public domain, and attempt to read the ways in which the women depicted in the photographs understood their lives.

Firstly I must outline the difficulties of looking at photographic images in relation to the two groups of women I am focusing on. Ruth and Eva, as lower-middle class working women, to my knowledge did not have the luxury of owning a camera. Their access to photographs was therefore restricted to more formal ones taken either at a studio or, in Ruth's case, in relation to Woodbrooke<sup>10</sup> or Rowntree's.<sup>11</sup> In contrast there are a range of publicly and privately taken photographs depicting Chris, Edy and Tony either already in the public domain through biographies (Adlard, Cline, Hamiton, Souhami, Trials) or at the Smallhythe Museum which holds Tony's photograph albums. These photographs include formal portraits and informal snapshots. However, whilst the disparity of the range of available images is perhaps frustrating in getting a clearer picture of Ruth and Eva, it highlights the class differences between the two groups of women. The most obvious point is that economically the Smallhythe Trio was in a much better position to buy luxuries such as a camera than either Ruth or Eva. The latter were single working women, and whilst not themselves dependent upon men for their economic security, they were surrounded by women who

---

<sup>10</sup> Woodbrooke was a Quaker-run establishment promoting social and religious study.

<sup>11</sup> Rowntrees was a Quaker-run chocolate factory in York where Ruth became a Welfare Worker, although she disliked both the job and the city (Slate, diary, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1916).



were. Minna, for example, was left destitute when her husband died and had to apply to the "Guardians" for money to survive (Slawson, diary, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1914).

For working-class people the history of the nonpolitical album (what is commonly termed the family album) is a very uneven one. Some families were so poor that photography was very low on their list of priorities; others were able to afford only the purchase of single or group photographs by itinerant photographers, or on special occasions a visit to a local "studio" photographer for a *carte de visite*, or Tintype [sic] (depending on finances) might be possible. With the invention of the box camera and then roll film, from the 1890s many families began to have access to a camera, or even bought their own, but even then this was by no means a common practice (Dennett, 73).<sup>12</sup>

Whilst access to photography was an issue, how to express oneself visually was another. Sonia Ruehl argues that

it is chiefly in portrait photographs of single individuals that elements of a lesbian identity are most apparent; secondly, that it is in formal,

---

<sup>12</sup> "Tintypes, or ferrotypes, were introduced around 1855. They were commonly used by itinerant, fairground and beach photographers as the plates were lighter and less fragile than glass plates. Ferrotypes continued to be a cheap form for portrait photographs, particularly outdoors, until the 1930s." (National Museum of Photography Film and Television, Info sheet: gen8) The "*carte de visite*" was brought to England in 1857. This was based on a number of portraits taken on one photographic plate. The photograph was mounted onto card which was the size of a visiting card (National Museum of Photography Film and Television, Info sheet: gen3).

studio portraits that a lesbian identity comes into play, rather than in informal portraits. . . Casual shots of lesbians, lovers and friends could often be photographs of just about anyone. It is rather in careful formal photographic compositions that a lesbian identity is delicately but deliberately conveyed (34-5).

Ruehl suggests that it is through the construction of a portrait photograph that sexual identity can be portrayed. To demonstrate her point she analyses four photographs: a portrait of Janet Flanner by Berenice Abbot, which shows her sporting a top hat with two masks adorning it; Cecil Beaton's well-known portrait of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas where they are facing each other but stand a short distance apart; a more informal portrait of Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy taken by Man Ray; and a snapshot photograph of Djuna Barnes and Natalie Barney. Ruehl claims that in creating a portrait it is possible to wear particular clothes or jewellery, use props or control the setting of the portrait, sit in a particular way to convey an image over which the artist or sitter has the maximum control. Certainly when we look at the photograph of Edy as Rosa Bonheur (fig. 9) or Chris as Hannah Snell (fig.10) we can see how they managed to portray an image which conveys their sexuality through their choice of character. Edy played the part of Rosa Bonheur in each Pageant of Great Women that she directed. Bonheur was well-known as an artist who lived with a woman and chose to wear men's clothes (Vicinus, "They Wonder," 432). Edy's choice suggests that she felt some affinity with Bonheur. They were both artists, both lived with women and whilst Edy was not known for wearing trousers she obviously took great delight in doing so for the Pageant and for this portrait. In

this picture Edy has what appears to be a cheeky smile on her face. Perhaps this indicates her satisfaction in representing herself in this way. She wears a smock over her clothes and it is clear that she is wearing boots rather than trousers (unless these are tucked into her boots, as we cannot see a skirt either). In her hand she holds a palette which is empty, perhaps to suggest the clean palette on which she was creating herself through this characterisation.



Fig. 9. Edy as Rosa Bonheur. Melville, n.p.

Chris had chosen to represent herself as Hannah Snell (fig. 10), a woman who married and after the death of her first child followed her husband to sea, finding work by cross-dressing and “passing” as a man. She appears to have been heterosexual, marrying twice and having one son. Her relationships with women appear to have been to cover up the fact that she was a woman whilst posing as James Gray (Wheelwright, 56-7, 170-2).<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it is Chris’ choice which is the more interesting. As the one member of the trio who clearly identified herself as lesbian she chose to play in the Pageant a woman whose identity was focused more on passing as a man than on her relationships with women. It may have been the masculinity of this character that appealed to Chris. This perhaps reflects how it appears that she defined her sexuality – that of an invert, having a man’s soul in a woman’s body – rather than her attraction to women. Whatever her motivation it is clear from the photograph that she enjoyed this role. In looking at the ways in which these women chose to portray themselves it should also be noted that of the fifty-two characters in the Pageant (Whitelaw, 86) they chose to play these ones, leaving aside the parts of Elizabeth I, Joan of Arc and others. It would appear then that through their choice of male roles they were able to publicly express their sexuality through the medium of theatre.

---

<sup>13</sup> There is some ambiguity about Hannah Snell. Wheelwright’s brief biography of her describes her as a woman who went to sea to follow her husband, discovered he was dead and returned home. She subsequently married again and eventually died in an asylum (170-1). Whitelaw (87) describes this same woman as working for both the army and the navy and living out her days as a Chelsea Pensioner.



Fig. 10. Chris as Hannah Snell (Mackenzie, 120)

Ruehl's dismissal of the snapshot as supporting evidence for, in this case, sexuality and relationships, seems to me to be rather hasty. There is a long tradition of using snapshot photography as documentary evidence, using what is essentially a snapshot, a picture taken of a moment in time, where the subjects

may or may not be aware of the camera. This documentary evidence is and has been important in building up our knowledge of people and social situations.<sup>14</sup> Snapshots tend to represent casual moments of note and formal occasions, for example when friends come around for a meal, a family outing, wedding etc. As such, they have often been ignored since they present a view of life based on the high days and holidays when family or friends are together and differences are left to one side.

The compulsive smiles in the snapshots of today insist on the exclusive claim of the family group to provide satisfying and enduring relationships, just as the calm dignity of earlier pictures emphasised the formality of family ties (Holland, "History," 1).

However, if we combine formal and informal images this enables us to build up a fuller picture of people's lives. Val Williams argues that

the notion of family emerges more strongly through the snapshot than it does through other photographic modes . . . Snapshot photography poses as the only photographic genre which could be said to be naïve, the result of a simple consciousness or an uncluttered wish to obtain a record and find proof and evidence of a particular course of events, of certain individuals, or of a pattern of experience (72).

---

<sup>14</sup> For more information about documentary photography in the early twentieth century see Williams, for contemporary commentary see Boffin and Fraser, and Spence.

It is clear that the albums at Smallhythe were family ones rather than individual ones. Over the last few years our notions of family have moved away from the married couple with children to encompass a range of situations, including the homosexual family (Weeks, Sexuality, 39-40). The photographs of the Smallhythe trio, which cover the years from 1905 until Edy's death, focus mainly on Chris and Edy.<sup>15</sup> As the photographs are taken over a number of years, it is possible to see the development and continuity of the family. Friends such as Vera Holme appear over the years and there are pictures of the trio partaking in similar activities over this time, such as Chris playing with the cats or dog. As I have already indicated there are few pictures of Tony. This points to her as the author of the pictures after 1916 and so includes her within the family itself. Most notably there is an absence of any men in the photographs, which again points to a lesbian or woman-identified lifestyle and contrasts with albums such as Vanessa Bell's (or the representation of her album)<sup>16</sup> which, although not a typical family of the time, is probably a more typical family album of the time. The one thing that probably was different from most family albums of the time was that "Bell never tired of taking photographs of naked children, generally of my brother and myself." (Bell and Garnett, 10) This fact is substantiated by the request from the firm which developed her snapshots . . . "Would Mrs Bell please

---

<sup>15</sup> Tony joined the household in 1916, so would be absent from the earlier photographs.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that her album is a book, compiled by Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett. This is therefore a collection of photographs from Bell's eleven volumes (Williams, 79) and represents how Bell and Garnett wanted the 'Bloomsbury Set' to be viewed rather than Vanessa Bell's album as a whole.

mark those rolls of film which contained images unsuitable for the eyes of the young ladies" . . . The firm did not like to handle material which could only be called "indecent" (Bell and Garnett, 10). The similarity between the albums is that over a period of many years they feature the same people, at generally the same place, with the same friends, doing the same things. In that sense the lesbian family album is no different from any other family album.

### **Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Image**

As already indicated, Radclyffe Hall epitomises the image of the lesbian at the beginning of the twentieth century. Jivani describes her as "the twentieth-century's most famous lesbian" (27). In fact Hall became so synonymous with her lesbian identity that her name was used as shorthand to describe a lesbian.<sup>17</sup> As a public figure, notorious for her sexuality but also for being a fashionable woman, there were many photographs of her. As Ruehl comments:

Her lesbian identity was after all the cause of her notoriety, if not her fame. Photographs of Hall and her lover appeared widely in the popular press. In these, Hall is pictured as the uncompromising "invert" she believed herself to be (35).

Whilst having celebrity status does not automatically mean that someone is from a higher class, Radclyffe Hall combined both upper class and celebrity status. She was a rich heiress, being the only daughter of a well-to-do gentleman and a

---

<sup>17</sup> In a letter from the heiress and writer Bryher (Winifred Ellerman, 1894-1983) to her lifelong friend and poet, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961) she writes "Mrs. Arthur is a . . . is a . . . well, you know, Radclyffe" (Doan, Fashioning, 28).



writer, which brought her notoriety as well as celebrity.<sup>18</sup> Images of Radclyffe Hall have been used as a model of the “mannish lesbian”<sup>19</sup> so I start with these images because, as Doan writes:

Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, Mary Allen, and the artist Gluck, among others, strategically harnessed photographic imaging – as portraiture, documentary evidence, or narrative sequence – for the purposes of public relations to further any number of agendas, personal, professional, or political (Fashioning, 165).

The two images I shall discuss here show Hall in public, either posing for an “at home” shot for publicity or out for pleasure but being photographed in her free time as a celebrity. There is therefore an interesting juxtaposition of the public and private in these images. The first illustration (fig. 11) is a publicity shot for the novel The Master of the House, created for the public market. In the second illustration (fig. 13) Hall and Troubridge are at what is essentially a public event but they are there to show their dogs and admire others in a private capacity. Due to their class and celebrity status they are “snapped” by the press photographers of the day. Both photographs appear to show a private side of the subjects – something which the range of biography and proliferation of magazines

---

<sup>18</sup> See Baker, Cline, Dickson, Souhami and Troubridge for biographies of Radclyffe Hall.

<sup>19</sup> Newton’s article “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman,” originally published in 1984, is a seminal work looking at the way in which Hall articulated the image of the “mannish lesbian” through the character Stephen Gordon. More recently Doan has looked at the images presented by all both through her characters and her self-presentation in relation to other images in the public domain.



Fig. 11. Radclyffe Hall photographed by Howard Coster 1932 (Baker, n.p.)

focusing on the lives of celebrities demonstrate that there is a large public interest in. An article written by Evelyn Irons about Radclyffe, albeit tongue in cheek, showed her “at home,” discussing her domestic arrangements (Jivani, 28).<sup>20</sup> Articles such as this were and remain very popular, satisfying the desire of the public for private details of the rich or famous.

---

<sup>20</sup> Evelyn Irons wrote a series of articles for the Daily Mail entitled “How Other Women Run Their Homes.” Her first candidate was a neighbour of hers, Gluck. Hall was apparently keen to take part in this article; “the problem was that she had no direct experience of housekeeping. . . . Hall only ever lifted a finger on the domestic front to ring for the maid” (Jivani, 28-30).

The image of the invert was one that Hall both identified with, as can be seen in her writing<sup>21</sup> and cultivated, as can be seen through photographs. The most popular image we have of her, is that of her dressed “as a man.” This image of the “mannish lesbian” appropriating the apparel of masculinity, is one that she also publicised through The Well of Loneliness. Hall emphasises Stephen’s masculinity by demonstrating the difference between Stephen and her mother and highlighting the importance of clothes within their different expressions of an identity.

The inevitable clash of two opposing natures who sought to express themselves in apparel, since clothes, after all, are a form of self-expression. The victory would now be on this side, now on that; sometimes Stephen would appear in a thick woollen jersey, or a suit of rough tweeds surreptitiously ordered from the excellent tailor in Malvern (Hall, The Well, 71).

There are many photographic images that show Hall in the style of the “mannish lesbian,” sporting a monocle and bow tie, with her hair cut short and brought severely off her face.<sup>22</sup> Figure 10 shows Hall in a relaxed pose, wearing a tweed jacket, which may have been perceived as less severe than a structured

---

<sup>21</sup> Troubridge describes how Hall asked her permission to write and publish a book that “she had long wanted to write on sexual inversion, a novel that would be accessible to the general public who did not have access to technical treatises” (Troubridge, 81).

<sup>22</sup> A number of photographs are held by the National Portrait Gallery, but many images can be seen in the various biographies written about her or about lesbians at that time (Baker, Cline, Souhami, Troubridge).

plain black jacket, or as definitively masculine as a smoking jacket. Hall has a large ring upon her hand, and the prominence of this may have been to emphasise her femininity. She is holding her monocle in her hand, something which has been seen by some writers as a signifier of lesbian sexuality (Barker, Cline, Garber). However, it was also part of a range of masculine clothing and accessories that had been appropriated by fashionable women more generally in the 1920s.<sup>23</sup> This ambiguity serves two purposes, firstly to feminise the image by playing down the sexual signifiers and gendered clothing, but at the same time maintaining them. Hall's use of a monocle and a short eton crop were indicators of both fashionable-ness and a certain sexual identity. These photographs show a woman who could easily be mistaken for a man. Hall's more casual image at home may thus have been intended to soften her image following the notoriety of The Well of Loneliness and ensuing obscenity trial. The images of Hall at that time had been severely lampooned (fig. 12) and this portrait shows a much softer image.

---

<sup>23</sup> Doan looks at the fashions of the 1920s and the development of the boyish "Modern Girl" from the earlier image of the "New Woman." In doing this she illustrates how difficult it is to identify lesbian signifiers from contemporary fashions, especially where we have preconceived ideas about the meaning of these items. This raises the question of where those preconceived ideas come from? Why do we remember the "mannish lesbian" in preference to the "Modern Girl"? The answer may lead us back to Hall and The Well of Loneliness and the uproar it caused through the subsequent trial. Prior to the trial the image of the boyish or masculine woman, if it was associated with lesbianism, could be ignored, the trial made lesbians visible (Jivani, 40).



Fig. 12. Beresford Egan's Cartoon lampooning Radclyffe Hall and The Well of Loneliness (Baker, n.p.)

The second image (fig. 13), taken in 1923 for The Queen, shows Hall and Troubridge with their award-winning dachshunds. By the late nineteenth century photography was used to publicise the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Professional photographers followed the country house season and publicised Society events (Davidoff, The Best, 62). In this photograph, Hall and Troubridge are dressed almost identically in the style of the “mannish lesbian.” This itself is suggestive of the fact that they are a couple. Una is wearing her monocle, which she appears to do more than Radclyffe, according to a friend of the couple: “Hall rarely if ever wore a monocle, but her ‘close friend’ Una Troubridge did” (Cline,



Fig. 13. Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge photographed in August 1923 for The Queen (Souhami, Trials, n.p.)

219). Both however, are in skirts. In many of the photographs of Radclyffe the images are cropped so that it is impossible to see whether she is wearing trousers or not. Obviously by not showing her skirt it was easier for journalists and publicists to emphasise her “masculinity” and to show her as a woman trying to “pass” as a man. Interestingly, Gertrude Stein (fig. 14), who also dressed severely in a masculine style whilst wearing a skirt, was not portrayed by the



Fig. 14. Gertrude Stein and Thelma Wood (Weiss, 22)

media in the same way. Photographs of her do not intentionally cut her off at the waist to emphasize the jacket and the severity of her clothes. This may have been because the French media were more comfortable with issues of sexuality than the British media were. However, Weiss suggests that “it was not that Paris was culturally more ‘liberated’ than England or America in its attitudes towards women, but simply that it left its foreigners alone” (21). In fact whilst the English press made reference to Hall’s masculine appearance, the American press were

more outspoken with headlines such as “Man or Woman?” and “You Are Wrong – It’s not a Man” (Cline, 219). This type of media attention worked for Hall, publicising both her novels and her sexual theories. Nonetheless she also complied with conventions of the day, always wearing skirts in public, conscious of her position in society.

There are photographs of John wearing trousers in private during the mid-thirties, when they were not yet generally worn by women; but she stuck to the convention of skirts for formal wear till the end of her life. Her gift was to make the skirt look almost more suitable for a racy member of the male sex (Cline, 151).

Radclyffe Hall’s was not the only lesbian image in the public domain. A number of women, mainly American writers and artists, lived in Paris at this time and have become known not only because of their art, but also, if not mainly, because of their sexuality.<sup>24</sup> The Parisian lesbian lifestyle appears to have had some significant differences from the English one as portrayed by Hall. Both Gertrude Stein and Natalie Barney had “salons,” which cultivated a lesbian network – indeed Barney’s salon ran for sixty years (Weiss, 111). These were not exclusively lesbian and provided a meeting place for artists, including men such as Picasso, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (Weiss, 82, 111).

---

<sup>24</sup> These women included the writers Djuna Barnes, Janet Flanner, Renée Vivien, Thelma Wood and the artist Romaine Brooks. See Benstock Women and Weiss for more detailed information about these “Women of the Left Bank” (Benstock). There are also individual biographies for many of these women (Field, Souhami Gertrude, Wineapple).



The two salons could not have had less in common: Barney's was formal, old fashioned, almost stuffy, while the Steins' was casual, unassuming, and open to virtually anyone (Benstock, 15).

In addition to her salon Barney "held pagan rituals in her garden" (Weiss, 101)

These theatrical events were based on a desire to recreate a lesbian community as depicted by Sappho.<sup>25</sup> An image of one event shows the women wearing flowing costumes, looking very feminine (fig. 4) – a stark contrast to the more masculine images of Hall and Stein (fig. 14). Barney and Romaine Brooks

*fashioned themselves* out of a decadent philosophy and aesthetic.

They were not simply reflecting or reporting their lives and those of their friends, but *making* them visible – that is, making their lesbianism visible – by adapting literary and visual conventions which were already coded "homosexual," for as Showalter notes, the term "decadence" was effectively a "fin-de-siècle euphemism for homosexuality" (Elliot and Wallace, 39).

As previously mentioned Barney disliked the masculinisation of lesbianism.

In particular, she objected to any form of dress or behaviour that suggested homosexual women were really men trapped in women's bodies. Therefore, she objected to cross-dressing, to the anger, self-indulgence, and self-pity that marked the behaviour of many of

---

<sup>25</sup> Barney and "the poet Renée Vivien travelled to Lesbos to set up a lesbian school for poetry and love. . . . Although her plans for Lesbos were stymied, Natalie gathered a similar community of women around her in Paris, and held pagan rituals in her garden" (Weiss, 101).

her friends, and to the need to mime the male in dress, speech, and demeanour (Benstock, Women, 11).

However, Barney adopted at least two identities which do not fit easily with this opinion, firstly that of the "page" and secondly that of the "amazon." Elliot and Wallace describe the identity of the page as one that she adopted "both in her poetry and in her lesbian relationships" (20). Likewise the identity of the "amazon" was one that informed the titles of two of her books of poems L'Amazone and Nouvelles pensées de l'amazone and there are photographs of her in both these guises. Elliot and Wallace suggest that

Barney's wealth enabled her to live out a number of alternative identities, it also effectively protected her from having to think through the real implications of the power relations suggested by some of her costumes (20).

In contrast, Brooks, according to Elliot and Wallace, had a "stagey transvestite persona" (22). Her paintings, both self-portraits and portraits of other women, are influenced by this identity, which show women in the masculine style portrayed by Hall and others. Indeed, one of the better known images of Una Troubridge is the portrait by Brooks – showing her in severe clothing complete with monocle and dogs (fig. 5).

Gluck (1895-1978) was an artist who was conspicuously unconventional. Unlike Hall she wore actual men's clothes, even liking "the discomfort her cross-dressing caused" (Souhami, Gluck 11).

She had a last<sup>[26]</sup> for her shoes at John Lobb's the Royal bootmakers, got her shirts from Jermyn Street, had her hair cut at Turefitt gentlemen's hairdressers in Old Bond Street, and blew her nose on large linen handkerchiefs monogrammed with a G (Souhami, Gluck 10).

In addition to her clothes, like Hall and the trio she changed her name although, unlike the former, this was a public name. Born Hannah Gluckstein she insisted on being called "Gluck, no prefix, suffix, or quotes" (Souhami, Gluck, 9), although she would permit members of her family to call her Hig. Gluck was specific about her reasons for this.

She said she thought it sensible to follow the example of artists like Whistler and use a symbol by way of identification. More fundamentally, she had no inclination to conform to society's expectations of womanly behaviour and she wanted to sever herself, but not entirely, from her family (Souhami, Gluck, 10).

This latter notion is interesting in considering Chris' relationship with her family and whether, like Gluck, Chris' name change was to effect a symbolic separation from her family.

There are differences between the ways in which Hall and Gluck presented themselves and expressed their sexual identity. As Doan states:

---

<sup>26</sup> A last was shoemaker's model of someone's feet from which shoes were then made or repaired.

there is a world of difference between Gluck's unique version of debonair manhood – so obviously a woman dressing as a man, for a gentleman rarely posed formally in fedora and a large, bulky coat, accessories that cloak Gluck's body – and Hall's distinctive cultivation of the elegant, if sartorially severe masculine mode in women's fashions (Fashioning, 177).

However, both Gluck and Hall understood the importance of the use of photography in self-promotion.

Gluck and Hall understood the power of photographic images in mass culture – photography's ability “to sell, inform, record, delight” – and consciously perfected the art of being public figures (Doan, Fashioning, 181).

The five women who are the subject of my research did not have the means nor perhaps the desire to use photography in the way that I have described above. More usually they are a record of their lives – some formal, some informal – some portraits, some snapshots. However, just like the photographs above it is possible to read their photographs in order to consider the representation of their identities.

### **The Smallhythe Trio**

At Smallhythe there are three photograph albums, one of which is entitled “Tony's Album.” There are only a couple of photographs of Tony in any of these and so it would appear from both the suggested authorship and absence of the

author that Tony had the role of family photographer.<sup>27</sup> It was a nineteenth-century tradition to keep a family album (V. Williams, 79) and Tony, whilst remaining a shadowy figure in the history of the trio, seems to have fulfilled the role of “documentor” of the family history after 1916. Her absence is a familiar one in family snapshots – there is often one member of the family (usually the father) who is the main photographer and is therefore absent (Holland, 7). On a wider scale Tony’s role in the family seems to have been one of looking after the family – she took charge of much of the finance, including Ellen Terry’s,<sup>28</sup> she kept the peace (Melville, 228-9) and documented the family both in photographs as shown here and in paintings which are still at the museum in Smallhythe. However, some of the photographs were taken before 1916, which was the year that Tony joined the household. So it may have been that earlier Ellen Terry, or their neighbour and Edy’s cousin Olive Chaplin, took photographs of Chris and Edy.

From the photograph albums it is clear that Chris and Edy possessed a camera as early as 1904. Williams establishes that this was not unusual for women of the upper-middle classes: “many of the Bloomsbury women were prolific makers of snapshots. Ottoline Morell, Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West

---

<sup>27</sup> This was a role not restricted to photography, as there are a number of Tony’s paintings of the family hanging in the Smallhythe museum.

<sup>28</sup> As Terry became frail and unable to manage her finances, Tony along with the help of Gilbert Samuel, and H.A. Gwynne took control of her finances. This included selling her Chelsea house, the large majority of her possessions and stopping the many allowances she gave to her relatives and offspring. (Melville, 234)

and Dora Carrington all possessed and used snapshot cameras” (V. Williams, 80). For her novel Orlando Virginia Woolf worked with her sister on the illustrations (V. Williams, 80). Despite approaching the society photographer Lenare her preference was for a much more informal approach.

I wanted to ask you if it would be convenient should we call in on Sunday on our way back; [sic] at Long Barn. It has now become essential to have a photograph of Orlando in country clothes in a wood, to end with. If you have films and a camera I thought Leonard might take you (Nicolson, A Change, 487).

We do not know whether the three albums at Smallhythe represent all the photographs ever taken or if there were more which never found their way into albums. It is not always clear who the photographer was but what is clear is that the trio used snapshot photography to both record domestic and social events. In addition, Tony appears in her album to experiment with portraiture photography.

The photographs primarily feature Edy and Chris in a timescale that starts in the early 1900s up until 1947, the year of Edy’s death after which there appear to be no photographs of Chris or Tony. Only what seems to be the earliest of the albums puts dates or details to the photographs. I have chosen to examine photographs depicting Chris, Edy and Tony in both private and public situations. These range from private moments in the garden by themselves to semi-private situations with their friends at home, to public places visiting people or places, or demonstrating in the suffrage rallies. All of these photographs have been taken outside. As Williams comments

snapshot photography is primarily to do with being out of doors, closely connected with outdoor rites and celebrations of a domestic nature. . . the emphasis was on loved ones and on family members, not on general spectacles (V. Williams, 76).



Fig. 15. "Briar Hedge" (Edith Craig Archive)

The first photograph of the Smallhythe Trio shows an intimate side to Chris and Edy's relationship and is entitled "Briar Hedge." This is from the earliest album at Smallhythe and shows them holding hands walking up the lane (fig. 15). We know that the image depicts Chris and Edy because the album names them

individually as well as giving the photograph a title. The photograph is not clear and shows the two women from behind only; we cannot see their facial expressions as the shade from their hats casts a shadow across the side of their faces that we can see. They are also not central to the photograph which is framed in a circle leaving a good half of the photograph with a hedge and building which is only slightly further up the road that Chris and Edy are walking. The title perhaps indicates that the hedge was as much the focal point of the photograph as the women themselves. This image has a relaxed air about it and suggests an intimacy, which is part of daily life, which contrasts with the next photograph.

This next photograph (fig. 16) shows Edy and Chris in the garden at their home in Smallhythe. It comes from "Tony's Album" and appears to be an attempt at photographic portraiture. This image demonstrates an intimacy in Chris and Edy's relationship that is implicit, but never explicit within the biographical material. In this first image Chris is standing above Edy, raised by the steps that can just be seen in the photograph, with Edy below, looking up at her. They are holding/touching hands. Whilst they are in a pose that suggests they are busy gardening, it is the intimacy of the touch that is most arresting. In fact the only things about the picture that suggest that they are gardening are their clothes and this is only because they are wearing the same skirts and smocks that they are shown in, in many of the pictures. These appear to be clothes that they wore around the house and garden. Tony's attempt at portraiture is perhaps a first attempt at an image, perhaps one that she would later use as a basis for a





Fig. 16. Chris and Edy in the garden (Edith Craig Archive)

painted portrait. It is certainly not a finished piece. The garden appears to have been an important feature in their lives as not only the pictures testify but the comments of their friends who describe visiting Smallhythe (Pym, 112-13). The backdrop of flowers gives the picture a romantic feel, and the difference in height between the two women with Edy looking up at Chris in a manner that is suggestive of a suitor, is perhaps reminiscent of the balcony scene in Romeo and

Juliet. The setting in the garden also suggests the Garden of Eden, and certainly the impression one has of the relationship between Smallhythe and the trio is that it was their paradise (Pym, 112; Sackville-West 118). Chris is touching the flowers as if to draw attention to the relationship between them and the language of love.

In fig. 17 we see Edy in the position of power, seemingly as a protector. In this image she has her arm around Chris's shoulders in a proprietorial pose, almost overwhelming her, a gesture that could also be read as a "masculine" one. Some biographers have positioned Chris as the "butch" or masculine partner (Melville, Steen) and Edy as the feminine one. The latter is emphasised through the flowers that Edy is holding. These images, however, present both these women in a different light which is more in line with Chris's reference to Edy as the matriarch (St John, letter to Sackville-West, 15 July 1933) and also Vita Sackville-West's reference to Edy as "the most tearing old lesbian – not unlike Radclyffe Hall" (Glendinning, 250). In this photograph Edy and Chris are pictured with Gabrielle Enthoven, a well-known actress of the day. Edy and Enthoven are dressed quite formally, which could suggest that they were about to go out – perhaps return to London from Smallhythe or vice versa. In contrast Chris is dressed in the Smallhythe "uniform". Whilst Enthoven is holding Edy's arm, there is a greater degree of intimacy between Edy and Chris with the former having her arm around the latter. Edy also appears to have her back turned slightly away from Enthoven and the focus of her attention is on Chris rather than



Fig. 17. Chris, Edy and Gabriele Enthoven at Smallhythe (Edith Craig Archive)

on the three of them together. Thus the photograph shows clearly the primary relationship between Edy and Chris. Enthoven seems almost to be excluded, despite having her arm tucked into Edy's.

Another early photograph shows Chris and Edy at home with friends (fig. 18). It is not possible to say whether or not these women just dropped by without Chris or Edy expecting them as Chris and Edy are dressed casually, rather than dressed up to entertain. Pym suggests that this may have been their usual garb



Fig. 18. Friends at Smallhythe (back row standing: Chris, Haskie; middle row: Edy, Pixie (Pamela Colman Smith), John; front row sitting: Reggie (Regina Laurence), Fanny Dellavent, Tassle. (Edith Craig Archive)

whether they were entertaining or not as she refers to the excitement of visiting them with her three children.

Smallhythe was to them a new and enchanted world, where grown-ups wore sandals on bare feet, drove about the dusty lanes in a

coster cart, dressed in smocks, were gay and laughing and unconventional (112).

The women shown are dressed in a range of styles. Haskie and John<sup>29</sup> are more severely dressed with dark suits and ties, similar to the clothing that the trio wore when out with friends whilst Fanny Dellavent is in lighter colours which softens the image but still retains the tie. Reggie is dressed in a similar style to Chris. The positioning of the group suggests that they are huddled together for the purpose of the photograph – Reggie looks as though she is being jostled by Pixie, although the photo is taken before everyone is ready and there does not appear to be another, more perfect, version of the image. This may be because the “better” image had been given away or that a rather more informal grouping was what was intended within this shot.

In figures 19 and 20 we see all three women outdoors, so in a public setting, yet on what were obviously private outings. Both photographs suggest pictures of days out, the first at the beach and the second at Sissinghurst, the home of Vita Sackville-West. They are more formally dressed than in the previous photographs, although it should be noted that the photo of Chris and

---

<sup>29</sup> In the reproduction of this photograph in Cockin’s biography of Edy, two members of the group remain unidentified. In the photograph album at Smallhythe from which this photograph is taken all the women have been named, albeit by first name only. As Cockin perhaps implies the fact that we do not have full names cannot give us any clues about who these women were and how they were connected to the trio. One of the women pictured is identified in the album by the name John. Given the convention of assigning male nicknames to themselves it is possible that the women here illustrate the wider network of lesbian women that the trio were connected to.



Fig. 19. Chris and Tony on the beach (Edith Craig Archive)

Tony on the beach indicates that the weather is much colder than it was in the previous ones. It is difficult to determine in this first photograph (fig. 19) exactly what Chris and Tony are wearing, as only their top halves are visible above the windbreak. However, their hats are plain and underneath Tony's scarf which appears to be the brightest piece of clothing either of them are wearing, is a tie. A coat slung over the breakwater suggests that the weather may have got warmer than they expected when they ventured out, or that its wearer had been more energetic than the others who remained sitting. The trio enjoyed days out in "Belinda," a car given to Edy by a friend (Atwood, 139) and it may be that this

was a record of such an occasion. The angle of the photograph suggests that the subjects may not have been aware, Chris especially, that this was about to be taken. They are not smiling, as is usual in snapshot photography<sup>30</sup> and Tony's attention seems to have been taken by something further up the beach. It may have been that Tony did not like her photograph being taken. This would fit with the general air of privacy in this perhaps clearest picture that we have of her.

The visit to Sissinghurst recorded in this figure 20 is dated 1932 in the Nicolson family album. Following a performance at the Barn Theatre in July of that year, in August Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson invited the trio to visit Sissinghurst. If so, then it was on this day that Chris fell in love with Vita. In Chris' Love Journal she writes that she was given the task of replying to the invitation but she hesitated because of a premonition that it would change her life (August, 1932). The photograph shows them standing at the bottom of the tower, which was where Vita's study was situated and to which only a few gained access (Nicolson, Portrait, 1). Again their dress is severe in comparison to the smocks that they can be seen in when they are at home. All three are looking in different directions, as in most of the shots where the three of them are pictured together. Tony's attention is caught by something out of the picture, whilst Chris and Edy talk together – none of them is focused on the photographer, presumably Vita

---

<sup>30</sup> Jo Spence talks about the similarity of snapshots everywhere (Cultural, 148) and Joan Solomon makes reference to the "happy snaps" of the idealised family (12).

who is the only one that Chris makes reference to in her reminiscences of the day.



Fig. 20. Edy, Chris and Tony at Sissinghurst 1932 (Nicolson Family Album)

Figure 21 depicts them as many of their contemporaries picture them, sitting in the garden, deep in conversation. In this photograph Chris seems slightly ill at ease, not fully engaged with the conversation and this may be because she is more aware of the fourth person who is taking the picture. She appears to be waiting for this person to return to the table as she is not at this time involved or perhaps even interested in the conversation that is going on.



This image, or one similar, is also captured by Tony in a painting held at Smallhythe.



Fig. 21. Edy, Tony and Chris at Smallhythe (Edith Craig Archive)

Another photograph from Tony's album was taken in the Spring of 1919 when the cottage was lent to Ruth Bower (fig. 22). There are a series of ten photographs showing her wearing trousers – the only person in the album who clearly is. The picture I have chosen here shows her posing with a cigarette on the steps to the cottage although there are others, which show her up a tree and with Honor Bright in the garden. The shoes that Ruth wears soften the image of the trousers, which are of a jodhpur design – the image, whilst boyish is also quite

feminine and shows a woman who was probably the epitome of fashion.<sup>31</sup> This contrasts with the images of the trio and also Radclyffe Hall who were more formal in their dress than Ruth Bower appears to be.



Fig. 22. Ruth Bower at Smallhythe 1919 (Edith Craig Archive)

### Ruth and Eva

In the Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson archive at the Women's Library there is an assortment of photographs of which only a few are identified. These include a

---

<sup>31</sup> There are a number of books that look the fashions of the early twentieth century. For more information see Alison Geinsheim's Fashion and Reality, Eizabeth Wilson's Adorned in Dreams, Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson's Chic Thrills. More recently Laura Doan's book Fashioning Sapphism looks at fashion with an especial reference to Radclyffe Hall.

box full of passport sized photographs of what are listed as “pink fabric box containing photographs of Woodbrooke students” dated 1914-1915. Then the mixture of photographs in the archive is quite eclectic, from a couple of small formal portraits of Ruth taken at Christmas in 1911 to a lone photograph of what appears to be a hall laid out for a wedding breakfast. Could this latter photograph be a picture of Ruth’s wedding? There are no photographs of Ruth and Hugh’s wedding and there are also no photographs of Eva in the collection. This may be because Ruth’s husband Hugh may have kept all their photographs after her death. There are also a collection of twelve unidentified nineteenth-century family photographs<sup>32</sup> and a miscellaneous collection of Ruth’s photographs. These include five formal photographs taken at Woodbrooke between March 1914 and May 1915. In a similar style there is a works photograph of Ruth taken with what could have been some of the women she worked with when she was a welfare worker for Joseph Rowntree’s in York. From their dress the women appear to be factory workers rather than other welfare workers.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Two of the photographs do have a name scrawled onto them but are indecipherable and their relationship to Ruth is not immediately obvious.

<sup>33</sup> Jo Stanley briefly looks at the ways in which employers represented their firm’s history through photographs of the employees. Stanley suggests that it was unusual for the women themselves to have copies of these photographs (“Well – who’d want,” 66-7) and it perhaps demonstrates the seniority of her position within the factory that she could either afford one or was perhaps given one as a memento when she left there.



Fig. 23. Ruth picking potatoes (Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive)

One of the photographs of Ruth is on the back of a postcard of which there are two copies in the collection. This practice of having multiple copies of a photograph printed and giving them to family and friends started in 1860 and remained popular in a variety of forms until around 1914 (National Museum of

Photography, gen3). Indeed there are also similar postcards of her friends May dated and sent for Christmas 1908, Maud Panting dated Christmas 1909, Nim dated 1917 and Eleanor dated and sent for Christmas 1922. The photograph from Eleanor is signed "Always, Yours Affectionately" which further suggests that these photographs were sent to friends for specific occasions such as Christmas. This photograph (fig. 23) shows Ruth in the countryside, in a field holding some recently dug potatoes, in her other hand a spade – suggesting that she dug the potatoes herself. There is no indication as to when or where this photograph was taken, but it is a lively image compared to the more formal portraits of the family in the collection and those of Ruth herself. In analysing how Ruth chose to express herself visually, this photograph shows a young woman, seemingly carefree and surrounded by nature. She is not dressed formally, wearing a short jacket and matching skirt in a light colour so it may be that she had in fact been working in the field as it does not appear as though she had prepared herself for a formal photograph. This more light-hearted photograph contrasts with the Ruth we know through her letters and diary who was thoughtful, concerned for the welfare of others and troubled by events at home. Ruth obviously had a "fun-loving" side, evidenced by Eva's comments about her and demonstrated with this image. However, the image tells us little about her sexuality: her clothes are not gendered, conforming to the fashion of the day for a sober and emancipated young woman. In fact they are much more relaxed in style and colour than the public clothes of the trio or indeed many of the other women in the Woodbrooke photographs. There is no one else in the photograph to whom we can relate her

posture and expression except the photographer, although the pose shows her showing off her haul of potatoes to someone.

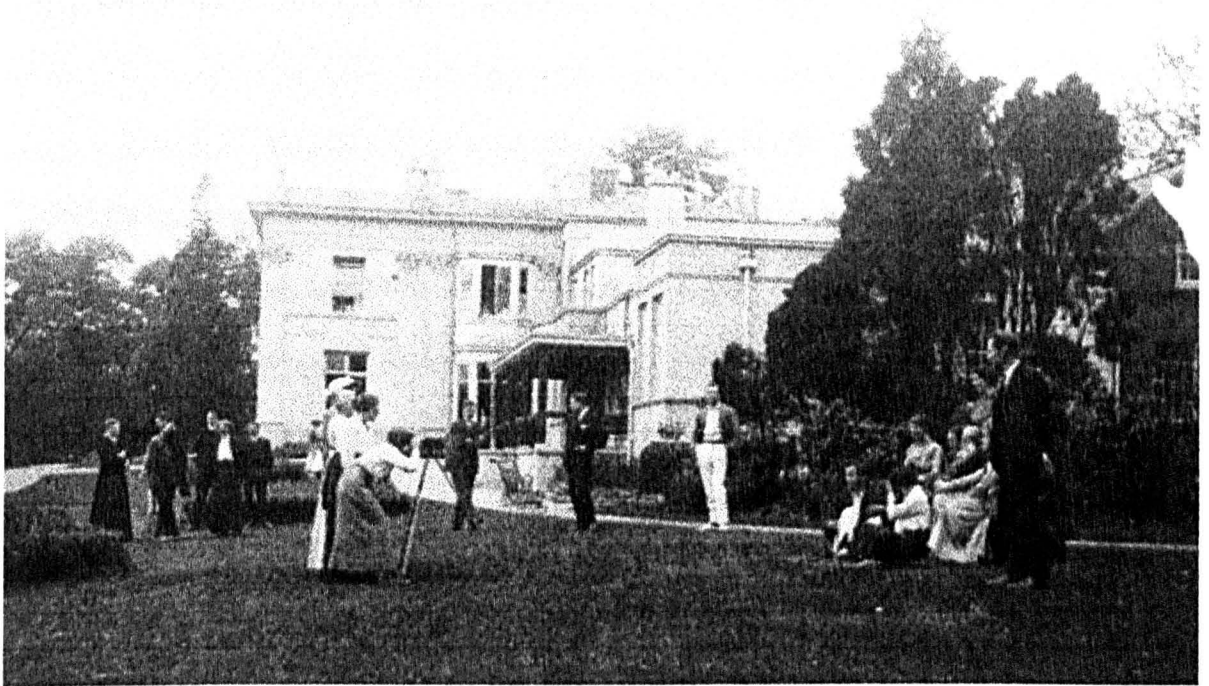


Fig. 24. Ruth at Woodbrooke (Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive)

As previously mentioned there are some formal photographs of the staff and students at Woodbrooke. Figure 24 is a photograph of the smaller groups of students and staff at the college of which there is another picture in the Slate/Slawson archive. This smaller grouping could perhaps have been a tutorial or class group. It is women who are taking the photograph and both the process and the groupings look much less formal so perhaps these images were not being taken at the same time as the other ones. A professional male photographer took the formal photographs one assumes. However, these images appear to show students taking the photographs. In this photograph (fig. 24)

Ruth is sitting to the right of the seated group, and although she is not very visible it is clear that she was not dressed in the dark more formal clothes that the group over to the left of the photograph are wearing, but in the lighter colours favoured by the majority of women in the group.

Figure 25 shows Ruth with a man, possibly Hugh. They are sitting in deckchairs quite close together, “Hugh” looking up intently at something to the left of the photographer whilst Ruth sits with a book in her lap looking directly towards the camera with a half smile on her face. Although not interacting directly with each other their positioning suggests a couple who are comfortable in each other’s company. It is an image very similar to that of Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey (fig. 26) whose relationship was a complex one. Carrington adored



Fig. 25. Ruth and Hugh (Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive)

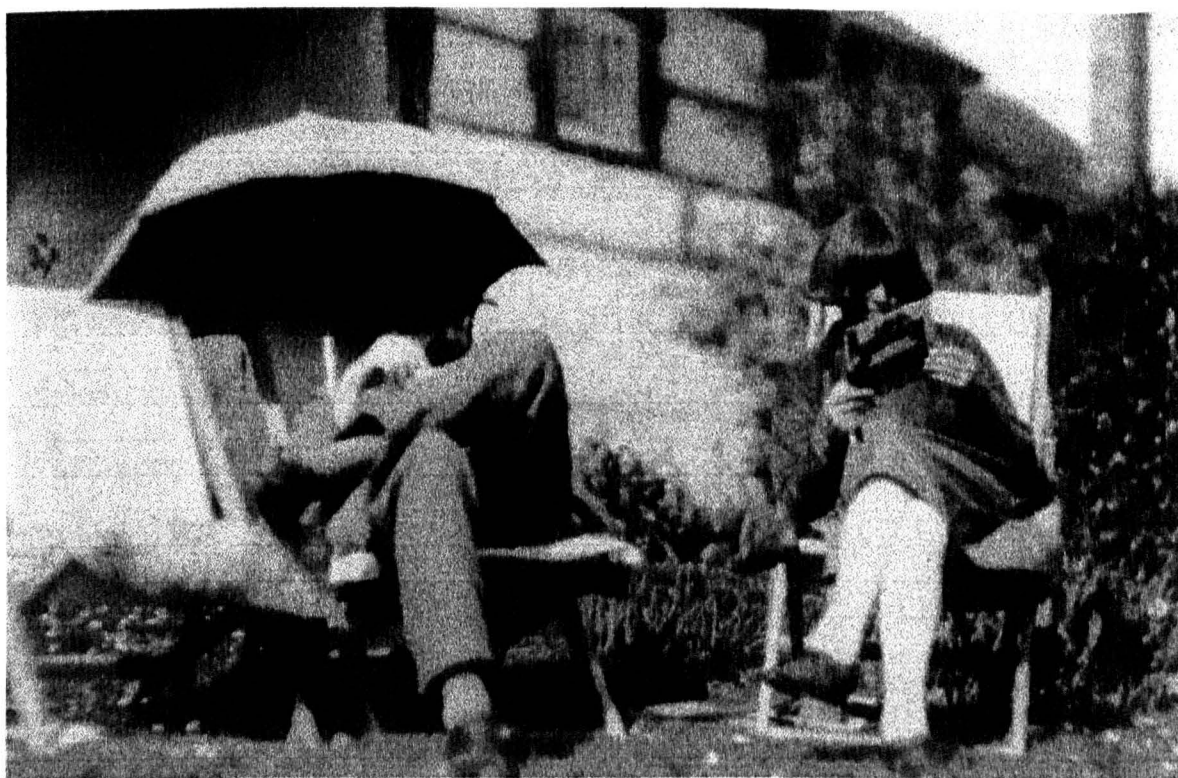


Fig. 26. Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey photographed in the 1920s (postcard, National Portrait Gallery)

Strachey, who was homosexual. Their love affair, whilst physically consummated, was not successful (Holroyd, 646). This image contrasts interestingly with Ruth's sexuality and feelings towards her husband, which were ambiguous at times. Of course this ambiguity is not visible within the image which appears to show a conventional heterosexual couple. Both couples are outside relaxing, Ruth and "Hugh" closer together than Carrington and Strachey. However, this could be due to the size of the garden as much as the relationship between the individuals. We also do not know in fig. 25 who the photographer is.



There are two photographs in the collection which show Ruth in later life. Both pictures are taken at different times and show her in front of a window reading. They perhaps show a side of Ruth that is apparent from her writing, her love of reading and learning. Both photographs are taken inside which is unusual and again there is no indication of who the photographer is. The fact that she appears to be engrossed in her reading would suggest that Hugh took the photograph.

## **Conclusion**

In comparing the two sets of photographs the first obvious point to note is the plethora of photographs of the trio available relative to photographs of Ruth and Eva. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter this in itself demonstrates a class difference. However, that difference is also evident in the different types of photographs that do exist. The trio had photograph albums of snapshots of themselves and their friends, in addition to more formal photographs that have been published elsewhere. For Ruth and Eva a few unmarked snapshots are available; the rest of the photographs were informal but professionally produced or very formal studio portraits. This meant that the trio were able to show themselves in a much more relaxed and informal way than Ruth or Eva were. The informality of some of the photographs of the trio gives us a much more informed view of them. An image of the clothes they wore privately emerges, for example. In terms of evidence of lesbian sexuality, the photographs of Edy and Chris are more revealing than those of Tony, Ruth and Eva. The photographs of Edy and Chris show the intimacy of their relationship and indicate Tony as the

outsider through her non-involvement in the pictures. Eva is absent from photographs, not because she was taking them but through circumstance, and the remaining images of Ruth are ambiguous in terms of any expression of sexuality.

It was much easier for upper-class women, as evidenced by Hall and Gluck, to live out their sexuality and enact it through the use of clothes or accessories because they were financially independent. Both women used images, which conveyed their sexual identity, in their work and also to publicise it. The Smallhythe Trio, although not so wealthy, were similarly able to be less concerned about conforming to social mores than Ruth or Eva. Hall and Gluck did not need to work, as they were financially independent, whereas the women I am researching all needed to work in order to support themselves.

As Merck illustrates, the use of photography to read sexual identity is problematic. Images of Hall and Gluck clearly show women living out their self-perceptions and representing this in the way that they dressed. In the photographs that I have analysed of the trio it is possible to read a lesbian identity into some of those images, but it requires a degree of knowledge about the trio in order to do so. If one was to look at those same images with no knowledge of the subjects at all it is unlikely that Rolley's "sixth sense" would find anything specifically lesbian about them. In the photographs of Ruth and Eva this is especially true as they are conventional images with no visual signifiers that might suggest a lesbian identity at all. As Merck concludes, "if these photographs

'show' us anything, it may only be this: that the lesbian self-portrait is as persistent as it is impossible" (28).

## Conclusion

Over the course of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries theories of lesbian identity and understandings of lesbian sexuality have changed considerably. This is evidenced in the theoretical writings by academics,<sup>1</sup> medical texts,<sup>2</sup> and the fictional or personal writings of women who defined themselves as lesbian<sup>3</sup> and through their biographers.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century prominent theories about lesbian identity were based on inversion as postulated by Ellis and others. At the time of my writing this thesis a recent prominent theory of both male and female homosexuality is that of Queer. I intend to discuss five of the key developments in theories of lesbian identity that have been posited over the twentieth century, to show how at any particular point in time the term lesbian has no unitary meaning or manifestation. As these definitions have changed this has had an implication for the analysis of sexual identity. I want to argue that any definition will capture just one version of a given identity and a range of factors will additionally influence this. One of these factors is class and my work has demonstrated how class difference could affect the opportunities, understanding and expression of a lesbian identity at the turn of the century. Women have always had relationships with other women that may or may not have been sexual. This is illustrated by the two groups of women I have

---

<sup>1</sup> For example Rich, Faderman, Foster, Jeffreys, Castle.

<sup>2</sup> Most notably Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, Freud, Bloch and Kinsey.

<sup>3</sup> Some examples include Bell, Hall, Lister, St John, Sackville-West.

<sup>4</sup> See Baker, Cline, Collis, Souhami, Summerscale.

researched whose experiences regarding sexual relations with each other are in some respects indeterminate. There are a number of seminal works that highlight the major changes in thinking about lesbian identity this century. I shall focus on four writers in order to elucidate these changes: Havelock Ellis, Jeannette Foster, Adrienne Rich, Lillian Faderman, together with the most recent theoretical elaboration of "queer" theory.

### **Havelock Ellis**

The principal theory, which influenced the climate in which the five women lived, was that of inversion and the figure of the mannish lesbian. I have discussed this at length in Chapter Two so I do not intend to go into great detail here. However, it was the theory around which women such as Chris and Radclyffe Hall described themselves. Propounded by Havelock Ellis and his contemporaries such as Carpenter and Krafft-Ebing, this was a congenital model of sexual identity, that is to say that the invert was *born* with a man's soul in a woman's body and vice versa. The female figure became known as the "mannish lesbian" predominantly because of the belief that she was really a man and therefore liked to dress and act as a man.<sup>5</sup> Radclyffe Hall has come to epitomise this image as I have shown in Chapter Five. The key to understanding the way in which lesbian history has been recounted and how women have understood their own difference over the twentieth century is the context in which the women wrote

---

<sup>5</sup> I have explored in Chapter Five how the figure of the "mannish lesbian" also found its expression in the fashion of the time, emblemized in the boyish "modern girl," (Doan, 102) for example.

about either themselves or others.

### **Jeannette Foster**

The book that Jeannette Foster is best known for, Sex Variant Women in Literature, was first published in 1956. It was based upon sexologists' notions that "sex variants commonly are conspicuous through the exhibition of characteristics usually associated with the opposite sex" (Henry, preface). Foster's work was important as it was the first time that anyone had attempted to bring together lesbian literature, when previous work on lesbian subjects was the domain of the scientific and medical professions (Foster, Foreword). Foster herself had been completely ignorant of lesbian sexuality until she discovered its existence through a dormitory scandal at the university where she was studying in 1916 (Foster, Foreword). I highlight this latter point as it demonstrates something about the times in which the women I researched lived. Despite the fact that Jeannette Foster went on to write a pivotal book about representations of lesbian identity, at college she was ignorant of her own sexuality and failed to recognise the lesbians around her. This places the possible ignorance of Ruth and Eva and the awareness of Edy, Chris and Tony into context. Perhaps in recognition of her early lack of awareness Foster highlights the fact that

not all women recognize a sexual factor in their subjective emotional relations, particularly in the intrasexual field so heavily shadowed by social disapproval. Still they often exhibit indirect responses which

have all the intensity of physical passion and which quite as basically affect the pattern of their lives (12).

Foster believed that it was possible to have a number of varieties of human behaviour that did not classify as male or female, heterosexual or homosexual. The term "sex variant" that she used comes from a study in 1941 by psychiatrist Dr D.W. Henry, which focused on people who had "emotional experience with others of their own sex" (Foster, 11) and whom he defined as homosexuals. She chose to use this term in an attempt to avoid defining sexual identity within a rigid framework. This is something she has in common with Rich and queer theory as I shall demonstrate later. Foster maintained that deviations from the heterosexual norm were many (11), but in order to clarify her work she started from Henry's classifications of sexual variants, which in addition to homosexuals included bisexuals and narcissists (12). She extended this classification, using the term lesbian where there was "overt sexual expression" (12) between women as she thought the term homosexual was both ambiguous and used more frequently in relation to men. Transvestism, she declared was "not in itself variant . . . to bring a woman properly within the scope of this study her transvestism must be accompanied by some evidence of fondness for her own sex" (12).

Foster looked to literature to provide evidence of the mores of the day believing, as I discussed in Chapter One, that this offers an indication of what was the social norm at any one point in time. However, inevitably her evidence was

based on the theories she herself was surrounded and moulded by and in looking for evidence of the lesbian she looked for those characteristics that the sexologists had previously focused on.

For each variant woman considered, as many as possible of the following points will be noted: physical appearance and temperament, with particular regard to "masculine" attributes; emotional history, including any suggestion of etiology for variance; social reactions to the variant expressed or implied within her milieu; and the author's personal attitude (14).

The relevance of literature to understanding lesbian experience is echoed by Rich, who highlights the assumptions made in the medium of both literature and social science scholarship (Rich, 229).

### **Adrienne Rich**

Adrienne Rich's theory of the "lesbian continuum" produced in 1981, posited the notion that there were a range of lesbian existences "through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (239). She argued that many women did not identify their feelings towards other women as lesbian, because they did not fit into the stereotype of the lesbian as portrayed by the images of Ellis or Carpenter and the later images of the "butch" and "femme" women of the 1950s (Feinberg, Nestle). Thus she suggests that there are a range of experiences that make up the



lesbian continuum, wider than the obvious erotic lesbian experiences, including female friendship and comradeship which, if ignored, limit the bounds of the erotic.

As we delineate a lesbian continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself; as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent in "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic," and in the sharing of work as the empowering joy which "makes us less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self denial" (240).

Rich also goes on to say that many women's experiences were formed from a range of male and female attachments. At the time that Rich was formulating her ideas the women's liberation movement had already made it both easier and socially more acceptable for women to become lesbians, not least as a political choice (Daly, Firestone, Johnston). For example there were many experiences of women having been married and becoming mothers before they recognised their erotic and emotional attractions to women as well as a growing definition and legitimacy of bisexuality as a sexual choice (Grahm, Lesbian History Group, Weeks Coming Out). Rich highlighted the fact that there were differences between women, around issues of ethnicity, nationality and culture, and that similarly there were differences between the experiences of lesbians. It is the

erotic experience that had previously been the main focus of attention from commentators such as Ellis, Carpenter or detractors such as Douglas<sup>6</sup> and MPs such as Colonel Wedgwood and Lieutenant Moore-Brabazon.<sup>7</sup> Rich's work widened the focus from the purely erotic and highlighted the idea that all women are equal while at the same time introducing the idea of difference.

### **Lillian Faderman**

Lillian Faderman, whose work again has provided an important landmark in lesbian history, proffered the view that "romantic friendships were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital" (Surpassing 16). Whilst

---

<sup>6</sup> It was Douglas who wrote the damning review of The Well of Loneliness that prompted the obscenity trial. Doan argues that this review was more about the newspaper wars than an attack on Hall and lesbianism. In 1928 the vote had just been extended to women on the same basis as men. Doan suggests that Douglas wished to shift the concern that had previously been focused on the "Flapper vote" to lesbians (3). She also cites the fact that this was August, the "silly season" for newspapers:

Douglas's masterful, if not vicious, attacks on anything or anyone could not have been more advantageous for a newspaper intent on boosting sales during the middle of a sleepy August, the so-called "silly season". The Express forced all other papers to scramble for their angle on the "story". . . . "Newspapers set out to entertain in order to capture the largest market." The war between the newspapers was noticeably intense in the latter part of 1928. (16-7)

<sup>7</sup> Jeffreys cites these two MPs as having particularly strong views in the Parliamentary debate in 1921 that was to decide whether lesbianism was to be made illegal. Colonel Wedgwood's argument was that by voting for the clause the publicity would inform more women about lesbianism (Spinster, 114). Another MP, Lieutenant Moore-Brabazon, "suggested that there were three possible ways of dealing with the 'pervert.' The death penalty would 'stamp them out,' and locking them up as lunatics would 'get rid of them' but the third way, ignoring them, was best" (Jeffreys, Spinster, 114).

researching the largely untouched area of lesbian history<sup>8</sup> Faderman discovered that there were many examples of female romantic friendship where declarations of love were common. What she found interesting, however, was the fact that in these declarations there was no suggestion that the women concerned were doing anything unusual or felt any guilt about their expressions of love (Surpassing, 16). She also discovered that society condoned these relationships rather than vilifying them (Surpassing, 16).<sup>9</sup> As a result of her investigation into these relationships she came to the conclusion that the majority of lesbians, as defined within the framework of romantic friendship, did not have genital sexual relationships although they may have shared beds and kissed each other. Faderman claims that because these women did not understand sexual desire and unlike men had no "visible proof" of their desire they would not have acted upon it (Surpassing, 16).

Obviously there were exceptions to this, one of the best known being Anne Lister, whose diary leaves no doubt about the sexual nature of her desire as well as her practice.

Foolish fancying about Caroline Greenwood, meeting her on

---

<sup>8</sup> Work had previously been done by Smith Rosenberg on the phenomenon of friendships between women and then the "New Woman." In the same year as Smith Rosenberg wrote about the new woman, Sheila Jeffreys produced her book The Spinster and her Enemies. Apart from these works very little had been produced about lesbian history. Foster's work, for example, focused on literature rather than on personal experiences.

<sup>9</sup> This was with the exception of women who dressed as men and were involved in female relationships. For Faderman the key here is that these women were trying to usurp male privilege (Surpassing, 17).

Skircoat Moor, taking her into a shed there is there & being connected with her. Supposing myself in men's clothes & having a penis, tho' [sic] nothing more (Whitbread, 151).

As a variety of observers point out, just because lesbians did not leave records of their sexual activity, or had the words to describe it, this does not mean that they did not recognise their physical feelings and act upon them (Donoghue 22, Hamer 2-4, Faderman, Scotch 126<sup>10</sup>). The main problem for Faderman is that whilst records such as Lister's leave accounts of how lesbian sexuality was experienced by the individual, these are scarce and in the main by women from an upper-class background who were able to leave records. The experiences of lower-class women were less likely to be recorded.

Faderman's work was an important milestone for lesbian history as her interpretation of lesbian relationships included "a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other" (Surpassing, 17-18). This provided an extended basis of lesbian identity from which lesbians could draw. As Faderman was writing Surpassing the Love of

---

<sup>10</sup> In the text it is "Ollie," Faderman's partner, who proffers this view. Faderman believes "we would feel as uncomfortable today being asexual as they would [in 1810] have felt being sexual" (Scotch, 250). Ollie cites a situation that she and Faderman found themselves in to demonstrate how their feelings took priority over the dangers of being discovered in a compromising situation and how, if they had been caught, their reactions might not have been dissimilar from those of Miss Woods and Miss Pirie (Scotch, 249). Ollie and Faderman do not come to an agreement over what actually happened between Miss Woods and Miss Pirie, although both agree that there is no evidence to prove anything one way or the other (Scotch, 244).

Men at the beginning of the 1980s, there was a rising interest in romance.

Writers such as Modleski and Radway were investigating the nature of romance (albeit in a heterosexual framework), Auerbach and Raymond were writing about the nature of female friendships. More importantly, however, throughout the 1980s there was increased interest in the lives of lesbian women and the notion of "reclaiming" these histories took a prominent place, although in many cases, like Faderman, the possibility of these relationships being physical was played down. Holledge, through her investigation of Edwardian theatre in 1981, came across the Smallhythe trio on whom her Innocent Flowers became primarily focused. Oldfield and Lewis investigated some lesser-known female friendships, the former between Flora Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks; the latter between the authors Somerville and Ross, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin (Martin Ross). Baker produced his biography of Radclyffe Hall, and Ormrod his biography of Una Troubridge and her relationship with Hall. Benstock wrote Women of the Left Bank exploring the artistic and personal lives of the lesbian community of women living in Paris. These explorations, which demonstrated the varieties of lesbian existence through history gave way, during the 1990s, to queer theory.

### **"Queer Theory"**

The most recent debates around sexuality focus on queer theory. Rubin in her essay "Thinking Sex" posits the notion that "there are also historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated" (4). During the 1980s

and 1990s the threat of HIV and Aids and the introduction of Section 28,<sup>11</sup> which linked homosexuality with disease, has caused such a renegotiation. Queer theory introduced the notion that sexual difference cannot be essentialised and promoted the idea of a range of differences with no boundaries.

Queer theory has no time for disputes about whether bisexuals are really gay or transsexuals really women; it has no time for hierarchies or oppression or for all the divisiveness identity politics that beset the movement in the 1980s . . . Queer is a form of resistance, a refusal of labels (McIntosh, 31).

Whilst queer theory is not without its problems - suggestions have been made that it "disappears lesbians" (Beemgn and Elisan, 165) or "become[s] an abbreviated way of saying 'lesbian and gay'" (Goldman, 173) - it does offer a way in which sexual ambiguity as well as difference can be expressed: "in the queer universe, to be queer implies that not everybody is queer in the same way. It implies a willingness to articulate their own queerness" (Daümer, 100). This ambiguity also entails difficulties. Jeffreys suggests that where the discussion of a woman's physical sexuality is left unaddressed this allows for it to be ignored or worse, brought back into a heterosexual framework, thus denying the very difference that queer theory is supposed to promote ("Revolting," 144).

---

<sup>11</sup> Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1987/8 forbade the "promotion" of homosexuality by Local Authorities.

## Theoretical Interpretation and Evidence

What these various theories demonstrate is how key to the interpretation and representation of lesbian identity has been the importance of evidential material. Despite Jeffreys' desire to leave aside whether women did actually have genital sex with each other, this remains a fundamental question in the interpretation of lesbian identity. Without evidential material we are left with ambiguous silences or gaps. Terry Castle's view, which she offers in The Apparitional Lesbian, suggests that many people cannot see the lesbian in front of them because they ignore the obvious signs.

The lesbian remains a kind of "ghost effect" in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot – even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen. Some may even deny that she exists at all. (Castle, Apparitional, 2)

She cites the case of a variety of women, including Greta Garbo, Eleanor Roosevelt and Sappho as examples of women whose relationships with women have been "sanitized . . . in the order of public safety" (Apparitional, 5). Despite the fact that many biographies have been written which ignore the lesbian relationships of their subject such as Charlotte Brontë<sup>12</sup> or edit it in such a way

---

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Whitehead has written about the friendship between Charlotte Brontë and Ellen Nussey, arguing that this relationship was much more important to Brontë than the one with her husband, the Reverend Arthur Bell Nicholls. Miller believes that a motivating factor in Brontë's acceptance of Nicholls' proposal was her father becoming ill. The marriage would allow them to stay in the Parsonage and Nicholls to undertake the parish work (48).

that it becomes acceptable such as the passionate relationship between Vita Sackville-West and Violet Trefusis, there has been a growing abundance of material either written by or about the experience of lesbians throughout the twentieth century (Bell, Collis, Lesbian History Group, Neild and Pearson, Summerscale). Towards the latter part of the twentieth century these auto/biographies have increasingly been open about the sexualised lesbian identity of their subject. Thus no evidence is needed as to the lesbian credentials of Martina Navratilova, K.D. Lang or Sophie Ward as they have been happy to be open about their sexuality. However, the further back in history one goes the less evidence there is of how people understood their sexual identity and expressed it. This is one reason that both Donoghue's and Faderman's research starts from the seventeenth century. It does not mean that there is an absence of lesbian sexuality before that time, merely that there is an absence of evidential material.

As I have just illustrated, theories of sexuality have changed over time and representations of lesbian identity as demonstrated by the five women I have researched can thus be read in a variety of ways. The theories mentioned above are broad enough to include all five women within them. Rich would see them all on the lesbian continuum in a similar way that queer theory offers a space for their experiences to be expressed. Although Foster concentrates on the manifestation of lesbian sexuality as a sexually erotic representation she also allows space for women such as Ruth and Eva, who perhaps did not recognise their lesbian identity within a broader definition of lesbian identity. Faderman,



however, would describe Ruth's and Eva's relationship as a "romantic friendship," not as a lesbian one. As the theoretical emphases change such as those on inversion or romance, for example, so does lesbian self-definition. As Jeffreys points out: "we must bear in mind that many lesbians past and present accepted sexological or sexual preference interpretations and internalised these models" ("Why lesbian," 14). However, it is also important to recognise that for some women sexual identity was neither key nor something that they recognised as an entity that needed or could be articulated.

### **The Smallhythe Trio**

The Smallhythe trio has been positioned as a lesbian *ménage à trois* in the later part of the twentieth century (Cockin 25, Hamer 123, Souhami 241). Whether or not they identified themselves as such is more ambiguous. Chris was aware of the work of Havelock Ellis and his contemporaries and, through her writing it is clear that she had accepted these theories and saw herself in terms of inversion, although she does not use that word (Letter to Sackville-West, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1932; Hungerheart, 245). Indeed, it is probable that she also saw her relationship in terms of a *ménage à trois* as

Shaw, writing to Christopher St John after Edy's death, had the naïveté to propose that 'Chris' should write the history of the *ménage à trois*. Naïveté, or mischief? Pretending to some degree of intimacy, he must well have known that such a history was

unwriteable. "Chris," very correctly, rejected the suggestion.

(Steen, 326)

This suggests that Chris did not appear to correct Shaw's vision of their relationship, just refused the idea of writing about it. Steen makes it clear that the nature of the relationship was such that it could not be talked about, implying that it was a lesbian one. Shaw had in fact lived next door to the trio for many years so may well have understood the nature of the relationship as implied by Steen. In Hungerheart Chris describes her partnership with Edy as a *ménage* "I used to wonder which was the husband and which the wife in the *ménage*!" (219). However, it is debatable whether Chris used the term "*ménage à trois*" as we would today. She may well have been referring to a household arrangement, rather than a sexual relationship between three people. The reference to the husband-and-wife relationship implies, however, a partnership based on the model of a heterosexual marriage. Again, this could be read as a way of describing a domestic arrangement, but given Chris' knowledge and the circumstantial evidence this is unlikely. What remains unclear, however, is to what extent Chris and Edy consummated their relationship and what happened to this aspect of their relationship after 1903. Hungerheart suggests that their relationship changed after Edy's love affair with Martin Shaw and Chris' alleged attempted suicide.

Edy and Tony left less explicit personal information with regard to their sexuality. The evidence of their lesbian sexuality has come largely through their

associations; as Auchmuty writes: "by their friends we shall know them" (77). It is through their associations with each other, friends such as Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, Vita Sackville-West, Vera Holme, Gabrielle Enthoven, Ethel Smyth to name a few that we know them to have been embedded in a rich network of women who were known to be lesbian. Sackville-West's reference to Edy as a "tearing old lesbian" (Glendinning, 250) is one of the few overt references to her sexuality and is reinforced by Woolf's portrayal of her as Miss La Trobe in Between The Acts. Of Tony we know even less. Her sexuality is usually defined in relation to that of Chris and Edy as part of the lesbian trio. There are no references to any other relationships. Whilst the exact nature of the *ménage à trois* is unknown to biographers, the popular view is that Chris was Edy's primary partner, as perhaps suggested by one set of nicknames where Chris is known as 'Master Baby' and Tony as 'The Brat' (Melville, 252). However, there is a view that their relationship probably ended before 1915 as evidenced through Chris' semi-autobiographical novel Hungerheart. Cockin cites The Golden Book as a possible source of evidence of their early relationship.

In The Golden Book, the unpublished journal addressed to Craig as beloved, St John expresses her desire and Craig's reticence, alluding to what she regarded as troubling aspects of their relationship, even as she attempted to rationalize them. The reticence seems to have been mutual, St John using her writing as a confessional space, a means of disclosure . . . The journal may have functioned in their relationship as a testimony of their

commitment to each other which could not otherwise be expressed. St John's account . . . demonstrate[s] the diversity of same-sex relationships and St John's growing acknowledgement of this in the beloved. (71)

How Edy and Tony saw themselves in relation to the sexological and psychosexual theories of the day is not clear. The emphasis on Tony's clothes, she and Chris being referred to as 'the Boys,' and Edy's sobriquet as the 'matriarch' provide a gender emphasis that would fit into the notion of inversion. However, not all readings of Edy can be seen in this light, as I demonstrated through the visual images of her in chapter 5, where she can be viewed as the dominant partner, the suitor and also not averse to defining herself as a cross-dresser. Hall and Troubridge did refer to all three women at one point as "the boys" (Dickson, 194) which suggests that they, like Woolf perhaps, saw something "masculine" in Edy's manner or appearance. However, none of the trio conformed to the popular image of the invert as Hall and Troubridge appeared to. Chris and Tony adopted male names and Chris saw herself in terms of a third sex. But they did not appear to see themselves as unusual in any way. Edy seems to float between images of masculinity and femininity. There is no evidence of her adopting any of the ideas of inversion or using any of the signifiers.

## The "Dear Girl" Duo

The nature of the "Dear Girl" duo's relationship and also that of Minna Simmons is less clear than that of the Smallhythe Trio. Ruth and Eva did not see their sexuality in terms of anything other than heterosexuality. This is despite the fact that Eva had a sexually intimate relationship with Minna of which Minna wrote eloquently after Eva's death, as this excerpt from a poem called "Friendship" demonstrates.

For seven short years there was given to me a love,  
A woman too, she was my life, and soul, words fail  
And desolation fills me, Life itself seems nought  
And it is night forever more without her. (Simmons, "Friendship" c.  
1917)

Ruth after Eva's death wrote: "the very foundation of my life has slipped away . . . Friendship has been the breath of my life and Eva was its crown" (Slate, diary, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1916). Whilst there is no evidence of Ruth experiencing a physically passionate relationship with another woman she expresses desire in her diary in relation to an unnamed woman, which could be read as sexual desire.

I enjoyed her physical beauty too and loved to watch her boyish gestures. Such a lovely healthy face and figure; the face very delicate and intelligent. She was wearing a pretty, soft green hat, devoid of trimming and independent of hatpins, and ever and anon she lifted it and passed her hand through her hair in a delightfully expressive manner. (Slate, diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916)

In addition to the detail with which Ruth recorded the way this woman looked and moved there are the boyish gestures, which are suggestive of inversion. Ruth also raises concern from her visit to this woman's lodgings that she should "fail to recognise a sister spirit" (Slate, diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1916). Could this notion of a sister spirit be lesbian or was it merely that they may have had similar social and political views? From Ruth's diary it would appear that this was an attraction beyond the merely spiritual.

Ruth and Eva had some knowledge of lesbian identity but they apparently did not recognise it within themselves. Ruth continued to have successive relationships with men despite describing them as "disappointing things" (Slate, diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1916) and Eva still thought in terms of heterosexual union being a true relationship. On one level their experience would appear to fit with Faderman's notion of the "romantic friendship." Ruth and Eva were politically aware, knowledgeable about sexuality as evidenced through their readings which included Edward Carpenter's Love's Coming-of-Age and The Intermediate Sex. Gertie (Eva's half-sister) believed Minna to be an "urning" – people who love their own sex – which, as Bristow notes, was the precursor to the notion of inversion (Sexuality, 21-2). This suggests that Eva and probably Ruth had read an earlier sexologist, Ulrichs.

Much of Ruth and Eva's expressions of love and desire were in the form of spiritual longings. As I have argued in Chapter Three, Faderman states how this

sublimates a lesbian desire. She suggests that in the case of Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt,<sup>13</sup> had they been together 20 years earlier, or of a lower and less educated class, they might have been able to remain innocent of lesbian sexuality.

While some decades earlier Hickok and Roosevelt themselves might have been able to think of their excitement over each other as a manifestation of their spiritual longing, in the early 1930's, at the height of their relationship, post-Freud and post Well, and as two worldly, literate women, they no longer had the luxury of innocence.

(Faderman, Surpassing, 311)

Ruth and Eva lived in those earlier decades; they were not worldly-wise, having been protected from the "excesses" of the lower classes.<sup>14</sup> In contrast the trio, surrounded by like-minded and educated women, was much more aware and it is this notion of class and education that is at the crux of their difference.

At the beginning of this chapter I outlined how the definition of lesbian relationships has changed over the last hundred years. By looking at the relationships of the Smallhythe Trio and Dear Girl duo it is possible to see how the ambiguous evidence of the relationships of these women can be interpreted as lesbian or not at any given point in time. The lack of concrete evidence

---

<sup>13</sup> Information about the relationship between the First Lady and Lorena Hickok can be found in Faber's The Life of Lorena Hickok: E.R.'s Friend.

<sup>14</sup> By this I mean that as respectable lower middle-class girls they were not expected to know about sexual relationships between men and women until they were married.

provides commentators with a relatively clean sheet on which to project the types of relationships that we would like to see. For Faderman and Jeffreys this was to reclaim women in history as lesbian, proving that there is a rich history of these relationships. Ellis may have viewed Chris as an invert although she did not conform to his stereotypical views of inversion. As I showed in my Introduction, this ambiguity has allowed biographical authors to gloss over the sexuality of the women. As Banks said of Chris and Edy: "it is not clear that they were ever actually lovers" (Dictionary, 55), her emphasis alluding to, and then dismissing the possibility of a sexual relationship rather than allowing the ambiguity to denote possibilities.

This ambiguity, however, is played out differently between the two groups of women. On the whole the sexual relationships between the members of the Smallhythe Trio are unclear. Chris does allude to her sexual identity, but to what extent her relationship with Edy is a sexual one is debatable and the role played by Tony within the *ménage* is unclear. The written evidence for their relationship comes primarily from Hungerheart which, as I demonstrated in Chapter One, is flawed. There is no evidence that the relationship between Ruth and Eva was ever sexual. Any evidence for a sexual relationship comes from Eva and Minna. Likewise the knowledge of lesbian sexuality was different between the two groups of women. Whereas the Trio were fully aware of it, the duo were only aware to a limited extent, demonstrated by the fact that Eva never saw the possibilities of a long-term relationship with Minna, believing that only a heterosexual relationship



would be a true one. Key to this difference of understanding was class, as Doan suggests:

knowledge of lesbianism was, for Rolph,<sup>15</sup> one significant marker or index of class separating the sophisticated from the “masses” – the unknowing “ninety-eight” per cent – who indulged in “traditional hard work” . . . The other minuscule two per cent for whom homosexuality, at the time of The Well's publication, became almost a fashionable subject at intellectual dinner parties. (Doan, 25)

However, the element that runs between all these relationships and the basis for their designation as lesbian relationships was the friendship, emotional and intellectual support and encouragement that they gave to each other.

---

<sup>15</sup> C. H. Rolph was a journalist and former police inspector who wrote the “Introduction” to Brittain’s A Case of Obscenity.

## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Sources**

- Atwood, Clare. "Tony's Album." Photograph Album. Edith Craig Archive. Ellen Terry Memorial Museum, Smallhythe, Kent.
- . Transfer of copyright document. 20<sup>th</sup> May 1920. Ms. 190/5. Imperial War Museum.
- Conway, Agnes Ethel. Letter to Clare Atwood. 19<sup>th</sup> May 1920. Ms. 190/5. Imperial War Museum.
- Craig, Edith. Two Untitled Photograph Albums. Edith Craig Archive. Ellen Terry Memorial Museum, Smallhythe, Kent.
- Fairfax, Eleanor. Postcard to Ruth Slate. December 1922. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London
- "Genealogical Information." Ts. 7/RSJ 6.3. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- "Journalism (Free Love)" T G Lectures 1909. Lecture programme. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- May (no other name provided). Postcard to Ruth Slate, 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- Nicolson, Nigel. Letter to the author. Ts. 18th May 1996.
- Nimmo, "Nim" (No other name provided). Postcard to Ruth Slate. 1917. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- Panting, Maud. Postcard to Ruth Slate. December 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.

- Phillips, Lewis W., C. Morris and E.C. Beman. Letter to Ruth Slate. 20<sup>th</sup>  
February 1912. Ts. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- Simmons, Minna. Letter to Eva Slawson. n.d., c.1916-17. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate  
and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . "Poem." n.d., c.1916. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . "Friendship." n.d., c.1917. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.
- Slate, Ruth. Diary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1897. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1897. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1898. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1898. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1898. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1899. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1899. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1900. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

- . Diary, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1900. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1900. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary rough notes, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1902. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary rough notes, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1903. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1903. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary rough notes. 24<sup>th</sup> May 1904. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1904. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1905. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1905. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1905. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1906. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1906. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1906. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1906. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1907. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

—. Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

- . Diary, 21st June 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.

- . Diary, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1916. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1916. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1916. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 15<sup>th</sup> July 1906. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 24<sup>th</sup> February 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 9<sup>th</sup> June 1908. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 25<sup>th</sup> January 1909. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 7<sup>th</sup> August 1910. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 1<sup>st</sup> July 1912. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.

- . Letter to Eva Slawson. 17<sup>th</sup> May 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- Slawson, Eva. Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.



- . Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson  
Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1915. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive.  
Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Ruth Slate. 15<sup>th</sup> August 1910. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Ruth Slate. 7<sup>th</sup> December 1911. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Letter to Ruth Slate. 27<sup>th</sup> January 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- . Postcard to Ruth Slate. n.d., c.1910. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva  
Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.
- St John, Christopher. Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 10<sup>th</sup> October 1932. Ms.  
Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.

- . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 19<sup>th</sup> October 1932. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 27<sup>th</sup> October 1932. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 1<sup>st</sup> November 1932. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 6<sup>th</sup> November 1932. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 21<sup>st</sup> November 1932. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 16<sup>th</sup> April 1933. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 15<sup>th</sup> July 1933. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 27<sup>th</sup> October 1942. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 13<sup>th</sup> November 1942. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1947. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 8<sup>th</sup> April 1947. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . Letter to Vita Sackville-West. 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
  - . "Love Journal." Ms. Sissinghurst Castle, Kent.
- Thompson, David. Letter to Ruth Slate. 4<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.

Thompson, David. Letter to Ruth Slate. 26<sup>th</sup> December 1916. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.

Thompson, David. Letter to Ruth Slate. 7<sup>th</sup> December 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.

Thompson, David. Letter to Ruth Slate. n.d. December 1913. Ms. 7/RSJ. Ruth Slate and Eva Slawson Archive. Women's Library, London.

### **Secondary Sources**

Abelove, Henry, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin, eds. The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. London: Routledge, 1993.

Adlard, Eleanor, ed. Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. London: Frederick Muller, 1949.

Ainley, Rosa. What Is She Like? Lesbian Identities from the 1950s to the 1990s. London: Cassell, 1995.

Allen, Grant. The Woman Who Did. London: John Lane, 1895.

Allen, Mary S. Commandant. The Pioneer Policewoman. Ed. and arranged by Julie Helen Heyneman. London: Chatto and Windus, 1925.

—. Lady in Blue. London: Stanley Paul and Co., 1936.

Allen, Mary S. Commandant and Julie Helen Heyneman. Woman at the Cross Roads. London: Unicorn Press, 1934.

"An Age of Innocence 1920-1951." Its Not Unusual: A Lesbian and Gay History. Dir. Ian MacMillan, 3 episodes, Wall to Wall Television Ltd for BBC, 1997.

Andermahr, Sonya. "'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk': Lesbian Cultural Studies." Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian Interventions in the Academy. Eds.

- Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermahr. London: Cassell, 1997. 8-23.
- Ash, Juliet and Elizabeth Wilson. Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader. London: Pandora, 1992.
- Atkinson, Diane. The Suffragettes in Pictures. London: Museum of London, 1996.
- Atwood, Clare. "Edy's Ways." Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. Ed. Eleanor Adlard. London: Fredrick Muller, 1949. 133-43.
- Auchmuty, R. "By Their Friends We Shall Know Them: The Lives and Networks of Some Women in North Lambeth 1880 - 1940." Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840 -1985. Eds. Lesbian History Group. London: Women's Press, 1985. 77-98.
- Auchmuty, R., S. Jeffreys and E. Miller. "Lesbian History and Gay Studies: Keeping a Feminist Perspective." Women's History Review. 1/1: (1992): 89-108.
- Audoux, Marguerite. Marie Claire. London: Chapman and Hall, 1911.
- Auerbach, Nina. Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction. London: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- . Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time. London: Norton, 1989.
- Baker, Michael. Our Three Selves: A Life of Radclyffe Hall. London: GMP, 1985.
- Banks, Olive. The Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists, Volume 2: A Supplement 1900 - 1945. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.
- . Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of "First Wave" Feminism. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986.

- Barnes, Djuna. Ladies Almanack. 1928. New York: New York University Press, 1992.
- Barney, Natalie. L'Amazone. Paris: n.p., 1920.
- . Nouvelles Pensées de L'Amazone. Paris: n.p., 1939.
- Barrett, Michèle. "Some Different Meanings of the Concept of 'Difference': Feminist Theory and the Concept of Ideology." The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory. Eds. Elizabeth Meese and Alice Parker. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989. 37-48.
- Barrow, Andrew. Gossip: A History of High Society from 1920 to 1970. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978.
- Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. 1980. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 1993.
- . Image – Music – Text. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977.
- Beemyn, Brett and Mickey Eliason, eds. Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- . "Queer Theory in Practice." Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology. Eds. Beemyn, Brett and Mickey Eliason. New York: New York University Press, 1996. 163-8.
- Bell, Barbara. Just Take Your Frock Off: A Lesbian Life. Ed. Brighton Ourstory Project. Brighton: Ourstory Books, 1999.
- Bell, Quentin and Angelica Garnett. Vanessa Bell's Family Album. London: Jill Norman and Hobhouse Ltd, 1981.

- Benstock, Shari. Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940. 1987. London: Virago, 1994.
- . "Paris Lesbianism and the Politics of Reaction, 1900-1940." Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past. Eds. Martin Duberman, Martin Bauml and Martha Vicinus. London: Penguin, 1991. 332-46.
- ., ed. The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. London: Routledge, 1988.
- . "Authorizing the Autobiographical." The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Ed. Shari Benstock. London: Routledge, 1988. 10-33.
- Birke, Lynda. "Born Queer? Lesbians Interrogate Biology." Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian Interventions in the Academy. Eds. Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermahr. London: Cassell, 1997. 57-70.
- Bland, Lucy. Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1887-1914. London: Penguin, 1995.
- Bland, Lucy and Laura Doan, eds. Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.
- Bloch, Iwan. M.D. Sexual Life in Our Time in its Relations to Modern Civilization. Trans. M. Eden Paul M.D. London: Heinemann, 1909.
- Boffin, Tessa and Jean Fraser, eds. Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. London: Pandora, 1991.
- Boffin, Tessa. "The Knight's Move." Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. Eds. Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser. London: Pandora, 1991. 42-50.

- Bono, Paola and Sandra Kemp. Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- Brandon, Ruth. The New Women and The Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question. London: Flamingo, 1990.
- Bristow, Joseph, ed. Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing. London: Routledge, 1992.
- . Sexuality. London: Routledge, 1997.
- . "Symonds's History, Ellis's Heredity: Sexual Inversion." Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 79-99.
- Bristow, J. and A. R. Wilson, eds. Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993.
- Brittain, Vera. Testament of Friendship: The Story of Winifred Holtby. Great Britain: Fontana, 1981.
- . A Case of Obscenity. London: Femina Books, 1968.
- Broster, L.R. and H.W.C. Vines, eds. The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality. London: Chapman and Hall, 1938.
- Browne, S. "Studies in Feminine Inversion." The Sexuality Debates. Ed. Sheila Jeffreys. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987. 606-12.
- . "Sexual Variety and Variability Among Women and Their Bearing Upon Social Reconstruction." A New World for Women: Stella Browne: Socialist Feminist. London: Pluto Press, 1977. 91-105.
- Brunt, Rosalind and Caroline Rowan, eds. Feminism, Culture and Politics. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986.

- Bryson, Valerie. Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992.
- Buckley, Cheryl and Hilary Fawcett. Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion From the Fin de Siècle to the Present. London: I.B Tauris, 2001.
- Burns, M.J. The Influence of Natalie Barney on Three Women Writers:- (Colette; Djuna Barnes; Radclyffe Hall). Diss. Manchester, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Caine, Barbara. English Feminism 1780-1980. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Carpenter, Edward. Love's Coming-of-Age. 1896. London: Methuen, 1915.
- Castle, Terry. The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- . Noël Coward and Radclyffe Hall: Kindred Spirits. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Chalon, Jean. Portrait of a Seductress: The World of Natalie Barney. Trans Carol Barko. New York: Crown, 1979.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. Eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993. 334-49.
- "Clare Atwood" Obituary. The Times. 4<sup>th</sup> August 1962.
- Cline, Sally. Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John. London: John Murray, 1997.



- Cockin, Katharine. Edith Craig (1869-1947) Dramatic Lives. London: Cassell, 1998.
- . "Women's Suffrage Drama." The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives. Eds. Joannou Maroula and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 127-39.
- Collis, Rose. Portraits to the Wall: Historical Lesbian Lives Unveiled. London: Cassell, 1994.
- . Colonel Barker's Monstrous Regiment: A Tale of Female Husbandry. London: Virago, 2001.
- Cominos, Peter, T. "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict." Suffer and be Still. Ed. Martha Vicinus. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972. 155-71.
- Coole, Diana. "Is Class a Difference That Makes a Difference?" Radical Philosophy. 77 May/June. 17-25.
- Corelli, Marie. Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct. London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1905.
- Craig, Edith and Christopher St John, eds. Ellen Terry's Memoirs. London: Victor Gollancz, 1933.
- Craig, Edward Gordon. Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self. London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1931.
- Craig, Sandy, ed. Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain. Ambergate, Amber Lane Press, 1980.
- Crawford, Elizabeth. The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928. London: UCL Press, 1999.

- Crompton, Rosemary. Class and Stratification: An Introduction to Current Debates. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Cronwright-Schreiner, S.C. Introduction. The Story of an African Farm. By Olive Schreiner. London: Collins, 1953. 9-13.
- Daly, Mary. Gyn/Ecology. London: Women's Press, 1979.
- Dane, Clemence. Regiment of Women. 1917. London: Virago, 1995.
- Daümer, Elisabeth. "Queer Ethics, or the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics." Hypatia 7. 7/4 (Fall 1992): 91-105.
- Davidoff, Leonore. The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season. 1973. London: The Cresset Library, 1986.
- . Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850. London: Hutchinson, 1987.
- Davies, Jill. "Now You See Her, Now You Don't: The Lesbian in Theatre Studies." Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian Interventions in the Academy. Eds. Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermahr. London: Cassell, 1997. 71- 85.
- de Frece, Lady V. Recollections of Vesta Tilley. London: Hutchinson, 1934.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction" differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies. 3/2 (1991): iii-xvii.
- de Pougy, Liane. My Blue Notebooks. 1977. Trans Diana Athill. London: Andre Deutsch, 1979.

- Delisle, Françoise, [Francois Lafitte-Cyon]. Friendships Odyssey. London: William Heinemann, 1946.
- Delisle, Françoise [Francois Lafitte-Cyon]. Friendship's Odyssey: In Love with Life. London: Delisle, 1964.
- Dennett, Terry. "Popular Photography and Labour Albums." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 72-83.
- DeSalvo, Lousie and Mitchell A. Leaska, eds. The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf. 1984. London: Virago Press, 1992.
- Dickson, Lovat. Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness: A Sapphic Chronicle. London: Collins, 1975.
- Doan, Laura. "'Acts of Female Indecency': Sexology 's Intervention in Legislating Lesbianism." Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 199-213.
- . "Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s." Feminist Studies. 24/3 (1998): 663-700.
- . Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Donoghue, Emma. Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801. London: Scarlet Press, 1993.
- Douglas, James. "A Book that Should be Suppressed." Sunday Express. 19<sup>th</sup> August 1928, 10.

- Duberman, Martin Bauml, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr., eds. Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past. London: Penguin, 1991.
- Duffy, Maureen. The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn 1640-89. 1977. London: Methuen, 1989.
- Duncker, Patricia. James Miranda Barry. London: Serpent's Tail, 1999.
- Dyhouse, Carol. Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England. London: Routledge, 1981.
- Eldridge Miller, Jane. Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel. London: Virago, 1984.
- Elliott, Bridget and Jo-Ann Wallace. Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Ellis, Edith. The Mine of Dreams: Selected Short Stories. London: A. and C. Black, 1925.
- Ellis, Havelock. Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume II Sexual Inversion. Philadelphia: F.A. Davies Company, 1918. Third Edition.
- . Commentary. The Well of Loneliness. By Radclyffe Hall. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928.
- . Psychology of Sex: A Manual for Students. London: Heinemann, 1933.
- . My Life. London: William Heinemann, 1940.
- Epstein, Julia and Kristina Straub. Eds. Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Eustance, Claire. "Meanings of Militancy: The Ideas and Practice of Political Resistance in the Women's Freedom League, 1907 - 14." The Women's

- Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives. Eds. Joannou Maroula and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 51-64.
- "Evelyn Irons" Obituary. The Times. 11<sup>th</sup> May 2000.
- Evreinof, N. The Theatre of the Soul. A Monodrama in One Act. Trans. Marie Potapenko and Christopher St John. London: Hendersons, 1915.
- Faber, Doris. The Life of Lorena Hickok: E.R.'s Friend. New York: William and Morrow, 1980.
- Faderman, Lillian. Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present. 1985. London: Women's Press, 1991.
- . Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers. London: Penguin, 1992.
- . Chloe and Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present. London: Penguin, 1994
- . "Acting 'Woman' and Thinking 'Man': The Ploys of Famous Female Inverts." GLQ. 5:3 1999: 315-29.
- Feinberg, Leslie. Stone Butch Blues: A Novel. New York: Firebrand Books, 1993.
- Felski, Rita. Introduction. Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 1-8.
- Field, Andrew. Djuna: The Life and Times of Djuna Barnes. New York: Putnam, 1983.
- Finlayson, Iain. Writers in Romney Marsh. London: Severn House Publishers, 1986.
- Firestone, Shulamith. The Dialectic of Sex. London: Women's Press, 1979.

- Fitch, Noel Riley. Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties. New York: Norton, 1983.
- Fitzroy, A. T. Despised and Rejected. London: C. W. Daniel, 1918.
- Foster, Jeannette, H. Sex Variant Women in Literature. 1956. USA: Naiad Press, 1985.
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction. 1976. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin, 1990.
- Fulford, Roger. Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle. London: Faber and Faber, 1958.
- Garber, Marjorie. Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety. London: Penguin, 1993.
- Gernsheim, Alison. Fashion and Reality (1840 - 1914): Victorian and Edwardian Fashion, a Photographic Survey. 1963. London: Constable, 1981.
- Gever, Martha and Nathalie Magnan. "The Same Difference: On Lesbian Representation." Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. Eds. Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser. London: Pandora, 1991. 67-75.
- Gilbert, O. P. Women in Men's Disguise. London: John Lane The Bodley Head, Ltd., 1932.
- Giles, Judy. Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900 - 50. London: Macmillan Press, 1995.
- Glasgow, Joanne. "What's a Nice Lesbian Like You Doing in the Church of Torquemada? Radclyffe Hall and Other Catholic Converts." Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions. Eds Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow. London: Onlywomen Press, 1992. 241-54.

- , ed. Your John: The Love Letters of Radclyffe Hall. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Glendinning, Victoria. Introduction. The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season. Leanore Davidoff. 1973. London: The Cresset Library, 1986. vii-x.
- . Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West. London: Penguin, 1983.
- Goldman, Ruth. "Who Is That *Queer* Queer? Exploring Norms around Sexuality, Race, and Class in Queer Theory." Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology. Eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason. New York: New York University Press, 1996. 163-182.
- Grahn, Judy. Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
- Griffin, Gabriele. Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- Griffin, Gabriele and Sonya Andermahr, eds. Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian Interventions in the Academy. London: Cassell, 1997.
- Gurney, Peter. "'Intersex' and 'Dirty Girls': Mass Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s." Journal of the History of Sexuality. 8/2 1997: 256-90.
- Hall, Catherine. White Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- Hall, Lesley A., Hall. "Feminist Reconfigurations of Heterosexuality in the 1920's." Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 135-49.

- . "Suffrage, Sex and Science." The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives. Eds. Joannou Maroula and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 188-200.
- Hall, Radclyffe. The Unlit Lamp. 1924. London: Virago, 1993.
- . The Well of Loneliness. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928.
- . The Well of Loneliness. 1928. London: Virago, 1991.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. 222-37.
- Hallett, Nicky. Lesbian Lives: Identity and Auto/Biography in the Twentieth Century. London: Pluto Press, 1999.
- Hamer, Emily. Britannia's Glory: A History of Twentieth-Century Lesbians. London: Cassell, 1996.
- Hamilton, Cicely. Marriage as a Trade. London: Chapman Hall, 1909.
- . Life Errant. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1935.
- Hamilton, Cicely and Christopher St John. How the Vote Was Won. London: Suffrage Press, 1910.
- Hanscombe, Gillian and Virginia L. Smyers. Writing For Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940. London: Women's Press, 1987.
- Henry, George W, M.D. Preface. Sex Variant Women in Literature. 1956. USA: Naiad Press, 1985. n.p.
- Hill, B., ed. The First English Feminist. Reflections Upon Marriage and Other Writings by Mary Astell. Aldershot: Gower, 1986.
- Hobby, Elaine and Chris White, eds. What Lesbians Do in Books. London: The



- Women's Press, 1991.
- Holdsworth, Angela. Out of the Dolls House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century. London: BBC Books, 1988.
- Holland, Patricia. "History, Memory and the Family Album." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 1-14.
- . "The Old Order of Things Changed." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 91-105.
- Holledge, Julie. Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre. London: Virago, 1981.
- Holroyd, Michael. Lytton Strachey: A Biography. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.
- Howlett, C. Gender, Identity and Collectivity in the Writings of the British Suffragette Movement. Diss. Cambridge, 1996.
- Hunt, Felicity. Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Inness, Sherrie, A. The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.
- "Interview with Edith Craig." Votes For Women. 15<sup>th</sup> April 1910. 455.
- Jackson, Margaret. The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality c1850-1940. London: Taylor and Francis, 1994.
- Jalland, Pat. Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

- Jay, Karla and Joanne Glasgow, eds. Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions. London: Onlywomen Press, 1992.
- Jeffreys, Sheila. The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930. London: Pandora, 1985.
- . Introduction. "Why Lesbian History?" Not A Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840 – 1985. Eds. Lesbian History Group. London, Women's Press 1985. 1-18.
- . "Does It Matter If They Did It?" Not A Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840 – 1985. Eds. Lesbian History Group. London, Women's Press 1985. 19–28.
- . ed. The Sexuality Debates. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.
- . Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution. London: Women's Press, 1990.
- . The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution. London: Women's Press, 1993.
- . "Revolting Lesbians in the Politics Department." Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian Interventions in the Academy. Eds. Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermhr. London: Cassel, 1997. 142-56.
- Jivani, Alkarim. It's Not Unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century. London: Michael O'Mara Books Ltd., 1997.
- Joannou, Maroula and June Purvis, eds. The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.
- Johnson, George W. and Lucy A. Johnson, ed. Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir. Third Edition, Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1909.

- Johnston, Jill. Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution. New York: Touchstone, 1973.
- Jordan, Jane. Josephine Butler. London: John Murray, 2001.
- Joyce, Patrick. The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- , ed. Class. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Kay, Jackie. Trumpet. London: Picador, 1998.
- Kent, Susan Kingsley. Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914. London: Routledge, 1990.
- King, Roger and John Raynor. The Middle Class. 1969. London: Longman, 1981.
- Kinsey, Alfred, C., Wardell, B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Morton and Paul H. Gebhard. Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1953.
- Krafft-Ebing, Richard von. Psychopathia Sexualis, With Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study. Trans. Charles Gilbert Chadock M.D. London: F.J Rebman, 1894.
- Kuhn, Annette. "Remembrance." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 19-25.
- Lavery, Bryony. Tallulah Bankhead. Bath: Absolute Press, 1999.
- Leaska, Mitchell A. and John Philips, eds. Violet to Vita: The Letters of Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West 1910-1921. London: Mandarin, 1990.

- Lee, Elizabeth. "Marshall, Emma 1830-1899." Dictionary of National Biography. 1901. CD-ROM, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Lee, David H. and Bryan S. Turner. Conflicts About Class: Debating Inequality in Late Industrialism. Harlow: Longman, 1996.
- Lee, Hermione. Virginia Woolf. London: Vintage, 1997.
- Lesbian History Group. Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840 – 1985. London: Women's Press, 1985.
- Lewis, Gifford. The Selected Letters of Somerville and Ross. London: Faber and Faber, 1991.
- Liddington, Jill. Female Fortune: Land, Gender and Authority. The Anne Lister Diaries and Other Writings, 1833-36. London: Rivers Oram Press, 1998.
- Liddington, Jill and Jill Norris. One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Suffrage Movement. 1978. London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000.
- Long, Vincent. "Editorial Notes." Friendship's Odyssey: In Love with Life. Françoise Delisle. London: Delisle, 1964. 307-19.
- . "Foreword." Friendship's Odyssey: In Love with Life. Françoise Delisle. London: William Heinemann, 1964. xi-xv.
- Lorde, Audre. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde. 1984. Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1998.
- Mackenzie, Midge. Shoulder to Shoulder. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.
- Madson, Axel. The Sewing Circle. Hollywood's Greatest Secret: Female Stars Who Loved Other Women. London: Robson Books, 1998.
- Maitland, Sara. Vesta Tilley. London: Virago Books, 1986.
- Manvell, Roger. Ellen Terry. London: William Heinemann, 1968.

- March, Caeia. The Hide and Seek Files. London: Women's Press, 1988.
- Marcus, Jane. "The Private Selves of Public Women." The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Ed. Shari Benstock. London: Routledge, 1988. 114-46.
- Marshall, Beatrice. Emma Marshall: A Biographical Sketch. London: Seeley and Co, 1900.
- Martin, Bernice. A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change. Oxford: Blackwell, 1981.
- Mason, Michael. The Making of Victorian Sexuality. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Mavor, Elizabeth. A Year With the Ladies of Llangollen. London: Penguin, 1987.
- McIntosh, Mary. "Queer Theory and the War of the Sexes." Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993. 30-52.
- Meese, Elizabeth. (Sem)erotics: Theorizing Lesbian: Writing. New York: New York University Press, 1992.
- Meese, Elizabeth and Alice Parker, eds. The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989.
- Melman, Billie, ed. Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Melville, Joy. Ellen and Edy: A Biography of Ellen Terry and Her Daughter, Edith Craig 1847 – 1947. London: Pandora, 1987.

- Merck, Mandy. "Transforming the Suit: A Century of Lesbian Self-Portraits."  
Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. Eds. Tessa Boffin and Jean  
Fraser. London: Pandora, 1991. 22-9.
- Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. Theories of Sexual Difference.  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Miller, Elaine. "Through All Changes and Through All Chances: The Relationship  
of Ellen Nussey and Charlotte Brontë." Not A Passing Phase: Reclaiming  
Lesbians in History 1840 – 1985. Eds. Lesbian History Group. London:  
Women's Press, 1985. 29-54.
- Mitchell, Geoffrey, ed. The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell  
Suffragette and Rebel. London: Virago, 1977.
- Modleski, Tania. Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for  
Women. London: Methuen, 1982.
- Moore, L. "Something More Tender Still Than Friendship." Feminist Studies 18/3  
(1992): 499-520.
- Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. "Militancy, Masochism or Martydom? The Public and  
Private Prisons of Constance Lytton." Votes for Women. Eds June Purvis  
and Sandra Stanley Holton. London: Routledge, 2001. 159-80.
- Murray, J.A.H., R.W. Burchfield and J. A. Henry. Eds. Oxford English Dictionary.  
Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- National Lesbian and Gay Survey. What a Lesbian Looks Like: Writings by  
Lesbians on their Lives and Lifestyles. London: Routledge, 1992.

- National Museum of Photography Film and Television. "Cartes de Visite and Cabinet Cards." Information sheet: gen3, 1996.
- National Museum of Photography Film and Television. "Tintypes." Information sheet: gen8, 1996.
- Neild, S. and R. Pearson. Women Like Us. London: Women's Press, 1992.
- Nestle, Joan, ed. The Persistent Desire: A Butch-Femme Reader. Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992.
- Newton, Esther. "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman." Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past. Eds. Martin Duberman, Martin Bauml, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. London: Penguin, 1991. 281-93.
- Newton, Stella Mary. Health, Art and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century. London: J. Murray, 1974.
- Nicolson, Nigel. Portrait of a Marriage. 1973. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990.
- , ed. Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson 1910-1962. London: Phoenix, 1993.
- Nicolson, Nigel and Joanne Trautmann. Eds. A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume III, 1923-1928. London: Hogarth Press, 1975.
- Norton, Rictor. The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity. London: Cassell, 1997.
- Oakley, Ann. Taking it Like a Woman. London: Cape, 1984.

- Oldfield, Sibyl. Spinsters of This Parish: The Lives and Times of F. M. Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks. London: Virago, 1984.
- . This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945. London: Taylor and Francis Ltd, 1994.
- Oram, Alison. "Friends', Feminists and Sexual Outlaws: Lesbianism and British History." Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian Interventions in the Academy. Eds. Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermhr. London: Cassel, 1997. 168-83.
- . "'Sex is an Accident': Feminism, Science and the Radical Sexual theory of Urania, 1915-40." Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 214-30.
- Oram, Alison. Annmarie Turnbull., eds. The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex Between Women in Britain from 1780-1970. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Ormrod, Richard. Una Troubridge: The Friend of Radclyffe Hall. London: Jonathan Cape, 1984.
- Pankhurst, Dame Christabel. Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote. Ed. The Right Honourable Lord Pethick-Lawrence of Peaslake. London: Hutchinson of London, 1958.
- Pearce, Lynne and Jackie Stacey, eds. Romance Revisited. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995.
- Pemberton, Edgar T. Ellen Terry and Her Sisters. London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1902.



- Prideaux, Tom. Love or Nothing: The Life and Times of Ellen Terry. 1975. New York: First Limelight Edition, 1987.
- Prosser, Jay. "No Place Like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues." Modern Fiction Studies. 41/3 (Fall-Winter 1995): 483-514.
- . "Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity." Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 116-31.
- "Playwright's Arrest: Miss Ellen Terry's Daughter Complains of Police Methods." Weekly Despatch 21<sup>st</sup> February. 1909: n.p. Vera "Jack" Holmes Archive. Women's Library, London.
- Purvis, June. "Using Primary Sources When Researching Women's History From a Feminist Perspective." Women's History Review. 1/2 (1992): 273-306.
- . Ed. Women's History, Britain 1850-1945. London: UCL Press, 1995.
- Purvis, June and Sandra Stanley Holton, eds. Votes For Women. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Pykett, Lyn. "Foreword." The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms. Eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. xi-ii.
- Pym, Violet. "A Great Treat." Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. Ed. Eleanor Adlard. London: Frederick Muller, 1949. 112-17.
- Radway, J. Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

- Rae, Isobel. The Strange Story of Dr James Barry. London: Longmans Green & Co. 1958.
- Raitt, Suzanne. "Sex, Love and the Homosexual Body in Early Sexology." Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. 150-64.
- Raymond, Janice. A Passion For Friends. 1986. London: Women's Press, 1991.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. Eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin. London: Routledge, 1993. 227-54. Article originally published in 1981.
- Richardson, Angelique and Chris Willis, eds. The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Robins, Elizabeth. The Convert. 1907. London: The Women's Press, 1980.
- Rolley, Katrina. "Cutting a Dash: The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge." Feminist Review. 35 (Summer 1990): 54-66.
- . "The Lesbian Sixth Sense: Dress as an Expression and Communication of Lesbian Identity." Feminist Art News. Volume 3, Number 5. n.d. (c.1990). 6-12.
- Rose, Gillian. Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials. London: Sage, 2001.
- Rose, June. The Perfect Gentleman: The Remarkable Life of Dr James Miranda Barry, the Woman Who Served as an Officer in the British Army From 1813 to 1859. London: Hutchinson, 1977.

- Rowbotham, Sheila. Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It. London: Pluto Press, 1973.
- . "Preface." The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel. Ed. Geoffrey Mitchell. London: Virago, 1977.
- . A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States. London: Viking, 1997.
- . A New World for Women: Stella Browne, Socialist Feminist. London: Pluto Press, 1977.
- Rowbotham, Sheila and Jeffrey Weeks. Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. London: Pluto Press, 1977.
- Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. Eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin. London: Routledge, 1993. 3-44.
- Ruehl, Sonja. "Inverts and Experts: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Identity." Feminism, Culture and Politics. Eds. Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986. 15-36.
- . "Developing Identities." Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. Eds. Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser. London: Pandora, 1991. 34-41.
- Russell, Dora. The Tamarisk Tree: My Quest for Liberty and Love. 1975. London: Virago, 1978.
- Rutherford, Jonathan, ed. Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

- Sackville-West, Vita. "Triptych." Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. Ed. Eleanor Adlard. London: Frederick Muller, 1949. 118-25.
- Sagan, Françoise. Bonjour Tristesse. 1954. Trans. Irene Ash. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.
- San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project. "She Even Chewed Tobacco': A Pictorial Narrative of Passing Women in America." Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past. Eds Martin Duberman, Martin Bauml, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. London: Penguin, 1991. 183-94.
- Sarton, May. The House by the Sea. London: George Prior, 1978.
- Schaffer, Talia. "Nothing But Foolscap and Ink': Inventing the New Woman." The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms. Eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. 39-52.
- Schreiner, Olive. The Story of an African Farm. 1883. London: Collins, 1953.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. Gender and the Politics of History. Chichester: Columbia Press, 1988.
- Seabrook, Jeremy. "My Life is in That box." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 171 – 85.
- Sewell, William H. Jun. Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labour From the Old Regime To 1848. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

- Shaw, Bernard. Preface. Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence.  
Ed. Christopher St John. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932. vii-xxx
- "Shinjuku Boys." Under the Sun. Dir. Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams.  
Twentieth Century Vixen Production for BBC TV. Transmitted 28<sup>th</sup> January  
1998.
- Shore, Naomi and Elizabeth Weed, eds. Feminism Meets Queer Theory.  
London: Routledge, 1997.
- Showalter, Elaine. Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle.  
London: Virago, 1995.
- Sidhe, W. Bodies, Books and the Bucolic: Englishness, Literature and Sexuality.  
Diss. Cheltenham and Gloucester, 2001.
- Simmons, Crista. "Compassionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat." Frontiers.  
4/3 (1979): 54-9.
- Simpson, John, and Edmund Weiner. Eds. Oxford English Dictionary Online.  
Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. <<http://www.oed.com>>
- Sindon, Donald. Laughter in the Second Act. London: Hodder and Stoughton,  
1985.
- Slater, Don. "Consuming Kodak." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic  
Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago,  
1991. 49-59.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New  
Woman, 1870-1936." Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and  
Lesbian Past. Eds. Martin Duberman, Martin Bauml, Martha Vicinus and  
George Chauncey Jr. London: Penguin, 1991. 264-80.

- . "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936." Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 244-96.
- . "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 1/1 (1975): 1-29.
- Smyth, Cherry. Lesbians Talk Queer Notions. London: Scarlet Press, 1992.
- Solomon, Joan. Introduction. What Can a Woman Do With a Camera? Eds Jo Spence and Joan Solomon. London: Scarlet Press, 1995. 9-14.
- Sontag, Susan, ed. A Roland Barthes Reader. London: Vintage, 1993.
- Souhami, Diana. Mrs Keppel and her Daughter. London: Flamingo, 1997.
- . The Trials of Radclyffe Hall. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998.
- . Gertrude and Alice. 1991. London: Phoenix Press, 2000.
- . Gluck: 1895-1979. Her Biography. 1988. London: Phoenix Press, 2001.
- Spalding, Frances. Twentieth Century Painters and Sculptors. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 1990.
- Spence, Jo. Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Spence, Jo and Patricia Holland, eds. Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. London: Virago, 1991.
- Spence, Jo and Joan Solomon, eds. What Can a Woman Do With a Camera? London: Scarlet Press, 1995.
- Spender, Dale, ed. Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions. 1983. London: Women's Press, 1996.

- St John, Christopher. The Crimson Weed. London: Duckworth, 1900.
- . Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul. London: Methuen, 1915.
- . ed. Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932.
- . Christine Murrell M.D.: Her Life and Her Work. London: Williams and Norgate 1935.
- . Biographical Note. Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. Ed. Eleanor Adlard. London: Frederick Muller, 1949. 9-11.
- . "Close-up." Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. Ed. Eleanor Adlard. London: Frederick Muller, 1949. 16-34.
- . Ethel Smyth: A Biography. London: Longmans, 1959.
- Stanley, Jo. ed. Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates Across the Ages. London: Pandora, 1987.
- . "Well, Who'd Want an Old Picture of Me at Work?" Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 60-71.
- Stanley, Liz. ed. The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick: Victorian Maidservant. London: Virago, 1984.
- . The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.
- . "Romantic Friendship? Some Issues in Researching Lesbian History and Biography." Women's History Review. 1/2 (1992): 193-216.
- Stanley, Liz and Ann Morley. The Life and Death Of Emily Wilding Davison: A Biographical Detective Story. London: Women's Press, 1988.

- Steen, Marguerite. A Pride of Terrys: Family Saga. London: Longmans, 1962.
- Stimpson, Catherine R. "Zero Degree Deviancy: the Lesbian Novel in English."  
Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. Eds. Robyn. R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993. 301-15.
- Stopes, Marie. Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties. London: A.C. Fifield, 1918.
- . Enduring Passions: Further New Contributions to the Solution of Sex Difficulties Being the Continuation of Married Love. London: G.P Putnams, 1928.
- Strachey, Ray. The Cause. 1928. London: Virago, 1978 .
- Straub, Kristina. "The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke." Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity. Eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub. London: Routledge, 1991. 142-66.
- Steedman, Carolyn. Landscape For a Good Woman. London: Virago, 1986.
- Summerscale, Kate. The Queen of Whale Cay. London: Fourth Estate, 1997.
- Taylor, C. L. Female Cross-Gendered Behaviour in the Fiction of Radclyffe Hall, Anaïs Nin, H. D. and Djuna Barnes (BL). Diss. Oxford, 1998.
- Taylor, M. Changing Subjects: Transgender consciousness and the 1920s (BL). Diss. York, 2000.
- Terry, Ellen. The Story of My Life. 1908. Ipswich: The Boydell Press, 1982.
- Thompson, David M, ed. Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century. London: Routledge, 1972.



- Thompson, Tierl. Dear Girl: The Diaries and Letters of Two Working Women 1897-1917. London: Women's Press, 1987.
- Thompson, Tierl and Libby Mason. "Dear Girl." In G. Griffin and E. Aston, eds. Herstory. Vol. 2. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991. 159-207.
- Tickner, Lisa. The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14. London: Chatto and Windus, 1987.
- Toklas, Alice. What is Remembered. 1963. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985.
- Trotter, David. "Lesbians Before Lesbianism: Sexual Identity in Early Twentieth-Century British Fiction." Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace. Ed. Billie Melman. London: Routledge, 1998. 193-211.
- Troubridge, Lady Una. The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall. London: Hammond, 1961.
- Turner, Kay. Dear Sappho: A Legacy of Lesbian Love Letters. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996.
- Tyler, Carole-Anne. "Passing: Narcissism, Identity and Difference." Feminism Meets Queer Theory. Eds. Naomi Shore and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997. 227-65.
- Ulrichs, Karl Heinrich. The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love: the Pioneering Work on Male homosexuality. 1864. Trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash. Buffalo NY: Prometheus Books, 1994.
- Veblen, Thorstein. The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions. 1899. New York: Mentor Books, 1960.

- Vernon, James. "‘For Some Queer Reason’: The Trials and Tribulations of Colonel Barker’s Masquerade in Interwar Britain." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 26/1 (Autumn 2000): 37-62.
- Vicinus, Martha, ed. Suffer and Be Still. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972.
- , ed. A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. London, Methuen: 1980.
- . "Sexuality and Power: A Review of Current Work in the History of Sexuality." Feminist Studies. 8 (Spring 1982): 133-56.
- . "One Life To Stand Beside Me: Emotional conflicts of First-Generation College Women in England." Feminist Studies. 8/3 (Fall 1982): 603-28.
- . "Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 9: (1984): 600-22.
- . Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920. London: Virago, 1994.
- . "‘They Wonder To Which Sex I Belong’: The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity." The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. Eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin. London: Routledge, 1993. 432-452. Revised and updated version of a paper originally presented in Amsterdam, December 1987.
- . "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?" Radical History Review. 60 (1994): 57-75.

- . "Fin-de-Siècle Theatrics: Male Impersonation and Lesbian desire."  
Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace. Ed. Billie Melman.  
London: Routledge, 1998. 163-92.
- Volcano, Del LaGrace and Judith "Jack" Halberstram. The Drag King Book.  
London: Serpents Tail, 1999.
- Waites, Bernard. A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918. Leamington Spa:  
Berg, 1987.
- Walker, Nancy. "'Wider Than the Sky': Public Presence and Private Self in  
Dickinson, James and Woolf." The Private Self: Theory and Practice of  
Women's Autobiographical Writings. Ed. Shari Benstock. London:  
Routledge, 1988. 272-303.
- Walkerdine, Valerie. "Behind the Painted Smile." Family Snaps: The Meanings  
of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London:  
Virago, 1991. 35-45.
- Wandor, Michelene. "The Personal Is Political: Feminism and Theatre." Dreams  
and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain. Ed. Sandy Craig.  
Ambergate, Amber Lane Press, 1980. 49-58.
- Warhol, Robyn R. and Diane Price Herndl, eds. Feminisms: An Anthology of  
Literary Theory and Criticism. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press,  
1993.
- Waters, Chris. "Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud and the State: Discourse of  
Homosexual Identity in Interwar Britain." Sexology in Culture: Labelling  
Bodies and Desires. Eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. Cambridge: Polity  
Press, 1998. 165-80.

- Waters, Sarah. Tipping the Velvet. London: Virago, 1998.
- Watney, Simon. "Ordinary Boys." Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 26-34.
- Webster, Margaret. The Same Only Different: Five Generations of a Great Theatre Family. London: Victor Gollancz, 1969.
- Webster, Noah. Websters International Dictionary. London: George Bell and Sons, 1900.
- . Websters New International Dictionary of the English Language. London: G and R Merriam Company, 1913.
- Weed, Elizabeth and Naomi Schor, eds. Feminism Meets Queer Theory. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present. London: Quartet Books, 1979.
- . Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities. 1985. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Weiss, Andrea. Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank. London: Pandora, 1995.
- Wheelwright, Julie. Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness. London: Pandora Press, 1989.
- Whitbread, Helena., ed. I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791-1840. London: Virago, 1988.
- White, Chris. "She Was Not Really a Man At All': The Lesbian Practice and

- Politics of Edith Ellis." What Lesbians do in Books. Eds. Elaine Hobby and Chris White. London: The Women's Press, 1991. 68-85.
- Whitehead, Barbara. Charlotte Brontë and her "Dearest Nell": The Story of a Friendship. Otley: Smith Settle, 1993.
- Whitelaw, Lis. The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton: Actress, Writer, Suffragist. London: Women's Press, 1990.
- Williams, Harcourt. "Edy." Edy: Reflections of Edith Craig. Ed. Eleanor Adlard. London: Frederick Muller, 1949. 45-50.
- Williams, Val. The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present. 1986. London: Virago, 1994.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. "Making an Appearance." Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. Eds. Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser. London: Pandora, 1991. 51-9.
- . Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- . Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts. London: Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2003.
- Wilson, Linda. "'Constrained By Zeal': Women in Mid-Nineteenth Century Nonconformist Churches." The Journal of Religious History. 23/2 (1999): 185- 202.
- Wineapple, Brenda. Genêt: A Biography of Janet Flanner. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989.
- Wolff, Charlotte. Love Between Women. London: Duckworth, 1973.

Wood Middlebrook, Diane. Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton. London: Virago, 1999.

Woolf, Virginia. A Room of One's Own. 1929. London: Penguin, 1993.

—. Between the Acts. 1941. London: Penguin, 1992.

—. Collected Essays II. London: Hogarth Press, 1966.

—. "Professions for Women." Collected Essays II. London: Hogarth Press, 1966.

Who Was Who: Volume 1941-1950: A Companion to Who's Who Containing the Biographies of Those Who Died During the Decade 1941-1950. (1952) London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964.

Who Was Who: Volume 1961-1970: A Companion to Who's Who Containing the Biographies of Those Who Died During the Decade 1961-1970. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972.

Yaffa, Claire Draznin. Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife: What She Did All Day. London: Greenwood Press, 2001.