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‘Sleeping Beauty’? Feminism in the Mid-Twentieth Century Novels
of Elizabeth Taylor and her Peers: 1945 – 1961

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by

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Last, but by no means least, I must give my heartfelt thanks to Rod for his long-suffering but unwavering support through some very bumpy times. His belief in me was never in doubt, even when my confidence was at its lowest.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my mum, Amy Lyson Kennedy (1915 – 1985). During the time span covered she was a young married woman struggling to readjust after six years' wartime separation from my dad and coping with two 'baby boomers' on rations. Throughout her life, she held to the belief that education was important for a girl when others were not convinced.

Notes on Citations

The novels are cited with abbreviated titles as listed below.

Full publication details are found in the Bibliography.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| <i>MR</i> | <i>Miss Ranskill Comes Home</i> , Euphan Todd, Barbara. 1946 (2003) |
| <i>W</i> | <i>Westwood</i> , Gibbons, Stella. 1946 (2011) |
| <i>TBGM</i> | <i>To Bed with Grand Music</i> Laski, Marghanita. 1946 (2009) |
| <i>WW</i> | <i>The World My Wilderness</i> , Macaulay, Rose. 1950 (1983) |
| <i>DGAH</i> | <i>Daddy's Gone A-Hunting</i> , Mortimer, Penelope. 1958 (2008) |
| <i>EW</i> | <i>Excellent Women</i> , Pym, Barbara. 1951 (2009) |
| <i>JP</i> | <i>Jane and Prudence</i> Pym, Barbara. 1953 (2011) |
| <i>AML</i> | <i>At Mrs. Lippincote's</i> Taylor, Elizabeth. 1945 (2010) |
| <i>VOH</i> | <i>A View of the Harbour</i> , Taylor, Elizabeth. 1947 (2012) |
| <i>WR</i> | <i>A Wreath of Roses</i> , Taylor, Elizabeth. 1949 (2011) |
| <i>GOHS</i> | <i>A Game of Hide and Seek</i> , Taylor, Elizabeth. 1951 (2012) |
| <i>SB</i> | <i>The Sleeping Beauty</i> , Taylor, Elizabeth. 1953 (2012) |
| <i>SS</i> | <i>In a Summer Season</i> , Taylor, Elizabeth. 1961(2008) |
| <i>FA</i> | <i>Forever Amber</i> , Winsor, Kathleen. 1944 (2000) |

Introduction

The title of this thesis signals an engagement with the contested idea of a 'Sleeping Beauty existence' for feminism in the years after World War Two. Elizabeth Wilson first used the phrase in 1980 in her influential work, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain: 1945 – 1968*. She observed that, while there was a complacent dusting of hands in a gesture of 'job done' for feminism after gaining the vote and other legal and employment reforms, women sensed the need for further change but in isolated pockets of unorganised resistance. If, as Wilson suggested, 'feminism led an underground or Sleeping Beauty existence', it was lulled into being by a silence 'in a society that claimed to have wiped out that oppression' (Wilson, 1980: 187).

The thesis is not, however, about organised feminism. Its purpose is to reveal signs of a new feminist consciousness in fiction about the personal and private lives of women. The female characters in thirteen selected novels by seven women authors published between 1945 and 1961 are absorbed neither in the residual reforming impulses of first wave feminism nor in postwar social change. The heroines of the early novels are faced with challenges associated with the Second World War while later characters face a range of inhibitions predominantly in the domestic sphere - far from the conflicts identified in 1956 by Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein. With only one or two exceptions, none of them is 'gainfully employed'.¹ My interest is in an unease that was, for the privileged

¹ Myrdal and Klein introduced the notion of women's dual roles in their 1956 study, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* that set the tone for the discourses that addressed the gendered distribution of the burdens of paid work and domestic responsibilities. It is still arguable, seventy years later, that if women are indeed to 'have it all' they must work twice as hard.

middle-class English woman facing the extraordinary circumstances of war or sitting comfortably at home during the postwar recovery, difficult to pin down let alone articulate. These areas of women's lives are illuminated in a literature that exposes much of the anguish and ambivalence, conflict and confusion present in a period that foreshadows the louder expressions of anger and resistance in the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s when 'the personal' was to become 'the political'.

Claire Seiler's notion of 'middleness' is helpful in locating the novels in the mid-century time-frame of the 1940s and 1950s.² They are viewed as a group that expresses a structure of feeling of the time in a style that avoids any association of 'middleness' with mediocrity. The term clarifies their situation in the transitional period of social, political and cultural stocktaking after World War Two that Seiler defines as '[S]uspended self-consciously at the chronological middle of a century already defined by two global wars and only recently exposed to a nuclear future' (Seiler, 2014: 125). While such a dramatic placement does not necessarily incubate fiction by women about the macro-issues of the time, the war and its volatile aftermath form a backdrop, visible or not, to the women's writing discussed here. Instead of writing that reflects only the larger issues of a troubled time there is a thread of commonality that emphasises the individual and personal concerns of women in narratives of lives made less ordinary by extreme events that expose them to unprecedented disruption. There is a tension in all the novels between the ordinary and the extraordinary that generates an atmosphere ripe for subversion.

² Seiler's 2014 article, 'At Midcentury: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948)' looks at the meaning of the term mid-century in relation to modernism and postmodernism.

The sense of languishing between two periods of feminist agitation has led to an underestimation of the importance of this group to women's literary history and to the history of feminism. I argue that this in-between body of work is as important as its close predecessors and successors for its contribution to an understanding of a broader definition of feminist consciousness at a period when, while open rebellion had subsided, there were foretastes of renewed resistance. To ensure a contemporaneous perspective, the criteria for inclusion require the novels to be set largely in their own time, with female protagonists - or as I prefer to term them, heroines - who variously confront a wide range of challenges narrated from a woman's point of view. Although they reflect a seemingly inauspicious privileged, mono-cultural, middle-class context, the woman-centredness of the novels reveals pressing concerns, some of them specific to the historical moment and social setting, but others more broadly relevant to the lived experience of women.

The novels by Elizabeth Taylor and six of her peers examined in this study dramatise situations confronted by women at a moment in history troubled by the conflicting forces of conservatism and stirrings of inexpressible unease. Elizabeth Maslen's observation that Taylor 'was both a product of her time and a commentator on it', is equally applicable to the other six authors, and is, as already stated, a criterion for their inclusion (Maslen, in ed. Reeve N.H., 2012: 135). Rather than offering a survey of women's novels of the time, my study considers selected fiction written by women about women and addressed largely to women that exposes the potential to subvert traditional female narratives and to reveal a nascent feminist consciousness.

A thematic structure is adopted that, while occasionally deviating from chronology, preserves the sense of progression from war to peace and after.

The themes relate to those broad areas of concern to women identified by Nicola Humble, namely, 'class, the home, gender and the family' (Humble, 2001: 3). This study expands these headings in new directions with an examination of the representation of five areas: home; female friendships; the alternative uses of romance and the 'anti-romance'; sex, marriage, the family, including 'mad housewives'; and a final section on the mother-daughter relationship raising the vexed question of abortion that gestures towards the activism of the 1960s. The broad scope of the novels necessarily reveals some overlapping of thematic concerns and this is addressed by the inclusion of some novels in more than one chapter and clarification through cross-references.

Although the thesis engages with a connected group of novels rather than a single author, the recurring thread of Elizabeth Taylor's fiction is a distinctive and considered feature. From her first novel, *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Taylor sets a tone that, in addition to exploring the meanings of home to women, resonates with other themes identified. The weight given to Taylor across the thesis contributes to the growing body of critical studies focussed on her work at the same time as it highlights the importance of the writing of the six contemporaries who share a position in the foreground of this woman-centred analysis. Taylor's novels, along with those of Barbara Euphan Todd, Stella Gibbons, Marghanita Laski, Rose Macaulay, Penelope Mortimer, and Barbara Pym, predate what Mary Joannou calls the 'highly fruitful, vibrant and dynamic period in the history of literature and the history of women' of the 1960s and 1970s and belong to a large and diverse body of writing by women between the end of the war and the beginning of the 1960s (Joannou, 2000:1). This group moves forward from a time when the opposition to war expressed in the writing

and journalism of Virginia Woolf, Storm Jameson, Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain and others in the 1930s is overtaken by the violent and destructive events that in themselves brought new imaginative possibilities to what Alison Light calls 'the forward march of women's consciousness' (Light, 1991: 22).

My own interest in mid-century writing developed from a Masters' dissertation examining women's fiction in the period between 1958 and 1967; a period ostensibly more significant in feminist terms. This was writing that engaged with the then taboo issues of unmarried pregnancy, abortion and single motherhood in urban settings.³ It was a new literature exemplified by work such as Shelagh Delaney's Salford drama *A Taste of Honey* (1958) and Nell Dunn's London narratives *Up the Junction* (1963) and *Poor Cow* (1967), representing working-class environments and dramatising the intractable problems for women coping alone in the face not only of poverty but also of societal disapproval and legal prohibitions around control of the female body. I also considered female authors exposing similarly dire circumstances for educated, middle-class single women stripped of their privileged social position when pregnant outside marriage, including Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* (1965), Lynne Reid-Banks' *The L-shaped Room* (1960), Paddy Kitchen's *Lying-in* (1965), and Margaret Forster's *Georgy Girl* (1965). While there is the temptation to identify these fictions as women writers' response to the 'Angry Young Man' phenomenon, they differ from the men's priapic narratives in that their female protagonists lack the ruthless anger that animated their male counterparts, experiencing instead a debilitating lack of agency only partially

³ Susannah Kennedy. 2012. 'Between Anger and Liberation: Shifting Images of Identity in Representations of Single Women in Mid-twentieth Century Female-authored Fiction'. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Hull.

resolvable using their own resources.⁴ All the same, this is a body of work in fiction, drama and film that, once more using Raymond Williams's words, 'produce[d] a shock of recognition' (Williams, 1977: 132).⁵ An engagement with that later group of women writers led to a desire to look back, not in anger but with curiosity, and interrogate some of the novels that foreshadow the bolder, less inhibited writing of the 1960s (bolder still in the 1970s) in order to re-evaluate their place in women's literary history and in the history of feminism in the twentieth century.

World War Two is, of course, a significant influence on those novels that were published just after victory in Europe, as is London, the epicentre of war and postwar operations and a symbol of the anxieties that flowed from it. Three novels that draw their particular force from the extraordinary and immediate circumstances of war are Rose Macaulay's *The World my Wilderness* (1949), Marghanita Laski's *To Bed with Grand Music* (1946), and Barbara Euphan Todd's *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* (1946). These novels each communicate distinct and powerful impressions of the time that deviate from the accepted narratives of women's wartime experience, while Elizabeth Taylor's first novel, *At Mrs Lippincote's* (1945) gives a subtler but no less disturbing vision of the effects of instability attached to wartime relocation. The backdrop to Stella Gibbons' *Westwood* (1946) is a blacked-out and bomb-demolished, but still

⁴ John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) led critics to attach the 'angry young man' label to the protagonist Jimmy Porter. Arthur Seaton, in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and Joe Lampton in John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) followed a more materialistic and priapic route to rebellion.

⁵ A measure of the impact of the novels and play addressed in the dissertation is that all but one was adapted for film or television: *A Taste of Honey*. 1961. Dir. Tony Richardson; *The L-Shaped room*. 1962. Dir. Bryan Forbes; *Georgy Girl*. 1966. Dir. Silvio Narizzano; *Poor Cow*. 1967. Dir. Ken Loach; *Up the Junction*. 1968. Dir. Peter Collinson; *A Touch of Love* (The Millstone). 1969. Dir. Waris Hussain.

culturally active, London. In *A View of the Harbour* (1947) Taylor concedes only that 'there had been a war on' as men gather up 'coils of rusty barbed wire' on the seashore; away from London, but still deeply affected by what remains (VOH: 11). In *A Wreath of Roses* (1949) the menace attached to the narrative has roots in the 'tired horror' of war (WR: 6). *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951) is alone in its use of a backward glance at the history of two suffragettes whose struggles are dismissed by a daughter torn between comfortable conservatism and a yearning for love.

The receding impact of war offers a renewed perspective on what is important to women. Barbara Pym's novel, *Excellent Women* (1952) is imagined in the context of a slowly recovering London, suffering shortages of housing, food and eligible men, whereas *Jane and Prudence* (1953) progresses to a time further removed from the palpable aftermath of war, slipping between a rural parish, the protagonists' Oxford *alma mater* and London. In the later 1950s the illusory comfort available to women in the affluent locations of London and the Thames Valley becomes central to the predicaments portrayed in Taylor's *In a Summer Season* (1961) and Penelope Mortimer's *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* (1958), that gesture decisively towards a new age of sexual politics. The war and the extended postwar aftermath of recovery frame the context of the novels selected ending on the verge of the 'liberated' sixties.

What further distinguishes this mid-century group of novels from their successors in the 'dynamic period' of the 1960s and 1970s, (and most of those discussed in my MA dissertation), is their middle-class setting, largely in the southern region of the country often described as 'Middle England'. Additionally, some contain 'middle-aged' - that is, over thirty - female protagonists in narratives that are imagined from the point of view of women facing challenges

despite a position of relative economic ease. Navigating this middle-ground the protagonists discover qualities hitherto unknown to themselves that at times facilitate and at others inhibit change. While the novels may justifiably be claimed as “middlebrow”, a term mercilessly disparaged by Virginia Woolf in the 1920s,⁶ this study supports Nicola Humble’s contention that, in labelling them as ‘too easy, too insular, too smug’, ‘we have crucially overlooked the significance of middlebrow writing’. Humble’s project ‘to rehabilitate both the term and the body of literature to which it was generally applied’ recognises that this body is as dauntingly extensive as it is varied in quality and, importantly to my argument, that it negotiates ‘new gender and sexual identities which were otherwise perceived as dangerously disruptive of social values’ (Humble, 2001: 1-6). The novels under review have been chosen specifically for their potential to challenge these same social values in ways that extend the understanding of what was at stake for women in the mid-twentieth century.

A framework is deployed that draws upon elements of ‘gynocriticism’, Elaine Showalter’s term for the analysis of woman-centred literature that emerged in the 1970s,⁷ supplemented by an eclectic mix of later feminist, psychoanalytical and poststructuralist thought as it enhances the argument. In this context, writing that is woman-centred features female protagonists succumbing to or challenging those roles and responsibilities attached to the condition of being a woman. The representation of the absence and/or subsequent gaining of female agency is a unifying feature of a group of novels that reveals experiences that both constrain and define women.

⁶ Woolf’s unposted letter on The Middlebrow to the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* was published posthumously in 1942 in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*.

⁷ See, Elaine Showalter’s 1979 essay, “Toward a Feminist Poetics,” in, ed. Mary Jacobus, *Women’s Writing and Writing About Women*. London: Croom Helm.

The period in question opens at the final stages of the war - what Gill Plain has called the 'postwar', when it was believed the war would be won - and moves into the years of recovery in its aftermath, a period of uneasy 'peace' and domestic retrenchment (Plain, 2013: 10).⁸ The notional 'golden age' of family life of the 1950s, a term Alice Ferrebe suggests was co-opted as 'a kind of nostalgic shorthand for national consensus, contentment and order', is complicated by a set of circumstances that place this conservative ideal against women's widening consciousness of the shifts already seen and the uncertainty of what is to come (Ferrebe, 2012: 1). It is to this mid-century moment that the attention of the thesis is drawn; a deceptive hiatus in the history of women that is marked by an estimable literature of ennui, discontent, resistance, escape, hope and at times, of redemption.

As already indicated, my earlier studies were informed by Elizabeth Wilson's feminist socio-historical account of the period, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain: 1945 - 1968* (1980) and by Niamh Baker's equally influential, *Happily Ever After? Women's Fiction in Postwar Britain, 1945 - 1960* (1989). It is to their work that, in setting the scene, I now return. Writing from an historian's perspective, Wilson confesses her unease with prevailing assumptions about the position of women following their enfranchisement and the wider availability of employment, health and child care. Her initial aim had been to account for the 'demise' of feminism once its specific goals had been achieved, but she discovered instead that a myth had been created proposing the view that women had no further need for feminism, a myth that actively supported the merits of a return to home and hearth. It is important at the

⁸ In her monograph, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* Gill Plain defines the 'postwar' in this way: 'In the aftermath of 1942's decisive victories in North Africa there came the realisation that the war could, and eventually would, be won' (Plain. 2013:10)

outset, however, to be clear about definitions of feminism. At that time, it was still seen as an aggressively campaigning movement for women's suffrage and legal rights that would be disbanded on achieving its goals. It is this definition that the female authors in question are shy of adopting, in spite of more propitious signs in their novels. In a rare interview with the local press in 1971, Elizabeth Taylor expressed her perplexity about 'Women's Lib'. "It all seems so vague. I'd have been a suffragette but that was different and I think all professions should be open to women'.⁹ Martin Pugh cites Marghanita Laski's 'historical detachment' from the women's movement: 'I was born too late for the battle. [...] Rights for women, so far as my generation is concerned, is a dead issue' (Laski cited in Pugh, 1992: 285). However, the emphasis on 'rights' clouds the issue and contains feminism in the political sphere rather than the personal. The received version of affairs was summarised in 1963 by Harry Hopkins who suggested that victory had been gained in women's historic campaigns, albeit with some residual nagging doubts, and that 'in the old battle of "Women's Rights" little remained but mopping-up operations...Yet to the veterans of the Cause, the victory seemed somehow hollow' (Hopkins, 1963: 321). Nevertheless, Niamh Baker's extended study of women's writing of the same period as the one discussed here supports Elizabeth Wilson's scepticism and points out that in the postwar period 'many writers wrote about women in ways that questioned the images current in their time' following in the tradition of foremothers 'who had found ways of expressing subversive ideas ... either consciously or semi-consciously' (Baker, 1989: 21). The lingering echo of the

⁹ Taylor was speaking to *The Bucks Free Press*, March 17th 1971. Cited in her daughter Joanna Kingham's introduction to *A Dedicated Man, and Other Stories* (1993. London: Virago)

hollowness of victory and the conscious or semi-conscious expression of subversive ideas reverberates in the novels in this study.

Hopkins' interpretation highlights the cyclical nature of women's history demonstrated in the intergenerational variance between women and their 'foremothers', that is, for example, drawn upon in Elizabeth Taylor's novel *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951). The ramifications of a psychological desire for women to be different from their mothers, is explored in the chapter on the mother-daughter plot. In contemporary material terms, the attractive 'modern conveniences' coming on stream for better-off women at home in the 1950s made being a housewife a radically different proposition from their mothers' household management practice. Yet what housewives might do with their freed-up time was soon to become a vexed issue, surfacing in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* as the 'problem that has no name' (Friedan, 1963 (2010): 5). Nonetheless, it was believed that such innovations in lightening the housewife's burden really ought to have appeased women's agitation, to have calmed the itch instead of further inflaming it.

The accuracy of the views of commentators such as Hopkins was contested by Elizabeth Wilson in 1980 and challenged again in 1991 by Alison Light who pointed to the male-centred origins of this illusory position for women and the silence surrounding the reality. Women's aspirations were still promoted as tied up with the desirability of marriage and family life, serviced by more and more consumer goods and the increasingly available leisure activities afforded by decent wages. However, Elizabeth Maslen notes that in re-reading some of the women's novels of the late 1940s and 1950s it becomes clear that the authors, and their readers, were indeed prepared to countenance the challenging questions raised in the novels and that 'the conservatism of the

society in which they lived were, albeit confusedly and sporadically, under pressure, even before the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s' (Maslen, in Dowson, ed. 2003: 26). Jane Dowson also argues that women's literature of this period 'revise(s) residual myths that the 1940s spawned a homogeneously egalitarian culture which evolved into a classless Britain in the 1950s, that feminism was an anachronism and literature was exhausted' (Dowson, in Dowson, ed: 1). The views of Wilson and Light are not denied their validity by the later revisions by Maslen and Dowson, rather they are enhanced by new interpretations of more of the marginalised writing of women. This study offers additional interpretations to the field.

The thesis structure includes an introduction to each chapter that outlines ideas, critical comment and theories used in the analysis, but a brief overview is offered here. The first chapter examines the disruption of and dislocation from the home amidst the turbulence of war as experienced by women at different stages of their lives, drawing lightly upon Freud (the *unheimlich*), Derrida (aporias of forgiveness and hospitality), Foucault (utopias and heterotopias) and Edward Casey (homesteading and homecoming). This analysis joins the discussion that Alison Light has called for about 'the place of home in the woman' rather than 'woman's place in the home' (Light, 1991:219). The related ideas of nostalgia, with its literal definition of 'home-pain', and what Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei describe as 'house haunting', are also considered in this context (Briganti and Mezei, 2006: 147).

In the second chapter the representation of the dynamics of female friendships in the face of heteronormative expectations and social values is considered in the light of the work of feminist and radical feminist literary scholars. The analysis of *Westwood* uses the model of the female

bildungsroman, informed by *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (1983). My reading of the two Elizabeth Taylor novels draws upon Patricia Juliana Smith's concept, *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (1997) that explores rationales for the extreme reactions of female friends.

Chapter three explores alternatives to the romance plot, what I have called 'anti-romance' for its denial of the classic romance's 'happily ever after' heteronormative resolution. Barbara Pym represents the ambivalence of women who are fascinated by the romantic discourse at the same time as failing to realise the illusion. Taylor's rendering of non-standard love stories uses characteristics of the traditional romance plot to evoke responses generated by identification and affect, only to refuse the desired outcome.

The core issues of sexuality, marriage and family as they affect women at different life stages are explored in the novels considered in chapter four. The three novels in this chapter range from the beginning to the end of the period of this study and offer an impression of changing social and sexual mores from the war to the start of the 1960s. This spread of time permits a closer examination of the effects of the wartime disruption of patriarchal moral codes and the approaching sexual revolution. The conflict between a woman's sexual and material needs, when her husband is serving in the war, and her role as mother is represented boldly and contentiously in *To Bed with Grand Music*. The issue of 'middle-aged' sexual desire is at the centre of *In a Summer Season*, the latest novel in the group, published in 1961, that highlights conflicts between tradition and modernity. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* (1958) confronts the ambivalence surrounding unwanted pregnancy and the troubled question of abortion. In a similar way to *In a Summer Season*, it is caught up in the broader

debates about women's sexual and reproductive choice that are at the centre of Second Wave feminism.

Finally, the theme of motherhood, specifically the mother-daughter relationship, is examined as emblematic of the impulse for change that drives a new feminism. As already indicated, in this final chapter I include four novels whose expansive scope calls for examination under more than one theme. *The World My Wilderness* is also considered in the chapter on dislocation from home and *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* is included in the discussion of sex, marriage and family life. Taylor's *A Game of Hide and Seek* appears in the anti-romance chapter and *A View of the Harbour* in the chapter on female friendships. The recurrence of the mother-daughter theme, however, emphasises the crucial importance of the effects of the dynamics of that relationship on a woman's individuation and, in a wider context, on feminist consciousness.

The distinctive thrust of the study lies in my own close reading and interpretation of the novels from a twenty-first century perspective that, inevitably, is influenced by having lived through, not the period in question, but the subsequent one when many of my personal attitudes towards women's in/equalities were formed. I have brought this experience to bear in my approach to a thesis that contributes to an ongoing and expanding discourse on women's writing of the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter One

Women and Wartime Dislocation from Home: 'The place of home in the woman'

At Mrs Lippincote's. Elizabeth Taylor (1945)

The World My Wilderness. Rose Macaulay (1950)

Miss Ranskill Comes Home. Barbara Euphan Todd (1946)

Whilst we have begun as feminists to subject to historical scrutiny woman's place in the home, we have more to discover about the place of home in the woman (Alison Light, 1991: 219)

The novels selected for discussion in this thesis are, to a greater or lesser extent, touched by the cataclysm of World War Two and its aftermath. Those examined in this chapter, Elizabeth Taylor's *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness*, and Barbara Euphan Todd's *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, owe their existence exclusively to the abnormal conditions of war. They relate in distinct ways the narratives of three women navigating the phenomenon of being unwillingly dislocated from home. The meaning of 'home' is inextricably linked to women, never more so than in wartime. Rachel Bowlby's positioning of home as an unstable concept between a desired and a lost ideal is particularly appropriate to wartime conditions. She places it within a false narrative of nostalgia in which 'home is imagined as a place of peace, stability and satisfaction that has subsequently ceased to be'

(Bowlby, 1995: 76). By this measure the equilibrium of the female protagonists in the three novels is disturbed when the very idea of home becomes unstable after unwanted dislocation. The representation of enforced movement in three disparate novels draws upon the realities of wartime life for a wife and mother in the first, uses the literal and metaphorical ruins of war as an active contributor to the narrative in the second, and adds elements of fantasy and speculative fiction in the third.¹⁰ English women writing at this historical moment were not only personally affected but would also be aware of the way in which wartime propaganda implicated women in the wider political and social imperative for the defence of the nation and the preservation of a way of life through the use of terms like the 'Home Front' and 'keep the home fires burning'.¹¹ Each of the novels considered here expands the imaginative scope of an extraordinary time to convey the emotional, physical and psychological impacts of 'unhoming'.

Historians suggest that although war throws into crisis the idealised view of femininity as focussed on the home, there is also a powerful counterbalance, sponsored by mechanisms of the state, that seeks to restore the domestic focus. Deirdre Beddoe notes that 'the single most arresting feature of the inter-war years was the strength of the notion that women's place is in the home', a belief reasserted in the Second World War and its aftermath (Beddoe, 1989: 3). In *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Julia Davenant's removal to a safer location reflects the desire to keep a family together to avoid not just the dangers of cities vulnerable to bombing but also the risks to the security of marriage. The personal risk, and

¹⁰ Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor's 2013 monograph *Postmodern Utopias and Feminist Fictions* proposes a feminist speculative standpoint in the interpretation of some fantasy or science fiction novels by women. This is drawn upon in the section on *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*.

¹¹ Elizabeth Taylor's family were relocated to Scarborough during 1943 – 44; Rose Macaulay's flat was destroyed by bombing, and although Barbara Euphan Todd was never shipwrecked on an island, she experienced the strangeness of conditions on the Home Front.

excitement, of the conflict are central to Barbary Deniston's experiences in *The World My Wilderness*, beginning with her participation in the French Resistance later replicated in the ruins of London. The meaning of home also encompasses the 'home country', a term whose patriotic resonances are magnified not only for servicemen and women but also for those remaining who are tasked with the job of 'doing their bit' and preparing a fitting homecoming. The burden of responsibility for keeping the home fires burning generates a moral insistence upon women's obligations in both the domestic and the national war effort, the practical execution of which is at first lampooned and later idiosyncratically reconfigured in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*.

The potential for feminist interpretation of the effects on women of these strange times is enhanced by the presence of protagonists who represent three states of womanhood; the married woman, the adolescent and the spinster. In the first novel Elizabeth Taylor's protagonist, Julia Davenant, is unhappily situated in a heteronormative marriage in the only novel of the three to be set entirely in an English location.¹² In the second, sixteen-year old Barbary Deniston is a 'junior' member of the Resistance in the landscape of Provence, where she lives with her mother and stepfather, before events dictate that she must leave her mother and return to her father's home in London. In the third, Miss Ranskill is an English spinster of seemingly independent means, approaching middle-age and proudly celibate. Part of her extravagant story takes place on a desert island where, by good fortune, there is already a shipwrecked mariner with whom she survives and thrives before her bewildering return to a homeland at war. Paradoxically, the latter two experience their environment away from 'home' as more 'homely' than home.

¹² Issues around sex, marriage and family are examined in chapter four of this thesis.

The narrative force of the three novels derives from a time in which the meaning of home is disrupted by a war whose impact on women is varied and far-reaching – a thread traceable through each chapter of this study. In *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Julia and her family are unhomed from London and rehomed in a Northern English coastal town, for an unspecifiable duration, close to her husband's RAF base. The uncanny effects of Freud's *unheimlich*, and the related idea of *hantise*, or hauntedness, proposed by Derrida are apparent in Julia's response to living in a home that is not her own and furnished with someone else's possessions. Derrida's aporias of forgiveness and hospitality are drawn upon in the analysis of *The World my Wilderness* in relation to Barbary's punitive expulsion by her mother from the place she considers home and her literal 'repatriation' to her estranged father's home.¹³ Edward Casey's terms 'homecoming' and 'homesteading' are deployed to interrogate the motives behind Barbary's actions when out in the 'wilderness'.¹⁴ Nona Ranskill survives the strictures of being 'islanded' with a man from the same 'homeland' but from a different social class background. Euphan Todd's deployment of mixed genres and experiments with form accentuate the outlandishness, quite literally, of the tale while emphasising the radical potential of the novel. Miss Ranskill's experience of 'uneasy homecoming syndrome' is considered in the light of nostalgia and memorialisation (Mengham, R. and N.H. Reeve, 2001: 162).¹⁵ Foucault's related concepts of 'utopias' and 'heterotopias' are deployed

¹³ The complex factors at work in the mother-daughter relationship are explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁴ Edward Casey sets out these terms in his 1993 monograph *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*.

¹⁵ Neil Reeve's phrase, 'uneasy homecoming syndrome' as suffered on return to an altered world, usually a soldier's return but increasingly in relation to women and war, is applicable to Miss Ranskill's predicament.

in a context which sees the island as a space of escape, transformation and revelation.¹⁶

The loss and inadequate replacement of home, brought about by the circumstances of war, is investigated in this chapter not just for its negative consequences but for its transformative potential. The disruption of the domestic base in each narrative has the potential to damage the female psyche but at the same time it opens a pathway to a form of self-discovery or, in Julia's case, to a reassessment of a failing marriage. The first novel under consideration, *At Mrs Lippincote's*, describes a realistic scenario of removal as a corollary of war that presents dangers less physical than existential to the female subject.

At Mrs Lippincote's

'On either side of – not our hearth but a borrowed one' (AML: 213)

At Mrs Lippincote's, chronicles the life-changes of Julia Davenant, the wife of an RAF officer, when she and her family are removed from London to someone else's house in the provinces. Mrs Lippincote and her daughter Phyllis have moved out of their home to an hotel to provide accommodation for the family of Roddy Davenant who is stationed nearby in a training role that effectively protects him from active service. However, the transfer, initiated by his Commanding Officer, has the additional motivation of a well-meaning attempt to re-unite Roddy Davenant with his wife to curtail his extra-marital affairs. Julia finds herself in the inverted Woolfian position of having not only 'no home of one's own' but also 'no life of her own'. Indeed, 'all she could hope

¹⁶ Elaborated in Foucault's 1967 essay 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias'.

for would be a bit of Roddy's, what he might have left over and could spare' (*AML*: 12 and 20).

Julia's subversive rejection of domestic expectations while at Mrs Lippincote's positions her as a woman whose sensibilities approach a progressive feminist consciousness. Significantly for the developing argument of this study, her actions engage with discourses of femininity which challenge the dominant vision of womanly behaviour, symbolised by the home. John Brannigan observes that Julia constructs 'an oppositional perspective on the practices of oppression and exclusion which revolve around notions of "home"' (Brannigan, 2003: 36). She dismisses the stereotypical routines of keeping house, taking on the persona of a rebel with an intelligent, if at times ambivalent, distaste for the inequities of entrenched gender and class divisions that lead her 'to identify "home" as, in Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty's terms, "an illusion of coherence and safety"' (in, Brannigan: 36). Domiciled at Mrs Lippincote's Victorian home, Julia engages with the past through photographs and visiting cards as physical evidence of a former life. Although she remains a modern woman looking in on the past, her attention is drawn to the hierarchical configuration of the household through these objects and by the architectural layout of the building. She formulates an analysis of gender and class relations that signifies in her a nascent political sensibility. Her perceptive observation, expressed towards the end of the narrative, that 'war only sharpens contrasts, makes one see one's position more clearly. Hence – revolutions at the end of them' indicates an awareness of the tensions at work between progress and conservatism in times of conflict that accelerate the process of political change (*AML*: 199). It also points to a personal realisation of the implications of her failing marriage.

On the face of it Julia's move is a more propitious one than that suffered by many women during the war. Single women and widows were forcibly relocated to factories and farms far from their home towns and children were separated from mothers by evacuation to places safer from bombing. Nevertheless, for Julia the move - having resonances of evacuation while keeping mother and child together - challenges the perception of the domestic. She is defeated from the first day of the move; "We shall never make a home of this" (AML:13). Her attempts at homemaking for her husband and her seven-year-old son Oliver are hampered by the presence in the household of her husband's cousin Eleanor, who personifies a different female condition from Julia's. In the way that single women facing wartime loss find themselves forced to resort to family support she has lived with them since suffering a nervous breakdown. Eleanor appears to Julia not as a supportive addition to the family group but as an 'envious and critical cousin-in-law' who has no family of her own save this one and is simultaneously infatuated with Julia's husband and irritated by Oliver (AML: 16).

In the characters of Julia and Eleanor, Taylor unsettles the traditional oppositions between married and single women. Eleanor's subdued love for Roddy brings with it criticism of Julia as both wife and mother that reflects an idealised image of these roles; one oddly out of place with her secretive involvement with a local Communist Party cell. Aware that Roddy would not approve – she hides her copy of the *Daily Worker* – she seeks acceptance, and possibly love, in a group outside the home. Eleanor's hoped-for future, when the Davenants move back to London, would be as part of a ménage with Sarge and Vera and the baby, 'reliable, useful, unobtrusive at first; later accepted, her worth assessed: and finally indispensable', everything she was not with Julia

and Roddy (*AML*: 199). Yet Julia has no sympathy for ‘the pathos of the single woman bravely facing old age’¹⁷ and is merciless in her teasing about a pen-friendship with a prisoner of war that did not develop romantically and about another man friend who claims to have only three months to live (*AML*: 198). She has always seen through Eleanor’s self-deception despite her capacity for empathy with others. For both women, however, the meaning of home is closely connected with romantic notions of the permanence of love which the sojourn in Mrs Lippincote’s house dismantles. The flawed, and in many ways false, positions of the two women demonstrate the absence of agency that they both suffer thrown into relief by the exigencies of war, an absence that symbolises the limitations operating upon women, single or married. Neither woman is ‘at home’ in their situation.

The lack of choice about the move is characteristic of the wartime exodus forced upon many British women in the same way that other, albeit more far-reaching, migrations have been imposed worldwide. In his consideration of the effects of forced removal on a global scale, Homi K Bhaba deploys the Freudian concept of the *unheimlich* or unhomely, a concept that has strong resonance with wartime rootlessness. Bhaba suggests that ‘[I]n the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation’ (Bhaba, 1997: 448). Julia Davenant’s provisional re-housing at Mrs Lippincote’s, imposed by patriarchal structures that in wartime cannot be opposed, exemplifies Bhaba’s observation of another world becoming visible in the new place. She engages imaginatively with the

¹⁷ The trope of the judgemental live-in single relative also appears in Taylor’s novel *In a Summer Season* (1961) in the character of Aunt Ethel.

physical objects still present in the house to envision a former world unlike her own. The structural background of the novel's setting, complete with attic and tower - reminiscent of *Jane Eyre* – is an example of Taylor's experimentation with the romantic and Gothic genres in which the *unheimlich* mix of the familiar and the strange is amplified by Julia's emotional state and her intimate engagement with the writing of the Brontës.

Rather than offering a secure haven, her arrival at Mrs Lippincote's precipitates Julia's experience of the phenomenon described by Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei as 'house haunting' (Briganti and Mezei, 2004). Her ghoulish musing, 'Did the old man die here?' sets a tone of morbid curiosity (*AML*: 5). Her meditation signifies a desire to reconfigure in her imagination a life located in a past that is memorialised in the structure, furnishings, crockery, ornaments and utensils that surround and appal her. The account of Julia's reaction to the move echoes Rachel Bowlby's assertion that

the home is no place of harmony: the house [...] is irredeemably driven by the presence of ghosts; its comforting appearance of womblike unity troubled from the start by intruding forces [...] untimely and dislocated hauntings of other times and places and other presences (Bowlby, 1995: 77).

Julia's experience of the disintegration of her marriage in the *unheimlich* atmosphere of the house is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls an 'historical inversion' where 'the ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past' (Bakhtin, cited in Hutcheon, Linda, 1998: 3). For Julia, the 'ideal' is neither comforting nor reassuring. Instead she is 'burdened by Mrs Lippincote's possessions' as her own discontent with the present colours her vision of the Lippincotes' past (*AML*: 10). She examines forensically their wedding photograph to formulate a history of the emergent relationship, seeing at first a hopeful scene with the

couple 'laying the foundations of something' - an appropriate metaphor for building a home - but quickly identifying with the notion that their hopes had nonetheless 'perished very quickly' (*AML*: 10). Instead of relating to the person of Mrs Lippincote as she is now, Julia is overwhelmed by 'the spectral sense of the presence of "someone as other"' that initiates an obsession with the lives of past occupants and superimposes her own story onto that of another, neither of which shows signs of enduring happiness (Derrida, 1994: 9).

The excessive burden of the domestic objects in someone else's home that Julia must safeguard generates a morbid curiosity about those objects. Julia picks over the smaller items of memorabilia gathered in the bureau, '...photographs (she foresaw a pleasant hour with those), some black-edged visiting cards and letters' (*AML*: 13). She is animated rather than shame-faced by her intrusion into the personal effects left behind, simultaneously enchanted and horrified by them as relics of another life. These small items are the 'objects of desire', gathered during Mrs Lippincote's life, that, Susan Stewart contends, 'we need and desire [as] souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative' (Stewart, 2007: 135). By appropriating these inanimate objects Julia imagines Mrs Lippincote's life in opposition to the unsatisfactory narrative of her own. The comparative visions of what women would expect of married life in Victorian/Edwardian times and in the mid-twentieth century reflect the implications of women being consigned to the domestic sphere and relinquishing autonomous existence once committed to marriage and family. More than that, it offers an insight into Alison Light's search for 'the place of home in the woman' that is emblematised in Julia's ambivalence about her temporary domestic base (Light: 219).

Stimulated by the house whose 'domestic spaces speak of the hold of the past on the lives of the characters', Julia imagines the Lippincotes' mode of living in opposition to the working lives of other members of the household, predominantly women (Briganti and Mezei: 158). In the layout and resonances of the house, Julia reads the social history of domesticity in a not too far away age. Its floor plan is based on the Victorian model of separation of servants and masters (or more actively, mistresses) that had already begun to unravel by the middle of the twentieth century, accelerated by two World Wars. The plush-curtained archway, a metaphor for the domestic separation of the classes, forms a liminal zone between kitchen and living rooms; 'like the baser side of someone's nature', beyond which 'the house put aside all show of decency'. Supposing that 'this room... represented what was fitting and decent for the working class', Julia implies that it really was not (*AML*: 8).¹⁸ Yet her sympathy with the servants is not supported by the presence on the other side of the arch of 'the ghosts of servants; Mrs Beeton's servants with high caps and flowing bows to their aprons. [Here] the ghosts haunted; they did not help or encourage' (*AML*: 9). Julia is ill at ease in the house as she walks from one world to another through the symbolic archway; a material reminder of irresistible social change. Out of place on each side, her class consciousness is conflicted and an imagined engagement with the community of absent people only adds to her alienation from the house. Nostalgia for the history of the occupants, distracts Julia from reflections on the insecurity of her own marriage and the instability of her sense of identity.

¹⁸ This is one of several indications in Taylor's writing of her socialist sensibilities. Her portrayals of the working class are more sensitive than those of many of her peers. She was a member of the Communist Party in the 1930s and remained a Labour voter all her life.

The Gothic emblem of the tower emphasises the unhomely atmosphere of a house that also contains a token 'madwoman'. Taylor's intertextual referencing of the Brontës underlines Julia's love for their novels and adds imaginative force to her growing insecurity. The overlaying of real and fictional lives associated with a house such as this is a palimpsest whose traces Julia recovers and re-interprets, (much as Barbary Deniston does in the ruins of London depicted in *The World My Wilderness*). Her overwhelming literary passion passes to her son Oliver, at seven already a vividly receptive reader who from the sanctuary of his bedroom

could distinguish the shrieks of Mrs Rochester
flinging herself against Grace Poole in frenzy...
but this madness of Mrs Rochester's was his
most formidable experience as yet (*AML*: 16).

Given that Oliver's childhood is passing in a time of war the 'as yet' implies a justifiable sense of foreboding but for now Oliver's fearful imagining is embodied in Mrs Lippincote's daughter whose unexpected descent from the tower adds to the dissonance in the house as fiction imposes on reality. The unfortunate Phyllis Lippincote is another victim of displacement from home, a young woman who, unable to fully comprehend the situation (she has learning difficulties) sees no reason why she cannot return to her home at will.

The literary life shared by Julia and Oliver provides a refuge from an everyday existence for which neither has much appetite. They inhabit a compensatory imaginative life from which Roddy, who does not read novels, is excluded. Briefly, but mistakenly, Julia's relationship with Wing Commander Mallory, himself a Brontë enthusiast, recalls Jane Eyre's with Mr Rochester. Yet friendship with Mallory, though stopping short of the romantic, allows Julia to confide in him her curiosity about the household at the same time as she reveals her sensitivity and her loneliness:

To myself, I seem like a little point of darkness with the rest of the world swirling in glittering circles around me. How I *long* to draw some of the brightness to me! That is what makes me inquisitive – it is only stretching out my hands to other people (*AML*: 110).

Her intimacy with his Commanding Officer irritates Roddy even more than Julia's deviation from her wifely role. While he is perfectly at home in the clubbable military environment with its clear hierarchies and modes of behaviour, he is perplexed by Julia's rebellious outburst at the mention of 'ladies' night' in which she articulates a savage critique of the men's club mentality. Julia's subversive appraisal of the military environment, that emblem of patriarchy, is one of the revelatory, and often angry, feminist outbursts that occur periodically in Elizabeth Taylor's writing.¹⁹

Ladies night! [...] It sounds like a lot of red-faced Masons with wives in royal blue satin and pink carnations. "We will put aside our secrets and our stories about copulation and give the old girls a break." I wouldn't go to one of those. My pride wouldn't allow it (*AML*: 11).

Her anger reveals Julia's pride as she clings to a sense of self that she fears would be smothered by her compliance. Yet ultimately, and tragically for a woman with such a potential for resistance, it appears that she must swallow her pride and settle for 'a little bit of Roddy's (life)' (*AML*: 12).

As Julia inhabits the past lives of the Lippincotes scattered details of her own recent past in London, where she sustained a life of her own, are revealed. She is animated when Roddy tells her he has met an old friend of hers. Although this is not the friend she had hoped for, Mr Taylor represents the cherished reality of a time when she was 'at home'. Bombed out of his Soho

¹⁹ Another example, in *A View of the Harbour*, occurs in Beth's meditation on 'the artfulness of men... [who] implant ... instincts which it is to their advantage for us to have' where she gives vent to her conflicted dual role as writer and mother/wife (*VOH*: 186).

restaurant where once he had made 'a great hue and cry on [Julia's] birthday' he, too, has lost much of his former life, not least his exquisite collection of vintage wines. The wartime inhibition against complaining in the face of the greater losses of others: 'But it could never be grieved over in public, because human beings had been lost', accentuates their shared tragedy (*AML*: 98). Julia and Mr Taylor are each displaced to locations away from all that is loved and familiar and suffer consequential psychological and physical damage. Julia is guided by their common past into an empathetic identification with Mr Taylor's loss of the components of his identity.

Taylor's interesting characterisation of non-normative men is a provision of the inclusiveness to be sought for both women and men under the banner of postfeminism. The quality of empathy is represented most clearly in Julia's relationships with those who demonstrate an untypical form of masculinity such as Wing Commander Mallory, her son Oliver and Mr Taylor. Roddy's homophobic distaste for Mr Taylor exemplifies the divide that separates Julia from her husband. While Roddy reflects only on 'his vile looks... corsets, suede shoes, lisp, dyed hair, cockney accent', Julia sees in Mr Taylor 'the dull eyes of a very ill or of a haunted person' (*AML*: 99). Julia's distinctive qualities grant her what Anthea Trodd calls 'outsider status in patriarchal society' from where she enjoys a unique perspective (Trodd, 1998: 6). Her love of literature, shared with Mallory and her son, her distaste for 'arse-creeping' around the high-ranking officers (*AML*: 67) and her acceptance of Mr Taylor for what he is, all set her apart from conventional expectations of middle-class femininity and deliver the reward of class and gender-equal friendship. Perversely, if she were to join

Virginia Woolf's 'Outsiders Society' ²⁰, she might wish to take along, in preference to female companions, the deviant males: Mallory who shares her passion for the Brontës, Oliver, who 'snuffs up literature' (AML: 15), dislikes school and 'simply didn't know how to run wild' (AML: 68), and Mr Taylor, whose homosexuality is not tolerated in the provinces as it is in Soho. Julia ignores the socially demanded mechanisms of exclusion at work in the case of Mr Taylor and befriends him as an act of defiance, striking back at her husband for subscribing to all that she counts as perfidious.

Shunning the social life of the military base her alienation from the temporary abode initiates in Julia the impulse to 'un-home' herself as an attempt to escape the emotional blankness.

[She] wondered where she could go. To whom? [...] "I am quite alone" she thought. "In that house, there are Roddy and Eleanor ranged against me, facing me from a great distance, like cliffs one sees from a long way off, with no birds flying or flags waving or windows glinting, not a sign of recognition at all." She got on a bus headed for the prison (AML: 93-4).

The bus journey towards the prison away from 'that house' emphasises Julia's abjection - she can be no more at home there than in prison. Her despair is dramatised by the tropes of the river and the Abbey ruins; 'a dark, Gothic, ivy-covered place' where she imagines 'if life were only a novel by Charlotte Brontë' she might have a chance encounter with Rochester/Mallory. The crumbling Abbey that is 'ominous, discounting the centuries, reminding one of the swift passage of time and of mortality', symbolises both her disintegrating marriage and the destruction of the old order by the passage of time, accelerated by the

²⁰ Virginia Woolf writes of her idea of an 'Outsiders' Society' in *Three Guineas* in 1938. She visualised it as a society that would operate outside the realms in which men operate.

war. (*AML*: 94-97). Julia is trapped in a situation that, as John Brannigan observes, 'invites an imaginative engagement across social and cultural divides and encourages anxiety about how the past erupts into the present in uncanny and disturbing ways'. She is simultaneously 'out of place and out of time' (Brannigan, in Dowson: 77). Not only is the house not her own, the era it epitomises does not sit well with her either. Her enthrallment by the past conceals an essentially 'modern' character which surfaces, for example, in the way she attempts to disguise the overwhelming darkness of the mahogany furniture and heavy curtains by scattering brightly coloured cushions around the drawing room and placing flowers in a manner calculated to clash with Victorian style. The revelations about her previous life in London suggest someone at ease with modernity, living the metropolitan life and having the habit of conversation about matters far removed from the foibles of butcher and baker. The life on offer away from home is a poor substitute and her near obsession with the Lippincotes' household emphasises her despair at her own disintegrating marriage.

Julia's unhomely unease coupled with her oppositional character lead to her refusal to adhere to the hierarchical conventions of the military wife, to adequately fulfil a housewife's domestic role, or even to obey the rules of social class. Her disdain for domesticity is aggravated by the presence of two other women, the cleaner and Eleanor, who occupy opposing positions in the hierarchy of the domestic sphere on either side of the symbolic red plush curtain. While her lack of appreciation of the need to placate the daily help is out of step with the growing emphasis on coping with the so-called 'servant problem', her lack of sympathy with Eleanor is savage. Nor does Julia embrace the challenges of wartime provisioning that so exercise Mrs Mallory, (she has

much in common with Miss Ranskill in this). Her culinary interest is aroused only by literary recipes such as the one for baked apples from Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, and another for Mrs Ramsey's *Boeuf en Daube* in *To the Lighthouse*, asserting that she gains pleasure only in 'recipes from good literature' (AML: 155). The place of home in this woman is a kitchen shared with Virginia Woolf or Charlotte Brontë.²¹

Ultimately, Taylor's circular narrative returns to the fact of Roddy's infidelity that, while sustaining a simmering undertone of discontent, remains undisclosed until the final pages. Julia's discovery of the letter in Roddy's pocket on the first day at Mrs Lippincote's had initiated a collapse of trust aggravated by the alien domestic location. She had discovered it "Oh, in the traditional way.... Going through one's husband's pockets. How wives do discover things". Yet she had not read it; an omission that she fears will be destructive. "And if I didn't read it because I didn't care", she thought, "I am absolutely done for" (AML: 214). It is in her final capitulation that Julia articulates a well-crafted, and decidedly feminist, critique of the position of the married woman.

It makes very little difference to me. I am a parasite. I follow my man round like a piece of luggage or part of a travelling harem. He is under contract to provide for me, but where he does it is for him to decide (AML: 199).

As a dependant woman with a child she is unable to gather the courage or the resources to leave. Her sense of powerlessness returns her to Mrs Lippincote's configuration of the wife rather than the modern woman. She is caught between impulses of womanhood characterised by two waves of

²¹ This interest in literary recipes provisions many subsequent publications, such as one in 2014 by Jans Ondaatje Rolls, *The Bloomsbury Cookbook: Recipes for Life, Love and Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.

feminism, one of which she has outgrown and the other not yet constructed. In her first novel, as in subsequent ones, Taylor evades activating Julia's outrage in a risky show of independence. Closing the curtains 'with a great rattle and flourish' is simply an angry gesture as she leaves behind the temporary home for the uncertainty of a future elsewhere (*AML*: 215).

Julia's clear-sighted appraisal of the constraints of being a wife falls short of the revolution of gender relations sought in Second Wave feminism, in spite of her assertion, quoted earlier, that 'war only sharpens contrasts, makes one see one's position more clearly. Hence – revolutions at the end of them' (*AML*: 199). Nevertheless, the effect of the war in opening women's eyes to the realities of their lives is neatly summarised in an observation that locates Taylor in the vanguard of the transition towards feminist reforms.

At Mrs Lippincote's offers scope for the examination of the multiple complications attached to uprooting from the domestic base and a consideration of 'the place of home in the woman'. The next novel, *The World My Wilderness*, broadens the idea of what makes a home and extends the territory of 'homeliness' into exterior landscapes.

The World My Wilderness

'The maquis is within us. We take our wilderness where we go'.

Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness*, as the title suggests, travels beyond an interior concept of home to the wild landscapes of the maquis regions of Provence and back to an equivalent 'wilderness' in the ruins of early postwar London. The perceived similarities direct Barbary Deniston to seek an acceptable location for what she would think of as 'home'. As a child/woman, Barbary's experiences of home are in part dependent on the adults around her,

yet her travels away from one domestic base to another constitute a quest to re-establish the meaning of home for an isolated woman who veers more widely from the norm than Julia Davenant.

From the outset, Macaulay evokes the novel's atmosphere of disintegration in her use of an epigraph from *The Wasteland* that attracts parallels between homes in ruins in London after World War Two and Barbary's personal, and comparably devastating, loss of home.

And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall,
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells that kept the hours,
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted walls.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, above the chapel,
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows and the door swings
(Eliot, T.S.1922: lines 380-390).

Just as Eliot expresses the destruction of signifiers of domestic civilisation: the 'bells that kept the hours', the 'exhausted wells', 'the empty chapel' that 'has no windows', so Macaulay's wilderness narrative renders the fragmentation of the very idea of being 'at home' in a devastated landscape. Written during the late 1940s, and infused with her own experience of loss and a fascination with ruins, the novel vividly represents the post-apocalyptic wasteland of London that bears so much resemblance, physically and emotionally, to Eliot's broken scenes wrought in the aftermath of World War One. At the same time as Macaulay's detailed account of London temporarily returned to the wild echoes Eliot's apocalyptic vision, it holds out the prospect of a metropolis that refuses annihilation. The archaeology of total war temporarily strips back the strata to reveal what Leo Mellor calls 'palimpsestic layers of past

lives, hidden meanings' that have inexorably rebuilt themselves amidst the 'curative vegetation' indicating repeated regeneration on top of ruins. As the wild vegetation begins to re-shape the site, it offers 'zones of possibility' in the quest of the young protagonist to regain the lost locus of home (Mellor, 2011: 174/171).

The landscape of London in ruins is equally as integral to the narrative as the human characters who propel it forward. Macaulay's representation of the rapid regrowth of vegetation over and around bombed cityscapes demonstrates the potential for the regeneration of civilisation.²² For Barbary, the environment of a place that is deceptively familiar services her dream of homecoming. Sarah Beckwith's vision of the ruins of postwar Britain as relic, enumerating their many functions, can usefully be applied to the physically and emotionally destroyed sites encountered in *The World My Wilderness*. Beckwith's classification sees 'ruin as mnemonic, as oblivion, as salve and negation, as redemption and disappearance, as sacred and profane, and finally as barbarian and civilian' (Beckwith, 2006: 191). It is notable that each can be identified in Barbary's quest for restoration to a sympathetic home-place.

The impact on the adolescent Barbary of her ejection from her mother's home to a futile rehoming in an environment at once familiar and alien has dramatic consequences. Her passage between homes is complicated by a subjectivity undermined by the shock of maternal rejection. The repercussions of this maternal schism are considered at greater length in the chapter on mother-daughter relationships, but this section is concerned with the significance of the physical environments in Barbary's journeys away from and

²² This is a theme taken up in the postwar/cold war 1950s by writers of post-apocalyptic science fiction such as John Wyndham in, for example, *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), *The Day of The Triffids* (1951).

back to home. The narrative follows her through a few months following the war during which she is peremptorily dismissed by her mother, Helen Michel, from her home in France on the suspicion that Barbary and her stepbrother Raoul were implicated in the plot to murder Maurice, Helen's husband and Raoul's father, as punishment for collaboration. Returned to her father's home in London, the city of her birth and childhood, Barbary rejects a re-location that threatens her psychic equilibrium and ultimately her life. The novel's focus on ruined religious sites contributes to the sense of transgression and guilt that weighs against Barbary's ultimate objective of a return to the safe haven of her mother. Mellor's description of the novel, as 'an exuberantly strange and moral tale' indicates a tone that, while imbued with the tragic aftermath of war, nonetheless retains some hope for a regenerated future (Mellor: 174).

Edward Casey's two terms, 'homecoming' and 'homesteading', conceived as part of his explorations of place in human experience, are useful in clarifying the specific effects of Barbary's displacement from home. Casey proposes a way of describing the difference between travel from home to elsewhere or from somewhere alien back to home again; precisely what happens to Barbary. Casey's terms suggest different ways of resolving the journey.

In *homesteading*, I journey to a new place that will become my future home-place. The homesteading place is typically unknown to me, or known only from accounts given by others who have preceded me. But I am determined to settle down in this novel place.... In *homecoming*...what matters most now is the fact of return to the same place (Casey, 1993: 290).

Paradoxically, Barbary's position falls somewhere between the two terms, complicated by the unwelcome actions of significant adults and her recent history of resistance activity. Although she might have been expected to

experience the relief of 'homecoming' on returning to the house of her childhood the 'repatriation' to her father's house in London does not fulfil that expectation. It is the 'foreign' location in France from which she is returned that she considers her real home. This inversion of her desires initiates a set of oppositional actions in which Barbary tries to make sense of a disrupted world. Powerful feelings of loss, memory and longing inhibit Barbary from effective homecoming in her father's London house where she might have been expected to reconstruct an identity in the present. Her transition from the environment of wartime resistance in France to scenes of postwar destruction in London leads her instead to a deceptively familiar surrogate homestead in the wasteland of the capital. However, Barbary's dwelling among the ruins does not fit neatly into Casey's definition of homesteading either, given that her re-implacement is temporary and conditional. The notion of re-implacement is still at stake for Barbary as each attempt at 'getting back in/to place' fails (Casey: 291). She is sustained in her confused condition out in the wilderness by her well-honed instinct for resistance in an environment that, while familiar, is fraught with new dangers.

The impression of place in the narrative has a powerful influence on Barbary's response to her vacillating world. She colonises the wilderness, that to her is equivalent to the landscape of the *maquis*, in the ruins of London, although it is ultimately to prove an illusory equivalence. Fuelled by the young woman's compelling desire to replicate the memory of her recent domicile, the perceived correspondence of London in ruins to the wilderness of the *maquis* temporarily overrides any discrepancies. While the similarity appears sufficient to her, the Freudian element of the *heimlich* is submerged by the *unheimlich*. Stifled, too, by her status as a juvenile with reduced agency in a setting once

considered home, Barbary is now dangerously out of place. Her rush to reinstall an illusory substitute is symptomatic of an ontological desire for somewhere to be 'at home'.

Barbary's rejection of the primary site of home requires a wilful withholding of memories of her childhood. She is haunted by the past in a home that she no longer claims as hers, preferring to embrace the uncanny otherness of subsequent reality. Even as she is 'engulfed by the resurrecting past' - the Derridean *hantise* that permeates this place - she senses the *unheimlich* in the uncanny atmosphere of a location that once was home but which now initiates a cognitive dissonance urging her to reject the familiar (*WW*: 41). Contrary to J.E. Malpas' contention that 'memory and identity are tied to spatiality, to embodiment and to worldly location', Barbary's presence in her childhood space fails to reconnect her to the time of innocence from which she is separated (Malpas, 1999: 184). The association between place and memory negates her own early history since she now possesses a more potent set of memories; memories she is proscribed from disclosing by the code of silence learnt in the Resistance. The fact that only her stepbrother, Raoul, has the same knowledge as Barbary ensures their isolation and draws them out of the house to colonise the ruins together.

Thus, Barbary is confused by a place that is no longer home, not just by her father's interloper wife but also by the haunting presence of an irretrievable childhood. Compelled to turn her back on this alien place her second, self-inflicted banishment takes place. She resumes the feral existence of her recent past in the devastated landscape that now communes with her.

Here, its cliffs and chasms seemed to say, is your home; here you belong; you cannot get away, you do not wish to get away, for this is the *maquis* that lies about the margins of the

wrecked world, and here your feet are set; here you find the irremediable barbarism that comes up from the depth of the earth, and that you have known elsewhere (WW: 129).

The Wasteland is again recalled in the reference to the barbarism 'that you have known elsewhere', tellingly encapsulated in Barbary's name, reflecting the despair at the appalling actions of human beings that inspired Eliot's work. Macaulay's use of signifiers of the destructive consequences of the Second World War evokes the effects on individuals when subjected to abrupt changes to their conception of being 'at home'; experiences shared, albeit with different responses, by the three heroines of the novels in this chapter. The unreliable voice of the ruins, which, after all, only 'seemed' to say what she understood, ultimately proves to be the irresistible siren call to Barbary's illusory home, drawing her to the near-fatal fall that, paradoxically, triggers her effective homecoming and eventual redemption.

The magnetic pull felt by Barbary towards Casey's vision of a homestead offers only a brief refuge in a familiar yet ephemeral environment. In the time spent in this place she experiences conflict between her desire for a homecoming to a place where she might recover from the 'irremediable barbarism' of war and the impulse to continue along the habituated path of violent resistance. Even though she feels she belongs in this place it is nonetheless imperfect as a homestead and once more Barbary finds herself in a kind of no man's land of half-belonging. Her predicament is complicated not only by the homesteading/homecoming dilemma but also by the limitations imposed by her youth and gender. The experience gathered in the Resistance could not be considered part of 'normal' adolescent growth, which for Barbary has been stalled. Yet in seizing upon the similarities of the *maquis* to the

London ruins she re-activates her agency and with it her progress towards maturity.

Barbary attempts to resolve her conflict and to purge her guilt by simulating religious ceremonies and engaging in discourses on forgiveness. For this Barbary and Raoul adopt a church from amongst the ruins not only as a place in which to achieve symbolic absolution but also to complete the circle of rituals of domestic residency of which the church traditionally forms the centre. They discover a spiritual home in a wrecked physical milieu.

They surveyed the gaping shells, the tall towers, the broken windows into which greenery sprawled, the haunted brittle beauty, so forlorn and lost in the wild forsaken secrecy of this *maquis*: it was their spiritual home (*WW*: 57).

Among the ruins of the church where symbols of barbarism and civilisation lie together in the heaps of rubble, the young people crave redemption for a sin that may be irremediable and is the cause of their expulsion into the wilderness. While the youthful and effectively marginal pair could not realistically have controlled the retributive actions of the *Maquis*, might they have anticipated it and given warning to Maurice? In the space of the ruined church they are driven to consider the moral and spiritual consequences of their inaction. Barbary articulates a sophisticated discourse on sin and the different interpretations of Catholicism and Anglicanism, noting that 'they don't have much hell in the English Church... but we'll have hell in our church'. She ponders the fact 'that if we others do wicked things, they stay done. Christians can undo what they've done by confession and absolution'. Yet, even as she declares 'I am not a Catholic' she is attracted to the Catholic doctrine that 'God will forgive you if you repent'. This type of forgiveness is tempting to Barbary who grasps at the prospect of absolution; 'perhaps I shall myself turn devout, in

that church' (WW: 58). She is able to use the church as a physical framework for her psychological deliberations on the effects on others of transgression since it is part of a tradition known to her though not hitherto followed. While Barbary has been exposed to a modified morality during her time in the *maquis* she and Raoul must now engage in an extensive re-examination of conscience to purge themselves of the consequences of their own action, or inaction. The place to do that, in their eyes, is in a church, a structural institution that is an integral part of an idealised domestic community.

It is significant, though perhaps not surprising in the moral flux of wartime, that Barbary's efforts to re-establish a domestic base should include the physical and metaphysical presence of a church. While she observes that forgiveness is between God and the sinner in a Christian ethic, Barbary's rationale to an extent anticipates Jacques Derrida's thoughts on forgiveness that are rooted in a secular tradition deriving from the examination of crimes against humanity.²³ Although conceived on a universal stage, his theories may be applied to the question of the forgiveness of one individual by another. The accusation of collaboration and its summary punishment described in *The World My Wilderness* were common in the period after the war in France when friends and family turned informer on those who had managed to 'get by' under the occupation. This post-conflict period generated violent repercussions, long-lasting bitterness, and a state of enduring unforgiveness that illustrates the paradox of Derrida's theory, the impossibility of forgiveness of the

²³ Derrida's two essays, 'On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness' (2001) set out the paradox, or aporia, of the impossibility of forgiveness of the 'unforgiveable'. His ideas originate in the experience of post-colonial violence in Algeria and the peace and reconciliation process in South Africa.

'unforgiveable'.²⁴ He asserts that for forgiveness to take place it must be 'unconditional, gracious, infinite, aneconomic forgiveness granted to the guilty as guilty... even to those who do not ask forgiveness' (Derrida, 2001: 34). Yet, at this moment in history, the prospect of individuals or nations forgiving or being forgiven seems distant. The events leading to a form of forgiveness of the daughter by her mother are elaborated later in this thesis, but the wider implications of the paradox offer a metaphor for the question of how regeneration can occur after a war that has once more devastated civilisation and shattered trust.

Given Barbary's recent history it is not surprising that an unbridgeable gulf opens between her and her father that renders Sir Gulliver incapable of providing the homecoming that satisfies her needs. Barbary's father is emblematic of a regressive force that would preserve privilege and resume life as it was before the harrowing experiences of war. There is no trace in him of the progressive, regenerative impulse that would facilitate transformation. His offer to Barbary is anachronistic in that the vision of home life he presents her with is that of an earlier period of class, gender and moral certainties that is crumbling in the aftermath of war. All he can do at this moment is attempt to assimilate her into this out-dated mode of living by offering engagement in the activities that constitute English upper-middle-class life. However, such is the distance between them that all Barbary perceives at the country house at Arshaig is 'an intimidating family of sons and daughters [...] formidably efficient at catching and killing Highland animals' (*WW*: 81). Barbary's association with fellow resisters, who were themselves efficient at catching and killing Nazis,

²⁴ See, for instance, Storm Jameson's 1955 novel *The Hidden River* that reveals the depths of unforgiveness and retribution following events during the occupation of France, even among family members.

places her irredeemably out of place in the Scottish family retreat where killing is sport. While her father misinterprets Barbary's wildness as the tolerable play of a young girl, her undomesticated ways have been formed not in play but in a hatred expressed in the practice of resistance. Two opposing worlds are divided by a schism slicing through civilisation and highlighting the seeming irreconcilability of grievances and the prospect of an arduous road to healing.

There is another paradox that may be deployed in relation Barbary's sojourn in her relatives' home at Arshaig - Derrida's aporia of hospitality.²⁵ Derrida sees the offering of hospitality as a relationship of power in which the host must in ordinary circumstances have some control over those who are being hosted. Genuine hospitality, however, would involve handing over everything one owns to the 'stranger'; a version of the Spanish expression '*mi casa es su casa*', which, pragmatically, implies a welcome rather than a giving over.²⁶ Unconditional hospitality, if both judgement and control are to be relinquished, would seem impossible. When offering hospitality to one's own family, however, some mutual relaxation in the stringency of terms might be expected. In Barbary's extended family, typical of their class, there are immutable rules that include codes of dress, mealtime conventions and participation in activities. An almost military adherence to the codes is shown in the preparations for the visit to Scotland that render a rare episode of humour in an otherwise bleak narrative. By necessity, the wardrobe to be gathered for Pamela, Sir Gulliver's new wife, includes clothes for

all occupations that might, in the Highlands,
arrive; a suit for catching salmon and trout, a

²⁵ For a summary of Derrida's *Of Hospitality* (2001) see Kevin O'Gorman in *The Hospitality Review* October 2006: pp 50-57.

²⁶ Translations of Derrida are ambiguous as to the equivalent of *l'étranger* in English. It could be translated as 'stranger' or 'foreigner'. This ambiguity adds to the paradox.

suit for catching grouse, a suit for peering through telescopes at stags, a suit for playing golf, a suit, Barbary gathered, for pursuing wild goats (*WW*: 81).

Barbary falls short in all these conventions and the 'host' loses control. Pamela's warning that she (Barbary), 'might pretend to know just a little about things, like other people' is suffixed by the caveat, 'even if you *have* lived abroad' (*WW*: 83). Pamela's reasoning that time spent abroad would tend to corrupt one's manners is both challenged and supported by the post-colonial theorist Mireille Rosello who moderates Derrida's contention by suggesting that 'hospitality may require that... both host and guest accept ... the uncomfortable and sometimes painful possibility of being changed by the other' (Rosello, 2001: 170). However, since neither Pamela nor Barbary will contemplate change there can be no genuine hospitality, given or received. The effect of this failure is to confirm the status of outsider that justifies Barbary stealing money from Pamela to escape the oppression of alien customs.²⁷ Sir Gulliver's mistaken assumption that she would re-align her wilderness ways to the controlled home environment in Scotland instead results in Barbary's next unhoming. Her *maquisard's* resourcefulness transports her away from Arshaig back to the site closest to her ideal of homeliness.

The accumulated occasions of being forced out of house and home, involuntarily and voluntarily, give rise to a confused psychic state in Barbary that prevents her achieving the 'place of home in the woman'. Still seeking a home, the unsuccessful 'homecoming' to the place of her upbringing is followed instead by an attempt at 'homesteading'. The return to the 'meaningless grey

²⁷ Her objective judgement on their absurdity is yet another version of the clarified vision that Miss Ranskill is able to deploy on her false homecoming (considered in the next section of this chapter) although, for Barbary the effect is less progressive.

streets' of London and the *unheimlich* nature of their respective lodgings propels Barbary and Raoul into a 'desperate nostalgia' and a resolve to "'be a great deal out of the house'". They discover viable alternative dwelling-places in the empty houses and flats of Cheapside, selecting a flat 'between the church and the café', two symbols of residence (*WW*: 50-52). The strength of nostalgia experienced produces illusory perceptions of homeliness, of the *heimlich*, where the re-wilded sites of destruction and the presence of displaced others closely resemble the environment of their past. Barbary wonders what London was like before the war, (she left it as a young child) thinking 'it would be nice to see a picture of all this as it was – all the houses and offices and streets'. Her mind is affected by a perverse kind of nostalgia for a home city she does not remember. She paints post cards of the present scenes for sale to American visitors, and finds she 'like[s] it better like this. One belongs more'. Her stepbrother Raoul agrees in the emphatic French sense he recognises as '*chez nous*' (*WW*: 181). London as it was before would indeed be no more than a picture to them, a parody of a city before its validation in ruins. If Barbary and Raoul can be said to be homesteading it is a cruel and contradictory version of that condition. They feel at home, *chez nous*, in ruins and bombed buildings where they are more likely to encounter danger than domestic comfort. Yet, they make great efforts to achieve that elusive state of belonging. And, for the time being, at least, the environment they inhabit has 'the familiarity of a place long known: ... the clear, dark logic of a dream; it made lunatic sense' (*WW*: 61). The juxtaposition of the words 'lunatic' and 'sense' emphasises the absurd contradictions in their disassembled world, a world loaded with resonances of Eliot's 'Unreal City' (*The Wasteland*: line 60).

Curiously, even as they refuse the material security of re-homing in their respective relatives' houses, Barbary and Raoul engage in some of the 'normal' home-making activities in their sequestered flat near Cripplegate - a real London location whose name aptly symbolises the disabling effect of ruins on the orderly conduct of society. All the time, however, the *maquis* background that accommodates them to this place is present. Barbary has no fear of staying alone overnight in the semi-open refuge: 'Children of the *maquis*, they were trained in lonely nights', naturalised to danger (*WW*: 181). The residue of domesticity, nonetheless, reveals a lingering desire to form a homestead. Barbary and Raoul make considerable efforts to construct a home-place that fulfils at least some of their needs, somewhere that recalls their home ground of Collioure, albeit re-imagined in a strange location. Identification with spivs, criminals on the run and deserters who inhabit the broken buildings and bear a strong resemblance to their comrades of the Resistance reinforces the feeling of being-at-home. It is natural, then, that they should become companions of choice for Barbary rather than her relatives.

The disorder that Barbary brings to the orderly English home is emphasised by Pamela's horror at the arrival of Helen and her child Roland to watch over Barbary's recovery following her fall; a symbolic descent into a form of purgatory that puts her in a state of mortal danger. Helen has no qualms about occupying the home that once was hers in the interests of her injured daughter. What is more Coxy's confidence in placing Raoul in Pamela's son's cot, indicates Helen's residual power in the household that she willingly abandoned but which would not so willingly abandon her. The return of the matriarch restores to the house the status of home, but the single purpose of

Helen's return is to be with Barbary until her recovery, no matter whether the household approves of or supports her.

Barbary's adoption of a surrogate home in the illusory landscape of bombed London is based not simply on common physical features. The facsimile of the *maquis* environment conjures up for her the wished for *heimlich* nature of the place where her mother resides. Her exile unleashes a psychic need to regain her essential 'other' in that lost locus of home; a goal that in the final analysis is approached only by accident. Yet Barbary's mother, still not fully aware of Barbary's deeper needs, sees the London wilderness primarily as a comparable physical landscape of wild vegetation, caves and other cover that characterises the stamping ground Barbary knows so well. Helen's perception of the physical correspondence of the Forêt de Sorède to ruined London signifies, however, only a partial discovery of a reason for her daughter's rejection of her childhood home.

How like [...] London was to Collioure, the maquis of the city to the maquis of the Forêt de Sorède. How much at home Barbary must have felt, hiding and being chased about the ruins with Raoul and spivs and deserters. *Caelum non animus mutant qui trans mare currunt*: the maquis is within us, we take our wilderness where we go (*WW*: 210).

Helen's understanding falls short of encompassing a full acknowledgement that the deprivation of home equals the deprivation of maternal love and that it is this equivalence that has propelled Barbary into her physical and emotional wilderness. There are elements in the young woman's inchoate agency, developed in 'unfeminine' activities in the resistance and licensed by her mother's liberal attitudes, that reflect the bold assertiveness characteristic of the suffragette and that prefigure the confrontational women of the second wave of feminism. For Barbary, however, her loss of home and the

journey to restore the sense of being 'at home' are bound up with the abnormal conditions of wartime that place obstacles in the path of the inextricable links between home and her mother that will be considered more fully in chapter five.

The next novel, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, also involves a deviation from the traditional meaning of home, but this time foregrounding a mature female character. Nona Ranskill develops qualities that transcend gender and class stereotypes to allow a new measure of individual judgement and action. Her transformation makes evident the importance of the place of home in a man and promotes the security of the next generation.

Miss Ranskill Comes Home

'This other island' (MR: 192)

Homecoming couldn't really be like this. It wasn't fair that, after all the loneliness of the island and the emptiness of the sea, she should have returned to a worse desolation of scorn (MR: 64).

Barbara Euphan Todd's *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, first published in 1946,²⁸ is a novel that contributes uniquely to this chapter's consideration of the effects on a woman of displacement from home. It is more than the straightforward narrative of homecoming that the title suggests. While its style and form reflect Euphan Todd's better known oeuvre as the author of the *Worzel Gummidge* series of children's books, this, her only novel for adults, combines the realistic and the fantastic, displaying subtle elements of speculative fiction as it re-imagines ideas of utopias, dystopias and, in relation to the desert island sojourn, of Foucault's concept of heterotopias. It is a novel

²⁸ Re-published by Persephone Books in 2003 and reprinted in 2008. It remains one of their bestselling novels.

that subverts normative expectations of gender and class at the same time as interrogating the meanings of home and the related concept of patriotism at the historical crisis point that was wartime England.

The sections that recount what took place on 'the island' demonstrate how Miss Ranskill is subject to a transformative process that allows her to see her homeland, 'this other island', through new eyes (*MR*: 192). Extraordinary experiences initiate a new appreciation of the meaning of home together with an unprecedented gender and class reconfiguration with her fellow castaway Reid, 'the Carpenter'. Miss Ranskill's story after being stranded away from home produces models for new possibilities, other ways of being. Following her return, she forms a critical vision of the patently absurd requirements in place on the 'Home Front' that are so avidly supported by women. The transitions in the novel contribute to the sense of home lost and regained in a new configuration, a process which enables the empowerment and transformation of the unlikely heroine.

Miss Ranskill's 'unhoming' is of a more sensational nature than Julia Davenant's removal to Mrs Lippincote's and, like *Barbary Deniston's*, it happens more than once. In brief, Miss Ranskill, a middle-aged, middle-class spinster, falls overboard from her cruise ship, (the fact of her lone cruise hints at an independent-minded and well-heeled spirit) just months before the outbreak of World War Two. She is washed up on a desert island where, fortuitously, an Englishman is already installed. They survive together for nearly four years before he dies of a heart attack and Miss Ranskill casts off in the boat painstakingly constructed over the years by Reid, 'the Carpenter', with the aid of his only metal tool, a pocket knife. Adrift and delirious she is rescued by a Royal Navy destroyer and returned to England, now four years into a war of which she

is entirely ignorant. Although Miss Ranskill's initial displacement occurs through an accident of time and place which has nothing to do with the war, effective readjustment on her return is hampered by the effects on her home country of World War Two.

The start of Miss Ranskill's Odyssean journey, a fall into the sea, is freighted with the religious symbolism of a baptism which would wash away her former identity and initiate a regenerative subject position. Her vision and attitudes are radically altered during the time spent on the island with 'the Carpenter' – an occupation reminiscent of Jesus and his surrogate father, Joseph. The stripping down of the trappings of civilisation on the island, the equalisation of woman and man, of upper-middle class and worker, of rich and poor, are all resonant with the egalitarian philosophy of Jesus Christ. Rather than a religious 'mission', however, I suggest Miss Ranskill's willing adaptation to change, along with a determination to pursue her project, signifies a modern, radical spirit closely aligned to the impulse that drives the soon to be renewed feminist project. In its representation of a new version of independent womanhood, the novel can also be read as a female *bildungsroman*²⁹ following Miss Ranskill's traumatic and post-traumatic experience. She becomes, in the language of modern psychotherapy, a trauma survivor, suffering events that disrupt what McCann and Pearlman call 'inner reproductions of self and world' as she witnesses disorientating change in a homeland she once held as immutable. Differently from Julia and Barbary, Miss Ranskill achieves a 'new reality, both adaptive and positive', after a period of recovery, through the

²⁹ Stella Gibbons' novel *Westwood*, discussed in chapter two is read as a female narrative of development or *bildungsroman*. There are aspects of Barbary Deniston's progress that might be also considered in the light of this form.

benevolent adaptation of her family home as a sanctuary for the wives, partners and children of enlisted men (McCann and Pearlman, 1990: 3).

A profitable way into the analysis of the novel is through the deployment of the 'feminist speculative standpoint' proposed by Jennifer Wagner Lawlor.³⁰ Although Miss Ranskill does not freely embark on a speculative journey, using Wagner Lawlor's terms, the homecoming of the title is not one that reintegrates the returning individual into the former home place. Being '[S]ick of shadows, the speculative figure rarely returns to her original home. Home is in the future'; a situation that disconnects the desired from the real (Wagner-Lawlor, 2013: 20). Like the Lady of Shalott, Miss Ranskill is 'sick of shadows' and as a speculative figure she will be empowered to see the world through a filter of strange, disorientating experiences before she can reintegrate herself into a transformed reality.³¹ The surreal nightmare that Miss Ranskill enters on her eventual return to 'this other island' bears little relation to the nostalgia for home she has experienced with Reid on the desert island (*MR*:192). The shock of the discrepancy between the real and the desired when she finally arrives home prevents the soothing of her longing for either island. 'This other island' is not familiar and her nostalgia is focussed on the island home, fashioned with Reid, that remains within her.

The shock of what Miss Ranskill finds on her return to her home country initiates a profound estrangement from what appears as a 'parallel universe'. She is in a place, characteristic in some ways of 'soft' science fiction, that manifests, in Sheryl Vint's terms, 'this movement back and forth between a

³⁰ Jennifer Wagner Lawlor's 2013 study *Postmodern Utopias and Feminist Fictions* draws upon the work of Donna Haraway in studies of speculative fiction.

³¹ In Tennyson's 1833 ballad, 'The Lady of Shalott' declares herself to be 'half-sick of shadows', and wishes to end her isolation and to participate in the world.

normal world that begins to appear strange and a strange world that begins to appear normal'.³² This inverted situation also reveals aspects of utopian and dystopian narratives thrown into relief by the 'dialectical interaction between what is familiar and what is alien' (Vint, 2014: 39). While there are elements of fantasy to the novel, perhaps surprisingly the novel contains few of the characteristic features of an island narrative. The novel's force derives from the effects of the four years spent with a single other (male) castaway on a desert island during which, untypically, there are no attempts to colonise the land through making a map, no indigenous people to wield power over, no references to the production of food, apart from catching fish. Nevertheless, it has in common with the island narrative the simple but sustained objective of a return home and the likely transformation of the repatriated character once back home.

Analogies with Foucault's idea of heterotopias can also be found since the island, a blank space without a history, is a site that although not in the 'real' world allows the exploration of issues without the force of voices from the dominant culture. As a space outside the normal, the island is aligned with Foucault's notion of heterotopias as 'something like counter sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' (Foucault, 1986 (2007): 24). This is seen firstly in the adherence to the social conventions attached to the relative class positions of the two castaways then in the pragmatic alterations in terms of gender roles and lastly by Miss Ranskill's

³² Although definitions of 'hard' and 'soft' science fiction are not universally agreed, the distinction could be compared to the use of the 'soft' sciences, the humanities and social sciences, rather than the 'hard' sciences, engineering and technology that would introduce physical changes rather than changes in social behaviours.

recognition of her love for Reid and her determination to act as surrogate parent to Reid's son. In her challenge to the specifics of regulations on the Home Front Miss Ranskill carries the revised consciousness gained on the island back to her homeland where she uses her altered vision to create a community that moves towards Michel Foucault's twentieth-century concept of a utopia as 'society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down' (Foucault, 1967 [1984]: 3).

The vision of 'society turned upside down' first appears in the reconfigured relations between Miss Ranskill and Reid in which binary oppositions of class and gender are suspended not just by pragmatism but through a new understanding of equal human worth. They have returned to a time of innocence and simplicity, emblematic of the time before 'The Fall' of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Yet the retention of social and sexual distance complicates the notion of a complete disruption of social mores by appearing to submit to the status quo. The domestic utopia created on the island serves to keep alive a vision of home based on an idealised locus of desire whereby Reid and Miss Ranskill call up mediated memories and wished-for futurities. Although they are displaced, located both somewhere and nowhere, they never let go of a past which they memorialise, and possibly embellish, by the sharing of impressionistic accounts of their life at home. It is, however, a home that remains elsewhere or 'in the future', a future that appears as a dystopia when Miss Ranskill first encounters its newly strange constitution (Wagner-Lawlor: 20).

It is interesting that the voice of Reid, 'the Carpenter', appears not in an embodied character but in the italicised interstices of the text in a device that highlights his enduring and influential presence in Miss Ranskill's psyche where,

ghostly but benevolent, he will remain unarticulated to anyone else for the course of the novel. The rest of the tale is told by a third-person narrator closely aligned with Miss Ranskill's perspective. Reid's character is valorised through selected quotations that illuminate the plight of the castaways on the island and detail how he and Miss Ranskill collaborate in their efforts to survive. Reid's textual presence after his death becomes a haunting narratology of his memory that motivates Miss Ranskill on her return.

Although they have a common nationality, the knowledge of a lifestyle hitherto unfamiliar to each of them generates an interest and empathy that would not normally have been found between the classes in English social life. They each articulate their world through a language that, while it remains within the ideological sphere of their origins, combines with emotional and empirical experience to initiate a change in view. The narrative demonstrates how Miss Ranskill's socially constructed way of looking at the world is modified upon the acquisition of new knowledge and experience. This 'awakening' ³³ begins on the island but attains its full force on her return when she perceives the many absurd conditions on the 'Home Front' and dares to challenge the methods of their execution. In other words, she becomes politicised in the broadest sense of the term in her thinking about social arrangements – a position that supports Julia Davenant's observation that the sharper contrasts and clarified vision that accompany wars lead to revolutions at their end (*AML*: 199). It would, however, be another twenty years before the feminist revolution broke out, but,

³³ This is not a sexual awakening such as that experienced by Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's 1899 novel, *The Awakening*. As explained later there is a sustained, if unacknowledged, slow burn of love for Reid.

interestingly, Miss Ranskill's personal transformation goes further than Julia's hopeless capitulation and is a harbinger of a changing consciousness.

The breaking down of class barriers is essential to the process of survival, a process mitigated by the telling of everyday recollections which they instinctively understand to be both comforting and crucial. The sharing of knowledge about their past life is achieved through the simple evocation of memory during sessions of 'going to the pictures' in which they reproduce images of their home as if they were at the cinema (*MR*: 12). Significantly, these sessions, initiated by Reid, use the popular medium of film that most readily represents escapist fantasies rather than literary media which might have been a more fitting vehicle for the middle-class Miss Ranskill. Reid tells of his wife, his children and, most proudly, of his home. Privilege is writ large in Miss Ranskill's memories, with 'the brass guard round the nursery fire, [...] bowls of bread and milk, red dressing gowns, the smell of soapy flannel, and all the ritual of bedtime' (*MR*: 15). Reid's description of his English home, imparted 'word by word, as he had once laid brick on brick', makes Miss Ranskill feel, paradoxically, that 'of course the homelessness had been worse for him than for her'; an interesting observation on 'the place of home in the man'. Reid's strong domestic instinct is manifest in his preoccupation with making their island refuge 'more homely-like' (*MR*: 5). He, perhaps more than Miss Ranskill, needs to be 'at home somewhere' (Wagner-Lawlor: 193). Miss Ranskill discloses her secret and curiously inverted class envy of village children playing out in the street. In this, Nona Ranskill reveals, too, a potential for oppositional behaviour and for seeing and acting outside the norm that will show itself more explicitly later in the novel. While their socially differentiated self-narratives, albeit originating from the same homeland, are distinct, they each gain an appreciation of how

the other (half) lived through their equal relationship and mutual dependency. While never fully relinquishing the vestiges of an English behavioural code, they make radical revisions to the binaries of class and gender that Nona Ranskill follows through on her return. This scenario is more subversive and radical than anything chronicled in the other novels in this thesis, not only in terms of feminist awareness, but in the representation of a non-stereotypical masculine sensibility attributed to Reid.

For all the harmony of their newly constituted domestic liaison, the respectful title of 'Miss Ranskill' (Reid does not know her first name) and her use of 'Reid', on the surface at least, replicates the master/servant position of upper middle-class England, 'set[ting] the right distance between them' (*MR*: 2). However, the fundamental change in their transformed version of home is that here woman and man participate according to needs and strengths rather than gender expectations. Their labour is divided as necessity demands and they share all the essential rituals of home-making. In this levelled out situation it is Reid who has the knowledge, skills and physical strength to formulate an escape plan, still functioning as the practical working-class male and demonstrating marked leadership skills, while Miss Ranskill learns new techniques like chopping wood and fishing, in addition to the traditionally feminine skills such as sewing and mending applied across the broad spectrum of survival. So, while located in the fictional territory of the island, far removed from the English system of social values, they still imitate that class system, yet, paradoxically, the temporarily *déclassée* woman and the working-class man are 'at home' in their collaboration.

Since no kind of sexual relationship develops between Miss Ranskill and Reid, their story offers a different outcome from that of another fictional cross-

class pair in the film of *The African Queen* (1951), based on C.S. Forester's 1935 novel.³⁴ Interestingly, that story is set during World War One, a coincidence which again supports the premise that there is a greater potential for the modification of class and gender roles in times of adversity, particularly war. The film foregrounds the developing cross-class romantic story of a shambling sailor, Charlie Allnut, and a prim spinster missionary, Rose Sayer who undertake a journey up an African river in a rickety steam boat that is in effect a space of crisis or, in Foucault's terms, a heterotopia. The progression of their intimacy is signified in the way they address each other; from 'Miss Sayer', to 'Rose', to 'Rosie' to 'dearest'; and from 'Mr Allnut', to 'Charlie', to 'my husband', culminating in their 'union in matrimony'. There are no such linguistic markers to map changes in feelings between Miss Ranskill and Reid. On the face of it their relationship remains at just the same respectful distance as when they began. Unlike the film, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* lacks the certainty of a developing sexual love and the ultimate union of the putative lovers expected of a romantic novel or a Hollywood movie.³⁵ What is more, the novel refuses the assumption that proximate male/female relationships must inevitably take a sexual turn, highlighting instead other possibilities inherent in close association. Miss Ranskill's chastity is an intriguing indication of a feminist freedom that permits the individual woman to choose her sexual future. Class distinctions may have been blurred on the island but this implicit position is respected by, for example, the preservation of the separate, private and 'homely-like' spaces for each of them (*MR*: 5).

³⁴ *The African Queen*, dir. John Huston 1951. A hugely popular film for which both Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn received Oscar nominations.

³⁵ Romance and 'anti-romance' in women's fiction of the period are discussed in Chapter three of this thesis.

Far from following the heteronormative romance plot, the novel validates Miss Ranskill's determination to preserve her virtue. The fact that even Edith, Nona's sister, assumes otherwise, highlights the power of Miss Ranskill's resolve. Her strong feelings on this position are made clear in the first pages of the novel.

She had been proud, virtuous and old-maidenly. She had cherished the flower of her virginity because all the years of her sheltered upbringing had encouraged that nurturing. To her, at thirty-nine, her chastity had still been a cool white flower, not to be snatched lightly and thrown away. It had remained the same through all the years on the island. She had always been proud of her integrity and of the Carpenter's also. They had made between them a greater story than those usually begotten on desert islands in books (MR: 3).

The exceptionality of their story, then, is predicated partly on Miss Ranskill and Reid's relationship remaining platonic. Yet it is only after the Carpenter's death that Miss Ranskill realises the depth of her feelings for him; burying him 'reverently because she revered him... and lovingly because she had loved him' (MR: 2). Despite her emotional independence and self-determined celibacy, she comes to a profound understanding of non-sexual love through the unfamiliar phenomenon of friendship between man and woman. While Miss Ranskill's position might be interpreted as prudish sexual repression, it suggests a progressive alternative to the heteronormative relationship such as those explored in Kate Bolick's *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* (2015).³⁶

³⁶ Further reference to Bolick's book is found in chapter three.

Following the trauma of Reid's death, Miss Ranskill's second unhoming signals the start of a new set of surreal experiences. She casts off in the boat he constructed only later to be tempted in her fear and uncertainty to 'go home' to the island. A vision of 'flying whales' above 'long grey ships' - the defensive barrage balloons of the fleet - marks the start of a period of cognitive dissonance as she is hauled on board a Royal Navy destroyer (*MR*: 33). Although the naval officers are greatly perplexed by her, she is treated with courtesy and care on the ship, a male heterotopia of activity and order far removed from any previous reality. It is not until the third 'unhoming' when she disembarks from her temporary home on the ship that she first encounters the alien ways of her homeland with their dystopian resonances. Although this is her home country she is unable to understand the new language that seems to have developed in less than four years. Acronyms like ARP and ATS and the WAAF, and talk of Bert being 'mad to get at the nasties', exclude her from meaningful communication in her native tongue (*MR*: 64). Similarly, her dishevelled physical appearance and apparent cross-dressing - she is still in odd items of naval dress - deny Miss Ranskill the polite response a middle-class woman with cash in hand would expect in a department store, a situation compounded by her ignorance of the need for coupons and ration books. She suffers as a refugee, someone with no status, no papers, no rights, no homeland. The careful preservation and repair of her saltwater-soaked tweed suit has not prepared her for re-entry into an exaggeratedly insular and defensive society in which the naval-issue shoes lent to her arouse the suspicion that she is a spy. The Hegelian notion of 'recognition' is here denied Miss Ranskill with the effect that her sense of self is destabilised. Her predicament fits with ideas of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler.

The lack of appropriate bodily covering, hairdo or cosmetics means that her gender and class performance is 'undone', her subjectivity is denied and, without documentation, no social value can be ascribed to her.³⁷

Punctuated by the sequence of 'unhomings' and unsatisfactory 'rehomings', Miss Ranskill's journey proceeds as an epic of trial and survival that, in contrast to her encounters with men, is inhibited by the actions of women from whom she might have hoped for support. Her conviction that her school friend, Margery, would welcome her *en route* to a reunion with her sister, Edith, is extinguished by the discovery of a household taken over by the war effort and inhabited by needy strangers. Nona Ranskill observes Margery stuck in the time warp of the sixth form and adopting a similar tone in the management of Air Raid Precautions to that of the Head Girl at school. Possessing an oppositional and interrogatory nature Nona highlights the absurdity of many of the bureaucratic impositions on the Home Front personified firstly by Margery and later by her sister and Philippa Phillips. Nona is someone who, as her sister Edith puts it, 'always [has] managed to do uncomfortable things' which challenge the unquestioning adherence to custom and form.

As the conditions of surveillance and authoritarian discipline that she finds on 'this other island' confound Nona Ranskill, perhaps more perplexing is the way in which these are so rigorously enforced by women. She is quick to perceive that

in this other island, in spite of the need for
weight-pulling, in spite of the equal need to win

³⁷ Judith Butler develops the idea of Hegelian recognition in much of her work, but most importantly in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004).

the war, thousands were employed to see that the rest did not cheat'. [On the desert island] the dying of the beacon fire had been a tragedy: here the showing of a light by night was a crime (*MR*: 192).

She has become a stranger in her homeland, a place she perceives as increasingly dystopian in contrast to the island which, in turn becomes more utopian as physical distance brings it closer in memory.

Despite her critical view on the measures on the Home Front, the reality of war and terrifying air raids is brought to her consciousness in the cellar of Margery's home where she is confronted with two fearful, male characters, Margery's son, Rex, an RAF bomber pilot, a small boy abandoned by his mother for an evening's respite at the pictures, and a cat having kittens. This ostensibly domestic scene, conceived during an air raid, is beyond Nona's previous experience but that night she assists in the safe delivery of the kittens, soothes the terror of the evacuee boy, and comes to understand the world-weariness of the pilot who finds being home on leave worse than flying bombing missions. For him, too, home is no longer a haven, finding that 'it's the leaves that are so bloody awful' (*MR*:167).

Nona's duties as an ARP warden bring her into anonymous and non-judgemental contact with more soldiers returning from embarkation leave who would be 'glad to meet a middle-aged woman to whom [...] they could stop pretending to be real soldiers and show what was in their minds', something they would not dare to do at home (*MR*: 274). Her liminal position, age and asexual persona allow communication to flow. The encounters with these young males, and later with Colin, the Carpenter's son, demonstrate a different gender positioning made more likely during the conditions of wartime that will support a recuperative process and provide the balm for her own post-traumatic condition

that enables her to restore Reid's son and the young servicemen to a renewed manifestation of home.

Euphan Todd's sympathetic treatment of men in wartime contrasts with her representation of women viewed by an ingenuous outsider. Miss Ranskill's critical impression of the arrangements for 'ration books and points and the "zoning of certain commodities"' initiates her subversive behaviour towards both the regulations and the manner of their enforcement by women. She rails against Edith, protesting that she has learned how to do without necessities in her island home.

I can manage with two or three garments and very plain food, but I won't fiddle and faddle and niggle and naggle, and make do and mend, and turn old petticoats into blouses when I've got two blouses already: it isn't *sense*. And as for being in this war together, we aren't (*MR*: 230).

The apotheosis of patriotism, Philippa Phillips, whose 'outlook was Red, White and Blue', insists on Miss Ranskill sharing her experience on 'one of our islands' and causes her finally to collapse. Advised by the doctor that gardening will help to stop her dwelling, metaphorically and literally, 'on that island of yours, she protests that the island is 'the one place where she could lay her mind to rest', a clear indication of 'the place of home' in her (*MR*: 231 - 4). Unable to submit to the false rehabilitation on offer, (at least the doctor does not recommend a sea cruise), she configures possibilities that will have a regenerative effect and, in 'rehomeing' herself, will also have a positive impact on the lives of others. By using her reclaimed assets, her family home, she manages to carry through a mission that is religious in its fervour from a class position that would place value on legacy. She is driven to compensate for loss of life by offering a home, not only to Reid's son, but also to the partners, wives,

mistresses and babies of soldiers on active service, with no moral strings attached.

Miss Ranskill's meeting with Reid's son, who appears as 'a little Carpenter with the same grey eyes and serene forehead, the same stocky shoulders and nervous hands', initiates a resolve to rescue him from his mother, the unseemly wife in a home so different from the one described by Reid on the island. Through her vicarious affinity to Colin Miss Ranskill conceives the notion to 'weave the thread of the Carpenter's eternity closer into the spiritual fabric of his son' (*MR*: 239); a version of Casey's 'homecoming' that would support her own post traumatic adaptation as much as it would benefit the boy. In this way, by creating a home for Colin she becomes a surrogate parent who, in another paradoxical gender inversion, will nurture the characteristics of the father.

A progressive impulse is present in the novel, not just in the representation of Miss Ranskill's empowered femininity, but also in the way it focuses attention on the crises of masculinity associated with war. The secret and shameful reluctance of the young males to fulfil their assigned gender roles demonstrates a revision of ideas of masculinity alongside the modified femininity characterised in Miss Ranskill. Deviation from gender norms exposes different potentialities and, importantly for the emphasis of this chapter, to alternative perceptions of home. In the cellar of his own home the pilot shares his emotions with a quietly receptive female and the temporarily motherless boy in the cellar triggers in Miss Ranskill the protective impulse of what Sara Ruddick has called 'maternal thinking' applied to either male or female care-givers (Ruddick. 1989 [1990]). This radical narrative portrays Reid as a man in possession of that

quality closely aligned with homemaking and with the provision of love and security.³⁸

Leaving aside the savage portrayal of women like Margery, Edith, Philippa, the shop girls and the slatternly Mrs Reid, Euphan Todd presents rather more sympathetic images of women among the wives and girlfriends of servicemen, expectant or new mothers to whom Miss Ranskill offers a communal sanctuary. This community is representative of hope for a more egalitarian society after the cataclysm of war endorsing Julia Davenant's belief that 'war makes one see one's position more clearly' (*AML*: 199). Miss Ranskill sees not only her own position but also the wider needs of a nation and its people at war. In prefiguring a realignment of gender roles, the novel also proposes the alternative possibility of communal living - tenets that were to become central to the personal politics of Second Wave feminism.

Although the persisting binary representation of male and female characters in the novel may appear problematic in a feminist reading, the critical and unsympathetic portrayal of women at either end of the spectrum of social class need not be interpreted as simply damning 'posh' women or slatterns. These women are portrayed as trapped in given roles in contrast to the new-style femininity of Miss Ranskill, that prefigures similarly brave and bold women. The experience of being dramatically unhomed and rehomed with a man of lower social status has consequences for Miss Ranskill that would not otherwise have occurred. The story of her rehomings incorporates a narrative of estrangement that gives rise to outcomes unprecedented in her life but that have clear feminist significance. The novel's radical driving force approaches

³⁸ Maternal qualities in a father are shown in Robert Cazabon in *A View of the Harbour*, discussed in Chapter five.

post-feminism for the breadth of experience reflected through Miss Ranskill's challenging intellect and utopian values refined in extraordinary circumstances. Her vision offers subversive possibilities that in some ways exceed the more specific and public aims of the two waves of feminism.

The narratives of the dislocation suffered by Julia, Barbary and Miss Ranskill represent them as isolated female figures responding with little support to the events that beset them. Although they each have male 'others' of some importance in their narrative, the absence of female friends is conspicuous. In the next chapter I examine three novels also published in the early postwar that represent the pleasures and pains of female friendship.

Chapter Two

Friendship between Women: 'A Ridiculous Controversy'?

Westwood. Stella Gibbons. (1946)

A View of the Harbour. Elizabeth Taylor (1947)

A Wreath of Roses. Elizabeth Taylor (1949)

'Chloe liked Olivia [...]'. Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women. (Virginia Woolf.1928[2004]. *A Room of One's Own*: 95).

Fictional relationships between women in three 1940s novels provide the focus of this chapter. My analysis historicises such relationships while engaging with competing discourses of female friendship that emerged in feminist scholarship from the 1970s onwards, seeking what Catherine Clay has called the 'forms, meanings and significance' of female friendships (Clay, 2006: 2). Elizabeth Abel has argued that attention to 'the dynamics of women's friendships' in the 'female literary imagination' reveals much about the significance of such relationships (Abel, 1981:414). A range of interpretations is introduced, at times conflicting, of an experience that is varied and emotionally complex. The arguments developed are necessarily equivocal as they engage with views of feminist critics that have provoked dissent and contention.

Well-realised representations of woman-to-woman relationships are examined in the three novels that, importantly, display female friendship centrally rather than on the margins of a heterosexual romance narrative. The examination of friendships between women as represented in Stella Gibbons' *Westwood* and in Elizabeth Taylor's two novels *A View of the Harbour* and *A Wreath of Roses* recognises the significance of such friendships as a vehicle for understanding how intimacy is implicated in the development of the female self and how that process may be inhibited by heteronormative expectations.

Although studies in the fields of social science and psychoanalysis have placed emphasis on family relationships between mother and daughter and sister to sister, culturally embedded perceptions of female friendships have been characterised at one extreme as adolescent and at the other as suggestive of latent lesbianism and consequently out of line with 'normal' expectations. For example, in *A Passion for Friends* (1986) Janice G. Raymond refers to a study cited in *Friendship* by Joel Block (1980) which sampled women's attitudes to female friendship and recorded comments such as 'To attach too much importance to friendship with women is adolescent' or 'It will be viewed as 'latent' lesbianism' (Block, cited in Raymond: 2). Each of these perceptions emerges in the discussion of three novels in which the pleasure and the pain of friendship between women is represented. The novels express a tension - implicit in all the novels selected for this thesis - between what is expected of women and what women themselves may desire. This becomes evident in the contrived use of friendship portrayed in *Westwood*, whereas Taylor's novels demonstrate the anguish caused by the disintegration of friendship in the face of heteronormative pressures at the same time as they celebrate the warmth of an intimacy that delivers 'fun without effort' (*VOH*: 69).

Gibbons and Taylor each portray relationships that have their origins in childhood and youth, but the newly-formed and exploitative friendship in *Westwood* highlights the possibility of something different developing during the disruptive circumstances of war. The friendships in *Westwood* may be categorised in two types: one the comfortably sustaining friendship formed in childhood and carrying family links; the other a more risk-infused, although appealing, progressive friendship that contains possibilities for developmental experience but requires concentrated effort. Abel's assertion that 'friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through relation to another who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self', becomes problematic when the relationship is threatened, as happens in Elizabeth Taylor's two novels (Abel: 416). These characteristics are differently tested in the friendship in *Westwood* that offers a means to a different end, that of cultural and aesthetic experience. Margaret Steggles' desire for enrichment drives her from familiar to unfamiliar configurations of friendship through a contrived process of change. Given the purposefulness of her intentions, Margaret's progression towards her goal is here considered as an example of a narrative of development or female *bildungsroman*.

In her contribution to *Images of Women in Fiction* in 1972 – significantly, published at the height of the Women's Liberation Movement – Ellen Morgan saw the female *bildungsroman* becoming 'the most salient form for (women's) literature' in terms of its emphasis on woman-centred progression (in Koppelman Cornillon, Susan ed. 1972:185). Indeed, Margaret's trajectory of development exemplifies aspects of a form, traces of which are also to be found in the progress of Miss Ranskill, Angela Whiting and Barbary Deniston in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*, and *The World My*

Wilderness, all considered in this thesis under other thematic headings, each as models of female resistance and self-realisation.

The tradition of the *bildungsroman* was renegotiated in the late twentieth century to examine literary models of female development that emerged when, as Esther Kleinbord Labovitz observes in her study of the female *bildungsroman*, 'cultural and social structures appeared to support women's struggle [and] the heroine in fiction began to reflect these changes' (Labovitz, 1986: 6-7). In *Westwood* Margaret's social alienation sees her out of place in her family home but not accepted, or acceptable, in the milieu to which she aspires. The narrative relies to an extent on fate or, perhaps more accurately, coincidence with the added effect of extraordinary circumstances at a dynamic period in history. Additionally, the setting of the novel at a time of social upheaval brings in its wake increasing mobility across boundaries of class, gender and race. Margaret is an example of a fictional heroine who contests the convention of an ending in marriage in favour of a form of self-realisation that, although it involves reconciliation with her former, stereotypically female career as a schoolteacher, is one in which she becomes socially and critically empowered.

The examination of the two Elizabeth Taylor novels in this chapter adopts a different perspective. As early as 1980 Elizabeth Wilson had noted that in *A View of the Harbour* and *A Wreath of Roses* 'a view is examined, but at once put aside, that there might be a lesbian element in the close and possessive friendship of two women'. Wilson's observation about Elizabeth Taylor's work that, in discussing 'the position of women more openly', particularly in 'these earlier books she seems very close to what feminists were saying in the same period', is a contention that forms the basis of the arguments proposed in this

thesis (Wilson: 150-1). The analysis of Taylor's novels in this chapter foregrounds the lingering perception of female friendships as immature, necessarily superseded by marriage and engages with the contentious debate around the distinctions between the homosocial and homoerotic elements of female friendship. The discussion begins by re-visiting Adrienne Rich's proposition of a lesbian continuum, also proposed in 1980.¹ In her foundational essay, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience', Rich questioned the tendency for female friendship and comradeship to be separated from the erotic, proposing instead a continuum that would define the erotic not simply as the desire for bodily sexual experience with a woman but as an energy generated from the joy of sharing a common interest. Her suggestion that all women 'exist on a lesbian continuum, [and] we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not' proved contentious, however. (Rich, 1980 [1986]: 53-4). Although Rich later feared her work had been 'reductively misread by many of her followers', Lynne Pearce, among others, maintains that 'it was instrumental in establishing a school of theory that rendered the majority of women "lesbian" whether or not their love for one another was explicitly sexual' (Pearce in eds. Mills and Pearce, 1996: 231). The use of the word 'lesbian', however, has a complicating, and sometimes pejorative, effect on the naming and celebrating of close relationships between women.

The work of Martha Vicinus, and later of Sharon Marcus, is also drawn upon in the discourse around pre-second wave writing about women friends. Although their focus is on the Victorian period it is, nevertheless, of interest to

the current discussion in that Vicinus supports Rich's view that an "undefined [lesbian] continuum" links "erotic friendships" in particular with women's friendships in general' (Vicinus, 2004: 69). However, Marcus argues that the concept of a continuum 'ironically [obscures] everything that female friendship and lesbianism [does] not share and [hides] the important differences between female friends and female lovers'. She contends that there is a need to see how 'different social bonds overlap without becoming identical'; wishing in effect, to preserve the 'important differences' (Marcus, 2007: 29).

The strong affective bonds and the impacts described in Taylor's two novels invite, therefore, an interrogation of the deeper significance of the friendships, irrespective of clear evidence in the novels of homoerotic desire. There is another related view of specific interest to this discussion advanced by Patricia Juliana Smith in her 1997 study *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction*. Significantly, Smith's monograph focuses on British women's fiction in the twentieth century, spanning the seventy-five years - including the period under review in this thesis - between the work of Virginia Woolf and the 1980s and 90s novels of Jeanette Winterson, significantly also including ostensibly straight writers such as Doris Lessing and Fay Weldon.² Smith appropriates the axiom 'lesbian panic' from the term 'homosexual panic' first used in 1985 by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.³ Although the term falls short of an

² In *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* Smith develops the idea of 'lesbian panic' as a motivating force in the extreme behaviours of women in both straight and lesbian literature. She examines the fiction of Woolf, Lessing, Bowen, Spark, Weldon, Brophy, Bainbridge, Duffy, Tennant, Winterson, with passing reference to many others including: Townsend-Warner, Keane, Renault, Dorothy Strachey, Compton-Burnett.

³ Later also adopted by Elaine Showalter in her 1990 study, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*.

exact equivalence across genders, it is productively deployed in the analysis of some woman-to-woman friendships in female-authored novels. While the Victorians had been ambivalent or downright disbelieving about sex in close female friendships, the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 initiated a response that led to a repressive period in women's literary history that made lesbianism taboo in conventional novels. Writing in 1997, however, Smith enjoys the retrospective benefit denied to Elizabeth Taylor in the 1940s of the changes brought about by second wave feminism and consequent loosening of the prohibitions on the expression of love between women. Smith introduces new interpretative possibilities in the reading of some key twentieth-century women's fiction using the term lesbian panic, describing it as

quite simply, the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character - or conceivably, an author – is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire (Smith, 1997:3).

Smith's work informs my analysis of two 1940s' novels that place female friendship centrally. In common with her 'sister writers', ⁴ Taylor is still subject to the taboo on women writing openly about the homoerotic potential in friendships between women. Following the Radclyffe Hall trial same-sex love became virtually un-representable in mainstream texts until the feminist movement of the 1960s began to release that constraint. ⁵ Although in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf had noted how she

⁴ Significantly, Elizabeth Taylor refers to a wish to meet her 'sister writers' in a letter to Barbara Pym held in the Pym Collection in the Bodleian Library (MS Pym 162/3) (accessed January 5th 2014).

⁵ On leaving court after the banning of her book, Hall is reported to have said to supporters, 'believe me, the end is only the beginning'. After the Second World War an underground trend for lesbian 'pulp fiction' appeared that openly addressed lesbians as characters. These cheap

wanted to see how Mary Carmichael set to work to catch those unrecorded gestures, those said or half unsaid words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex (Woolf, 1928 [2004]: 98),

As a consequence of the trial, Woolf's wish to locate the uninhibited expression of female friendship in literature was set back.

This constraining aftermath was still felt by women writing in the 1940s and 50s. Gibbons and Taylor, in common with other female authors active during the time parameters of this study, approached maturity in the inter-war period when new patterns of women's friendships began to emerge. Most famously, the friendship between Winifred Holby and Vera Brittain pushed the boundaries of convention in a relationship of emotional intensity. Brittain tested the triangular possibilities of what she foresaw as "an ideal life, perhaps not more than a year or two ahead, in which you and he [her husband, George Catlin] play an equal part" (Brittain, cited in Kennard, 1989: 7).⁶ The triangular model is considered in the examination of the female friendships represented in Taylor's novels.

Nevertheless, the pressure to achieve the ideal of heterosexual marriage and family life that would tend to disavow and marginalise close female relationships persisted. Sharon Marcus summarises the position:

The increasing importance of school, the emergence of adolescence as a life stage,

paperbacks were important to the avowal of lesbian identity following the obscenity verdict and prior to second wave feminism which supported a new wave of lesbian texts.

⁶ In a way that is revelatory of the constraining aftermath of the Radclyffe Hall trial, Kennard also points out that most of the terms of endearment between the two women that might have suggested an erotic relationship 'have been edited out of the published correspondence' (Kennard: 7). See also Catherine Clay, (2006) *British Women Writers 1914-1945: Professional Work and Friendship*.

anxiety about lesbian deviance, and the popularity of developmental models that equated maturity with heterosexuality made it almost inevitable that same-sex friendship would come to be defined as antithetical to the family and the married couple (Marcus, 2007: 28).

The reassertion of heteronormative models after World War Two hardened the mood post-Radclyffe Hall and reinforced the reticence of female authors to represent social bonds that appeared to cross the line between the homosocial and the homoerotic. Niamh Baker questions whether it was 'censorship or self-censorship that led to an almost complete absence of lesbians in women's fiction' of the 1940s and early 1950s (Baker: 78). In view of this absence, or silence, Patricia Juliana Smith's concept of 'lesbian panic' is of interest to the examination of ostensibly straight women's writing in that same period as it offers a new lens through which to view female friendships in woman-centred fiction of the time. While none of Taylor's novels are included in Smith's study, the concept is nonetheless a useful framework for discussion. Taylor's relatively early position in the chronology of women authors examined by Smith - after Virginia Woolf, but before Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing and the 1960s' novels of Elizabeth Bowen - ⁷ indicates an engagement with a progressive mood in writing that shows sympathy for the pain of friendships divided by heteronormative pressures. In both *A View of the Harbour* and *A Wreath of Roses* there are instances of disruptive action and reaction that suggest an equivalence to Smith's paradigm justifying a re-opening of the question posed by Elizabeth Wilson in 1980. A telling passage in *A View of the Harbour* has

⁷ Elizabeth Taylor and Elizabeth Bowen were mutual admirers and friends. However, it is Bowen's 1960s novels that are scrutinised by Smith, showing that Taylor's 1940s novels could not have been directly influenced by Bowen's later work, although the possibility of a reverse influence is an interesting one on which to speculate.

Tory Foyle extolling the virtues of female friendship, 'none of that wondering if the better side of one's face is turned to the light' (*VOH*: 69). It is a passage that shows a marked similarity to Woolf's consideration of the task of an author in capturing the intimacy between women without the 'capricious and coloured light of the other sex'.⁸

The portrayal of female friendships in the three novels discloses loving relationships between women more than twenty years before the term 'sisterhood' was co-opted to the struggle for women's liberation. These friendships, however, show themselves to be inhibited, often painfully, by constraints that that movement sought to remove. Virginia Woolf's vision, expressed in 'Women and Fiction', of women writers who are 'perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to man' is reflected in the choice of focus on friendship between women by Elizabeth Taylor, but firstly, in a different fictional scenario, by Stella Gibbons (Woolf, 1929: 49).

⁸ Woolf's influence on Taylor is perceptible throughout her writing. The epigraph from *The Waves* in *A Wreath of Roses* and dedication of the novel to her close friend Maud Geddes is evidence in this chapter of Taylor's recurring homage to Woolf.

Westwood

Friendship and the Female *Bildungsroman*

‘... from the world within to the world without, from introspection to activity’ (Abel, Hirsch, Langland: 13)

Stella Gibbons’ *Westwood* (1946) opens the discussion of friendship between women in a manner distinct from the analysis of the two novels by Elizabeth Taylor. While recognising the friendship types already outlined, this section reveals important aspects of the female *bildungsroman* described in the introduction to the chapter. Set in World War Two London, the core friendships in the novel are between young women of similar ages; although a third friendship with an older woman who functions as a guide to the ultimate direction of the leading protagonist, Margaret Steggles, is introduced in the final stages of the narrative. Two distinct types of friendship represented in the novel reveal a tension between the temptation to remain in the comfort of class and gender appropriate behaviours and the desire for something more. The first is an example of a sustaining friendship, formed at school or in childhood, and based on the intimacy of common experience that provides primary emotional support. The second appears as a progressive friendship that, while requiring focussed application, is potentially dynamic in its effect. This second type of friendship, although in many respects built on unreliable foundations, is sought by a young woman determined to follow a more stimulating path. The friendship with Zita Mandelbaum, the alien insider, offers Margaret the opportunity to pursue the desired journey to personal and aesthetic development. Margaret’s story is, therefore, a female *bildungsroman*, a novel of personal development that also demonstrates the merits of the first type of friendship between women.

The sustaining friendship between Margaret and her long-time school friend, Hilda, is resumed when Margaret obtains a job in a better girls' school and the family moves back to London.⁹ Margaret has received a good education – this is before the 1944 Education Act – and is a well-regarded teacher who has risen from her lower middle class origins to a higher position of economic and social status. The difficulty of finding suitable housing after the Blitz would have provided no alternative but to continue living with her parents. Inevitably, this restrictive family configuration adds to Margaret's feelings of discontent. At that time the family formed the paradigm for interpersonal relationships and the fact that Hilda and Margaret still live with their respective families, albeit with different degrees of personal satisfaction, impacts on their different aspirations and consequently on their friendship. The sisterly interaction between Hilda and her mother – something Margaret lacks – is an important factor in building Hilda's psychological and emotional characteristics and supports a family configuration in which shared social interactions blur the boundaries of age and status. Margaret, however, not only because of her education and career but also her unhappy home life, is socially displaced from this family link, a displacement intensified by her parents' unsatisfactory marriage.

Although the two young women have developed different interests and character traits - Hilda's outgoing warm-heartedness contrasts with Margaret's serious and bookish nature - it is easy, initially at least, for them to resume their friendship. Yet the differences begin to emerge and, while Hilda's personality is

⁹ It is noteworthy that Margaret still lives with her family. A single professional woman might have been one of those living in boarding houses and other independent lodgings in the interwar years, as described in Terri Mulholland's book *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Women's Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces* (2017). The devastation of housing during the war set back this option for independent living.

very successful with 'boys', Margaret has recently lost the rare boyfriend, Frank Kennett, who shares her interest in 'all the things – music poetry and pictures – that the rest of Reg's crowd didn't like'. Her dismissal of her brother Reg's crowd as 'ignorant as pigs and common as dirt', prompts a defence of the boys from Hilda that speaks of a growing gulf between the friends. Hilda is the expansively affectionate and sociable girl in contrast to Margaret's introverted, aspiring aesthete (*W*: 11). Yet despite their different temperaments and time apart, Hilda's empathetic nature senses Margaret's unhappiness and, confident in Hilda's friendship, Margaret has no hesitation in confiding the cause of her unhappiness. She tells of a broken relationship with the young man with whom she had shared an appreciation of culture. It was Margaret's seriousness that had appealed to Frank, with whom she had felt 'the nearest thing to happiness I've ever had'. Having different priorities from Margaret, Hilda can only ask whether he kissed her. Margaret's admission that 'I *did* like him! We were friends' (*W*: 12), suggests that the kind of relationship she seeks is platonic, based on shared interests; a complete anathema to Hilda.

Margaret's compliance with her mother's insistence on establishing Frank's intentions, however, makes him take flight. Mrs. Steggles' rush to see Margaret wed is not based on a romantic notion of love or even companionability - her own miserable marriage attests to that. What is more, the economic advisability of marriage is less pressing in view of Margaret's earning power as a teacher which would at that time have been curtailed upon marriage. If she so wished she would have been perfectly able, as a single woman, to sustain herself through her teaching career. The family's impression of her as 'a proper school-marm' and Margaret's assertion that her mother is 'very down on old maids' demonstrates their fear of something that deviates

from heteronormativity (W: 12). Their fear arises not only from Margaret's bookishness and perceived lack of physical attractiveness to men, but also from misgivings around the 'spinster problem', that persists in the mid-twentieth century. However, her mother's efforts to push her daughter into marriage are deeply suspect to Margaret: 'It was almost as if she wanted to drag me into the worry and sordidness and pettiness of being married' (W: 13). The reluctance to follow convention is fed by the spectre of a marriage where her mother, 'a superlative housewife' who provides every amenity, 'except laughter and love', must endure her husband's extra-marital relationships (W: 23-24). The 'happily ever after' ending was still as likely to enclose young women in the domestic sphere in the mid-twentieth century as it was in Victorian times. While there is no doubt that Hilda will eventually succumb to the norm, pursuing what Niamh Baker calls the 'myth of happiness' (Baker. 1989: 1), Margaret is set against conforming in favour of seeking 'a more beautiful and interesting life' (W: 48). For this she needs to break with the conventions of her lower-middle class milieu and, it would seem, leave behind Hilda's friendship.

Margaret's position anticipates the rise, ten years later, of the 'Angry Young Man' as a figure in literature who, like her, is educated beyond his social origins and consequently becomes disorientated when failing to break into a higher social stratum. Gibbons' portrayal of Margaret's character offers an early indication of an expanding mid-century resistance to traditional social markers. A masculine resolution to this conflict in the 'Angry' novels of the 1950s was through hypergamy, that is 'marrying up', and/or by reacting violently against conservative social institutions and authority figures.¹⁰ However, the aspirations

¹⁰ Among writers embraced by the term are John Wain (*Hurry on Down*, 1953), Kingsley Amis (*Lucky Jim*, 1954), John Braine (*Room at the Top*, 1957) and Alan Sillitoe (*Saturday Night and*

of 1940s women were more difficult to fulfil than those of their later male counterparts who, though in most cases still tied to the family home for economic reasons, would nevertheless enjoy licence in their social and sexual behaviours. The female version of the *malcontent*, while not overtly angry nor outrageously badly behaved, must seek a different course, in Margaret's case by calculated exploitation of a friendship with a woman who might provide access to 'a more beautiful and interesting life' (W: 48).

Margaret's vision of what she desires drives her to re-shape her life rather than merely seek a convenient marriage. At the same time as the distance between her and Hilda grows, Margaret sees the potential in London to feed her desire for the romance of literature, drama and the arts that continues during the war. While Hilda's war work is significant, she makes a greater contribution to the morale of the troops by entertaining them on their leave and keeping them 'ever so cheery'. She disdains art, drama and all that Margaret values, but her contentment reflects the ease with which she, as the stereotypical young woman awaiting marriage and motherhood, slips into expected feminine roles, while still maintaining her personal integrity. In contrast, her dear friend Margaret experiences profound dissatisfaction with her given social position and limited opportunities for cultural enhancement. The craving for a more beautiful and satisfying life takes 'the form of wanting to meet interesting people ... the possibility of meeting one, however briefly, excited her painfully' (W: 48). Convinced that the friendship with Hilda will not help in this, Margaret follows a path out of her social class and zone of experience into a new and unlikely association that might yet give her access to what she desires.

Sunday Morning, 1958). John Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger* (1956) suggested the name of the group.

This potentially progressive second friendship begins with Margaret's chance discovery of a ration book on Hampstead Heath followed by a fortuitous meeting in a shop with Zita Mandelbaum, 'one of a series of refugee mother's helps' in the Westwood household (*W*: 103). These coincidences bring with them the exciting prospect of gaining access to the lives of the painter, Alexander Niland, 'the Modern Renoir' (*W*: 40), and his wife Hebe, whose name is on the ration book. Margaret is enchanted by the vision of people like the Nilands and Gerald Challis, the dramatist whose work she has long admired.¹¹ Discovering that Challis lives in the gated mansion, Westwood, she finds 'her imagination playing about him and about the inside of the house' (*W*: 122). Her class caution and outsider status, however, forbid her to believe she will ever see him, but she is compelled to try. Admitted only by chance to play a subservient role to the elite of Westwood she is driven to pursue a non-sexual infatuation with the admired playwright Gerald Challis and with his extended family at Westwood.

Before she achieves a position of self-knowledge, Margaret's expectations of London life and her relationship with Hilda fall short of the 'unalloyed pleasure to which she had looked forward' (*W*: 124). For her part, Hilda, while still good company and generous with her time, is running out of sympathy and thinks Margaret should 'snap out of it' (*W*: 124). In this way the friendship, at least on Margaret's side, begins to slip away, even though

¹¹ According to Lynne Truss' introduction to the 2011 edition, Challis is based on the writer Charles Morgan (1894-1958) who infuriated Gibbons by, amongst other things, pompously claiming that a sense of humour was overrated in a writer. Faye Hammill records that he also attended the same award ceremony for the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse won by Gibbons in 1933 for *Cold Comfort Farm*, (much to Virginia Woolf's disgust). Morgan invited 170 guests to Gibbons' tentative 12 family members (Hammill, 2009, (2011) in *Intermodernism*, ed. Kristin Bluemel).

Hilda would always have that place in her affections which is reserved for the oldest friend; the friend with whom there is often no link surviving save the twenty-five or so years which have elapsed since a mutual youth; but she sometimes felt, not without guilt, that she had outgrown her (*W*: 124).

Lacking the family relationships Hilda possesses that most resemble friendship, Margaret's growing discomfort with her oldest friend renders her oblivious to the human qualities that, at times, conceal Hilda's true emotions. Even as she senses an alteration in Margaret, Hilda's manner remains unchanged. She possesses 'that impenetrable reserve that frequently accompanies a sunny temperament: her dislike of displaying her deeper feelings' (*W*: 197). She is, all the same, well able to detect her friend's troubled spirit although her advice goes unheeded. Interestingly, Hilda's characterisation in the novel is more sympathetic than that of Margaret - and indeed, of Zita, the racial and religious outsider - who are both manipulative and gullible, but each driven to seek more in life than is immediately available. Although Hilda is portrayed as possessing superior human qualities her destiny is marriage and family, perhaps for her happily ever after.

Gibbons' engagement with the extraordinary physical and social upheavals of the war admits the figure of the educated refugee with whom Margaret forms an exploitative but potentially progressive friendship. Zita is also displaced and alienated, albeit differently from Margaret, since her role at Westwood is incongruous given the cultured, middle-class background she left behind in Hamburg. Although she complains of much unhappiness, the life that Zita makes for herself seems full: 'A nature which puts such zest into all its activities cannot truthfully be described as unhappy'. Although 'easily hurt and easily moved' she sustains her appreciation of music and art and she and her

fellow refugees pursue an active social life, the kind of 'full life' that Margaret seeks (and also like Mildred Lathbury in Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women*, another example of a woman craving something more than her lot) (*W*: 105). What Zita lacks is a confidante, someone close at hand rather than the more formal associations of the club or in her many complicated relationships with male admirers. A new configuration of friendship arises between the two women that, in time, becomes beneficial both to Zita and to Margaret but widens the gulf between Margaret and Hilda.

Initially, however, a reassessment of the relative merits of her two friends sees a brief revival of Margaret's appreciation of the qualities of the old friend. Maintaining the friendship with Zita is hard work given that her sensitive personality 'might not prove so attractive in the long run as Hilda's unfailing gaiety and common sense' and Margaret finds dealing with 'a strong, capricious and moody human personality' very taxing (*W*: 146). On balance, however, she reckons the advantages of 'hours of exquisite pleasure... that could truthfully be called happiness' in gaining proximity to the Westwood elite as worth the effort (*W*: 153). The motivation for working at the relationship, then, lies not in Zita's intrinsic values but in her usefulness to Margaret's quest. Despite a recurring thread of disappointment Margaret satisfies some of her desires through 'chance encounters with the delightful inhabitants of Westwood' thanks to her friendship with Zita (*W*: 217). Friendship such as this, formed for instrumental reasons, deviates from sociologist Graham Allan's prescription of friendship as existing 'simply because it is found enjoyable. It should be undertaken for its own sake rather than for some ulterior motive or as a means to some other end' (Allan, 1979: 43). Although the friendship with Hilda contains many of the characteristics of a good friendship, including affection, empathy, the ability to

express her feelings and to make mistakes without fear of negative judgement, Margaret temporarily devalues it as she opts to endure the trials of the relationship with Zita for its potential benefits.

Hilda's liaison with Challis – the assumed name "Marcus" ensures the relationship remains mysterious – is an opportunity for Gibbons to exercise her talent for the comic. In an ironic sub-plot it is Hilda who unwittingly makes the connection with the object of Margaret's desire and ultimately demonstrates her stoutness of character. Describing him to her mother as 'an old guy I clicked with in the tube', Hilda thinks him 'just lonely, poor old thing' (*W*: 92). In contrast to Margaret, the loyal and good-natured Hilda 'did not organize her friendships, and it had not occurred to her that benefits might accrue to her from Marcus/Challis's apparent wealth and superior social position'. Unlike the 'working-girl of fifty years ago' (that would have been in the 1890s) 'whose desire for luxury and comfort was often the cause of her downfall', Hilda wants 'nothing material, social or spiritual from Challis ... no wonder that he found her attitude unusual and attractive' (*W*: 163 – 164). As strenuously as Margaret attempts to insinuate herself closer to Challis to further her aesthetic education, Hilda's connection with Marcus/Challis is easy, given her attractive appearance and sympathetic personality. Yet, losing sight of her friend's virtues, Margaret's relationship with her continues to fade in the face of the promising new friendship with Zita. Significantly, however, Margaret's access to Westwood is by the tradesmen's entrance. Her education and good manners are not enough to gain full acceptance in this exclusive milieu, a setting that is a bastion of the old order of social class and cultural snobbery. Although Hilda has the admiring eye of Marcus/Challis, neither would she have been admitted to the inner

sanctum of Westwood. She remains an outside and secret diversion for the famous man.

Hilda finds Margaret's motives for befriending Zita transparent but, slipping out of character, she shows a hint of jealousy. For her part, Margaret's reaction to Hilda's older boyfriend is merely a pretence of interest as 'she was also a little repelled, and her sense of estrangement from her friend increased' (W: 175). That Hilda and Margaret each and separately have a relationship with the man in one of his two guises is a scenario from which only Hilda emerges with credit. The Shakespearean doubling of the 'marvellous' Mr. Challis and the 'quite harmless and rather boring' Marcus sets the scene for the climactic revelation of the true situation that leads to a form of resolution of the *bildungsroman* (W: 174).¹² The hero with his false philosophy of intellectualism is exposed and, as the mask falls, someone deserving of ridicule and censure is revealed, shocking Margaret and leaving Hilda morally outraged. Abel, Hirsch and Langland's assertion that, 'development may be compressed into brief epiphanic moments' is further exemplified when Margaret's critical judgement, both aesthetic and personal, begins to differ from Zita's blind adoration. These 'internal, flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of an action' (Abel, Hirsch, Langland, 1983: 12).

The toppling of the idol Challis, facilitated by her critical judgement of his play and unwittingly by Hilda's association with him, is the pivotal moment in Margaret's progress that brings her friend's qualities back into focus. Her uncompromising condemnation of Challis/Marcus to Margaret as 'nothing but a dirty old man' refreshes their friendship, although while Hilda is 'inclined to

¹² The homophonic connection of the name Challis to the Chalice in the quest for the Holy Grail is perhaps more than coincidental, particularly given the religious undertones of the concluding scene with Lady Challis.

laugh over the situation' it affects Margaret more deeply (W: 404). Hilda's fearless intervention causes Margaret to reflect on her friend's qualities.

What she needed was not Zita's eager comprehension of her hero-worship for a man whom she had thought a great artist; it was Hilda's schoolgirlish squeeze of the arm and rueful giggles that would comfort her when she took things hard at school (W: 408).

Two very different types of friendship play a part in Margaret's developmental journey. While 'the vividness of her own outlook on life had increased since she had known Zita', she re-learns the value of Hilda's qualities (W: 232). However, the ambivalence embedded in the narrative about the uses of friendship suggests that departing from the traditional path is fraught with setbacks and heartache. It is also true that Zita's role as a liminal member of the elite society, is instrumental in altering Margaret's perceptions simply by facilitating access to Westwood. Margaret's conflicted feelings are exposed when, having gained access to what she thought she desired she finds it wanting. There is, nonetheless, a change in Margaret's character development. Hilda's interventions, intended and unintended, remind Margaret of the value of their friendship. The moment when the undeserved adoration of Gerald Challis is exposed by Hilda's pity and ridicule is undoubtedly the epiphanic moment in Margaret's progression that sets up the conditions for a realignment of her false vision.

Ultimately, however, Hilda is content to accept the heteronormative route to marriage and family that would involve the loosening of the bonds of female friendship with Margaret. The distancing of female friends when one of them marries is common as husband and family take precedence. Unlike Camilla in *A Wreath of Roses*, however, Margaret will adjust to the new terms of her friendship with Hilda seeing the importance then of becoming 'true friends with

Zita' who, in a reversal of roles, now relies on Margaret for advice and comfort (W: 432). For her part, Margaret is almost ready to gain the agency to shape her future.

There is another significant female relationship in the novel between Margaret and Gerard's mother, Lady Challis. Friendship with an older woman can be placed elsewhere on the spectrum of female friendship types, (also exemplified in *A Wreath of Roses* by Frances). The friendship with the older woman comes late to the scene but is telling catalyst in Margaret's journey of development. Lady Challis possesses some of the same qualities that Hilda is endowed with, the listening qualities of a good friend, but with the wisdom of age and experience. In the final 'Chapter The Last' - the only one given a title - Hebe Niland reveals that her grandmother had 'married up' when 'Grandpapa fell for her one morning when she was hanging out the washing; she was seventeen' (W: 333). Aided by his legacy, Lady Challis gained autonomy after the death of her husband. In her role as elder she counsels Margaret not to accept the demeaning role of caring for the Nilands' children and, recognising both Margaret's desires and her potential, delivers a warning. The life Lady Challis wished for only became possible after her husband's death, a situation that suggests the extent to which marriage can constrain women. Her project to renovate three cottages to create a self-sufficient community 'mixed in age and class' signifies a resurgence of her own desires (W: 438). The Utopian community she creates – comparable to that which Miss Ranskill sets up - is designed to fulfil what she identifies as broad human needs. Written at the same historical moment, both novels portray the provision of support to the victims of a war that has broken down the foundations of humanity, each serving as a

metaphor for the disintegration of one way of life and the hope for a resurgent new order.

Lady Challis has achieved a kind of personal peace based on what she calls the 'Gentle Powers': 'Beauty, Time, the Past, Pity and Laughter' that she offers as a guide to Margaret's future.¹³ Margaret's resistance to taking a spiritual direction, however, encourages her to seek a resolution of her own. Still beset by patriarchal expectations instilled in her by her mother, Margaret asks the question 'Do you think it likely that I shall marry?' (W: 446), as if that step had nothing to do with her and, implicitly, that it would be a failure not to do so. Lady Challis' suggestion that the hardest thing in the world is 'to live without worldly love' supports, on the face of it, the imperative to marry for love. Implicit in her comments is a broader interpretation of 'worldly love' that she sustains through her expansive community. This broader definition envisions the alternatives for women in choosing the single, independent life that propose ways of attaining a 'full life' outside the traditional married unit, recently expounded by Kate Bolick in her book *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* and discussed in chapter three in the sections on Barbara Pym (Bolick, 2015).¹⁴

The novel stops short of the scope of the 1970s' narratives of female development, re-shaped as confessional novels during the second wave, that end in the awakening of female sexual identity.¹⁵ Margaret's *bildungsroman* marks a stage before these more overtly sexualised feminist novels, drawing a line of development between them. In demonstrating a movement from 'the

¹³ *The Gentle Powers* is the subtitle of the novel.

¹⁴ A longer discussion on the life choices of the spinster is found in chapter 3 on the anti-romance.

¹⁵ These include novels that Imelda Whelehan in 2005 calls feminist bestsellers, such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973), Lisa Alther's *Kin flicks* (1976), Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977).

world within to the world without, from introspection to activity' it points to the possibility of a woman acting upon an impulse for change (Abel, Hirsch, Langland: 13). Ultimately, Gibbons allows Margaret some success in her quest. Her job as teacher regains its vocational status and she can now take more pleasure in helping her young pupils 'avoid the worship of false gods' (*W*: 416). The friendship with the alien young woman, formed for transactional purposes, is temporarily added to the security of the old friend. Yet, the end of the narrative marks only a provisional conclusion to the first part of Margaret's quest. Speculation about her continuing development requires a speculative reading to follow the thread of ambition running through the novel from which there emerges a challenge to patriarchal expectations where the female protagonist rejects the 'normal' course to explore other ways of being.

Positioning the novel as a female *bildungsroman* communicates a message of transformation facilitated in part by chance and coincidence, but more so by planned and unplanned interventions that realise the power of female friendship. The cautiously optimistic outcome for the young women characters in *Westwood* is not, however, repeated in the two Elizabeth Taylor novels considered next where more mature women confront the pain of the failure to sustain deep friendships in the face of heteronormative pressures.

A View of the Harbour

"But nothing with men is as good as our friendship. If women love one another there is peace and delight, fun without effort. None of that wondering if the better side of one's face is turned to the light" (*VOH*: 69).

The representation of female friendships in Taylor's novels is significantly different from that in *Westwood*. The two novels, *A View of the Harbour* and *A*

Wreath of Roses, reflect a tension in the prevailing ideology that inhibits the overt expression of love between women. In common with the analysis of *Westwood*, attention is given to the characteristics of female friendships, their origins, how they are sustained and what undermines them. My interpretation takes up Elizabeth Wilson's tantalising observation, already cited, 'that there might be a lesbian element in the close and possessive friendship' between Tory and Beth and Liz and Camilla in the respective novels. This possibility is investigated through an engagement with later feminist discourses on the issue (Wilson: 150). As outlined earlier, the analysis of Taylor's two novels draws upon Adrienne Rich's 1980 essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience' that introduces the concept of a lesbian continuum that blurs the distinction between female friendship and lesbianism. It goes on to consider whether there is a case to be made for attaching Patricia Juliana Smith's term, 'lesbian panic' to the uncharacteristic behaviours of the protagonists as they confront unwelcome changes to the basis of their friendships. While this may prove both contentious and ambiguously inconclusive, it is nonetheless a fruitful area for discussion from the feminist perspective adopted throughout the thesis.

Before beginning the discussion, however, a small section of biographical background is included to shed light on the importance attached to female friendship by Elizabeth Taylor at the time of writing the two novels. In her 2009 biography of Taylor, Nicola Beauman relates details of Taylor's close friendship with Maud Geddes (Beauman, 2009: 184-192). Having met in 1946 during a series of WEA lectures, and despite an early mutual antipathy, by spring 1947

Maud was staying at the Taylors' home.¹⁶ According to Beauman, 'the two women grew close so rapidly that it was like a platonic falling in love or the discovery of the female best friend neither of them had ever had'. While similar in temperament and sharing interests in literature, philosophy and art, the women's approach to their appearance differed: 'Maud always dressed badly... totally indifferent to how she looked'. Described as 'looking like Dora Carrington', Maud was also said by her friends to have an ambivalent attitude towards men, believing that women were always disappointed in them. Yet in 1948 Maud Eaton married Bill Geddes, an anthropologist who was soon to go to Borneo. Taylor confided to Ray Russell, her friend and one-time lover, that although she was 'excited and happy' about the marriage, she would be 'lost' if Maud accompanied her husband to Borneo; a statement that, while implicitly approving of marriage, reveals the importance of female friendship and suggests the difficulty in sustaining both. There is an interesting subtext to Beauman's account of the friendship. In describing the friendship as 'a platonic falling in love' Beauman endows it with the unique power of that feeling but with a careful caveat that there is no evidence of a homoerotic element. The reference to 'the discovery of the female best friend' contributes to the discourse but the mid-twentieth-century taboo – interestingly still felt by Beauman in the twenty-first century - can be detected in Taylor's guardedly emotive fictional representations of close female friendship. There is an added poignancy to a friendship that inspired Taylor to dedicate *A Wreath of Roses* to Maud who, in 1956, was to take her own life (Beauman, 2009: 184-192).

¹⁶ WEA, the Workers Educational Association, provides education and lifelong learning for those who had missed out on stages of education. It was founded in 1903 by Albert and Frances Manbridge. It still exists as a national charity.

Taylor's moving representation of the foundation and disintegration of close female friendships in *A View of the Harbour* and *A Wreath of Roses* reflects experiences with which other women may identify. The discussion of the friendship between Tory Foyle and Beth Cazabon (Victoria and Elizabeth) in *A View of the Harbour* focusses on how unexpectedly extreme reactions follow threats to their relationship.¹⁷ Their friendship is fatally undermined by an affair between Tory and Robert, Beth's husband, about which Beth remains ignorant and Tory is conflicted. Their friendship forms the central thrust of the narrative, one that might in other novels be represented as secondary to a heterosexual romance plot.¹⁸ In this case, rather than offering the classic romantic outcome, Tory's love for Beth leads to the double tragedy of a conclusion which sees her refusing Robert and relinquishing Beth's friendship.¹⁹

Like that of Margaret and Hilda, Tory and Beth's is a sustaining friendship, formed at school, that continues to provide primary emotional support. Tory's 'disquieting and isolated memories' of an unhappy childhood picture her 'between her mother and her governess, head bowed in some sort of disgrace' (*VOH*: 221). While Tory's relationship with her mother is represented as punitive and lacking in warmth, she finds an alternative maternal object in her friendship with Beth whose 'dogged loyalty' over the years has provided a measure of

¹⁷ It is interesting to speculate on whether the significance of the names of the protagonists, as queens of England, is intentional. Also of note is Beth's married name of Cazabon with its close resemblance to Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, another instance of Taylor's homage to canonical women writers.

¹⁸ The implications of the romance or anti-romance are considered at length in Chapter 3

¹⁹ Although the situation is not directly equivalent it is of interest to note the intertextual correspondence of names between Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and this novel. Shirley relinquishes Robert out of fidelity to her friend, as Tory gives up Robert for the sake of her friendship with Beth.

stability to Tory's disturbed life (VOH: 221).²⁰ Having subscribed to the orthodoxy of marriage, Beth's determination to place Tory on an equally conventional footing is protectively maternal and reveals an attitude supporting Sharon Marcus' observation that the attainment of maturity is tied up with heterosexuality, marriage and family, at the expense of single-sex friendship.

Safely married, [Beth tried] to steady Tory into some sort of betrothal with one or other of the young men who seemed all exactly the same – except that Teddy Foyle was not so impoverished as the rest (VOH: 222).

Implicit in the idea of 'safely married' is that not being married is unsafe, as indeed, it could be. The pressure to marry is reinforced by society's suspicion, even fear, of the 'old maid' just as Margaret Steggles' family in *Westwood* exert the pressure to conform that Margaret resists. A more resistant spinster is offered, however, in the character of Miss Ranskill who, while remaining proudly celibate, proves capable of love of a different kind to sexual love. The stigma of spinsterhood at that time still carried not only the threat of economic insecurity and social isolation but also, in Sharon Marcus' words, 'the anxiety about lesbian deviance' (Marcus: 28).²¹ Beth's marriage to a man with prospects gave her both economic security and a space to write - a room of her own - and Tory's lack of interest in the young men presented to her is resolved by marrying for financial security and to avoid loneliness. "I didn't exactly marry for money.... But neither did I marry for love... it is pleasanter not to be on one's

²⁰ Object-relations theory as applied to feminist studies has been shaped by the psychoanalytical work of Melanie Klein, D.W. Winnicott, Nancy Chodorow and Julia Kristeva. The importance of the mother-daughter relationship to a renewed feminist consciousness is considered in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

²¹ The problem of 'surplus women' after wartime reductions in numbers of marriageable men persisted in social attitudes throughout the first half of the twentieth century. See, *Singled Out* by Virginia Nicholson, 2007.

own” (VOH: 222). Marriage is the option that affords her the comfort she desires until the war and Teddy Foyle’s sexual infidelity bring their marriage to an end. Yet, while neither Tory nor Beth admits to unequivocal love for their respective husband/ex-husband Tory’s love for Beth is expressed more emphatically. ‘I really think I love you more than anyone else, except Edward’ (VOH: 80). Her comparison, just short of a mother’s love for her child, emphasises the strength of the bond.

Tory’s initial appearance in the novel, ‘bringing fragrance into the room’, attired ‘all in grey in a feathery hat’, is suggestive of a type of femininity that Beth does not display (VOH: 29). Their enduring closeness transcends the different priorities given to feminine preoccupations with personal appearance. This is emphasised in a scene where, trying to engage with Beth’s professional life and recover the former pleasures of friends together, Tory shares her expertise in dressing Beth for a meeting with her publisher. Tory’s methods reflect the idea, advanced by the psychoanalyst Joan Rivière in her 1929 essay ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, that women dress and perform in a manner that takes best advantage of their gendered role. Rivière examines specifically the performance of gender by professional women competing in a man’s world.²² Tory’s efforts are designed to empower Beth to perform the unpractised feminine role and impress the publisher. Refusing Beth’s attempted resistance on the grounds of her age, Tory’s promise of girlish ‘good fun trying clothes on’ (VOH: 171-3) returns them to the uninhibited frankness of their adolescence,

²² Rivière followed Melanie Klein’s theories as a psychoanalyst. She developed her ideas on femininity as a mask using clinical observations. Her original work made a considerable contribution in its time. This concept is also applied in *Excellent Women* to Helena Napier, a career anthropologist operating in a masculine sphere in chapter three and to Deborah Robertson’s transformation in *To Bed with Grand Music* in chapter four.

before marriage intervened to usher them into maturity. Dismissing Beth's mannish green suit, Tory declares, 'I will lend you a corset and my new hat', each symbols of coquetry. The corset and the hat placed in opposition to Beth's tweed suit, highlight the different manifestations of womanliness in the two friends.²³ Tory's efforts to dress Beth confirm her implicit belief in the need for women to develop a professional persona, to perform the masquerade. In Tory's 'best white blouse, the barathea jacket' Beth "'look(s) like a real writer [...]. Neat, distinguished'" (*VOH*: 179). Beth's doubtful response, 'I think I look like a Lesbian' betrays both her discomfort with the masquerade and a fear of the possible misinterpretation of the style. Tory offers a series of ornate hats to reassert Beth's heterosexual persona, going too far in the opposite direction. Beth now protests "'It makes one feel like – Becky Sharp'", the epitome of a flirt who uses her charms to fascinate men, something Beth is clearly not interested in. (*VOH*: 180). Carried away by the anticipation of the encounter, as Tory imagines the publisher 'looking like King Edward the Seventh [...]. They became two silly girls giggling at nothing'. Convinced that the hat 'will astonish him', she is sobered by the shock that the publisher is a woman. Tory's stereotypical understanding of gender roles does not yet allow for women holding positions of influence in publishing – or anywhere else. Elaborate preparations to exploit feminine allure will only be effective on a man. Her exclamation, 'what the hell have we been wasting all this time for?' confirms Rivière's observation that a woman operating in a man's world would use

²³ In the context of a novel published just two years after the war, it is interesting to note that rationing was not applied to women's hats. Although not explained, this was thought to have been partly down to their importance to feminine morale and possibly as a boost to the millinery industry. See, File Report 830 August 1941, "Clothes Rationing", Mass Observation. Cited in *Gender, Labour and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain*. 2009, eds. P. Levine and S. Grayzei. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

extreme femininity to gain the approval of her male peers (VOH: 181-2). In a case study she observes; 'It is significant that this woman's mask, though transparent to other women, was successful with men and served its purpose very well' (Rivière, 1929: 134). Tory understands that a woman would see through the façade she is creating for Beth. This scene illustrates an interesting facet of female friendship. Beth's line of suitable young men for Tory to marry and Tory's advice to Beth on what to wear for the publisher are sincere, if unwelcome, attempts to guide the other in the best ways of achieving an acceptable outcome within the parameters of gender expectations.

While the contrasting femininities of the two women have so far had no negative effect on their friendship, Tory's attention to her sex appeal is the complicating factor that menaces the relationship. She becomes dangerously conflicted between the love she has for Beth and the sexual attraction between her and Robert. Her emotional equilibrium has been unsettled by divorce and her over-feminised manner demands attention - approving from men (Robert and Bertram) and disapproving from women (Mrs Bracey and Prudence). Robert's loyalty is torn between Beth as wife/mother and Tory as lover, who is in turn pulled between Robert and her dearest friend – all of them located inside a reconfigured triangle of desire.²⁴

In a triad of Beth, Tory and Robert, Tory's attraction to Robert would be channelled through Beth, the mediator of desire. Deploying Smith's axiom of lesbian panic Tory's conflicted feelings would go some way to explaining firstly

²⁴ The idea of the triangle of desire was introduced in René Girard's 1961 work – although based on male figures - in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* in 1985 proposed the erotic triangle of two men and a woman and Terry Castle in *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* in 1993 put forward the idea of the erotic triangle of two women and one man.

the initiation of the affair with Robert and later, what can be described as the panic reaction of agreeing to marry Bertram Hemingway. In a speculative triangle of desire the sexual passion for Robert would derive from a wish to have sex with the man who has sex with Beth. Is it also worth asking the question whether Beth's, possibly wilful, ignorance of the affair between Robert and Tory disguises a subconscious desire for a different resolution that would take account of the crucial bond between the women but retain Robert's presence; a *ménage à trois*? The social mores of this period, (and more influentially, it must be admitted, the presence of Prudence, whose very name casts an inhibiting shadow), prevent them from contemplating an alternative relationship structure such as those seen in Victorian times or as a feature of the 1960s and 1970s sexual revolution or, indeed, at moments in between in private arrangements.²⁵

Beth's unwillingness to challenge convention in her own life is displaced by the drama of her fictions. For this she co-opts episodes from life such as the time she and Tory sent a letter stained with the blood of 'topside of beef' as a contrivance 'to *make* him (Teddy) come and talk to you' (*VOH*: 68). This ruse appeals to Beth's writer's instinct and evokes tears of laughter and little shame from the two friends. Women's marginalisation in the condition of immaturity, as Sharon Marcus has indicated, is characterised by adolescent behaviour (Marcus: 28). The expectation is that this tendency between friends would be curtailed upon marriage, reducing the potential for harm to the heterosexual

²⁵ Sharon Marcus describes nineteenth century situations in which female friendship, passionate or otherwise is tolerated by the husband. Thomas Carlyle wrote indulgently of Geraldine Dewsbury, who 'felt quite captivated with my Jane' (Marcus: 62). The 'Bloomsbury group' and other artistic communities in the early twentieth century, and later the 1960s 'counter-culture' of communal living and 'open' relationships tested alternatives to heteronormativity.

norm. Fortunately, the freedom of women to interact without inhibition in the privacy of their own homes is, in the mid-twentieth century, beyond the immediate control of patriarchy. Robert, as its representative in the narrative, is nonetheless shocked at the lapses in feminine delicacy shown by Beth and Tory. “Women are so coarse-fibred, so tough, so lacking in sensibility,” he thought.... God knows what they say to one another when they really throw back their veils” (*VOH*: 227). The reference to veils betrays a residual Victorian attitude to women – accepting that some parts of them must be hidden from men - but it is also telling in the light of the idea of masquerade already explored. Robert is disgusted at their abandoned behaviour and dismayed at the idea of seeing past the mask, something he intuitively understands only women can do. ²⁶ His judgement on the grossness of female intimacy is predicated on the masculine double standard of womanly conduct. However, setting each other off in such hilarious ways is a liberating facet of friendships between women, later transformed into the sisterhood that powered the Women’s Liberation Movement out of the privacy of the domestic and personal and into the public and political sphere. ²⁷

After this scene of laughter, tears and moderate shame a moment of danger arises, prompted by Tory’s searching question about how much Beth’s writing means to her. ‘Does it matter more than your friends, more than your children? Or your husband?’ (*VOH*: 68-9). Tory acknowledges the overwhelming

²⁶ The intertextual reference here is to another Robert. In *Lady Audley’s Secret* Robert Audley thinks, “I hate women, [...]. They are bold, brazen, abominable creatures, invented for the annoyance and destruction of their superiors” (M.E. Braddon. 1862 (2009) *Lady Audley’s Secret*: 224).

²⁷ Although reports of bra-burning were apocryphal, women’s public demonstrations and protests on a range of issues ranging from Miss World to abortion removed the inhibitions around feminine conduct that had been reinstated after the Women’s Suffrage campaign.

importance of Beth's work, even while voicing criticism of her single-minded devotion to it. For Tory, though, it is the final part of her question that is most significant in view of her own conflicted feelings. Beth's response, although ambivalent, provokes in Tory an emphatic avowal of the value of their friendship, and of female amity in general, described in the epigraph above: 'But nothing with men is as good as our friendship' (*VOH*: 69). Beth's discomfort at this is betrayed in her throwaway reference to the 'smart young ones' who, she suggests 'would find a sinister implication in your words'. The lifestyle of the daring young bohemians, known in the 1920s as the Bright Young Things, included outrageous dress, drug-taking and sexual experimentation, including the homoerotic. In this instance, though, Beth's retort appears to position the idea of love between women as 'sinister' or something 'other' to her experience. Tory, quick to defend her words, counters that 'they would overlook a trivial but everlasting thing about me – that I like to be made love to by men' (*VOH*: 69). Tory's defensive response is a reaffirmation that women's sexuality should be exclusively directed towards men. She protests, perhaps too loudly, against the opinions of the 'smart young ones', now superseded by the postwar pressure to sustain heteronormativity (*VOH*: 69). This awkward exchange ends in ellipsis, with the very English preparations for tea leaving its deeper implications unexplored.

If Tory's heterosexual affirmation is an attempt to explain, if not justify, to herself her relationship with Robert she is jolted by his warning to 'keep out of Beth's way', a warning that prompts her reluctantly to engage in 'all sorts of compulsions', amounting to

an intricacy of excuses, trivial explanations,
distortions [...] all this moreover, to her dearest
friend with whom there had been since

childhood only clarity and candour and intimacy
(VOH: 168-9).

Tory's unease in Beth's company is assuaged by the apparent failure of the supposedly observant writer to pick up on the signs that Beth's daughter Prudence has already correctly perceived. Beth's writer's otherworldliness prevents her from seeing what is before her eyes. Yet when Tory and Beth, who have never quarrelled before, have a difference of opinion superficially about Tory's son Edward, the floodgates of guilt and angst open and Tory attacks Beth obliquely through her identity as a writer. Tory is 'suddenly swept away on a tide of words such as came from Beth only through her pen' (VOH: 80). It is Beth's persona that Tory now scorns.

Writers are ruined people. As a person you're done for. Everywhere you go, all you see and do, you are working up into something unreal, something to go on paper [...] you've done it since you were a little girl [...] I've watched you for years and I've seen you gradually becoming inhuman, outside life, a machine (VOH: 80).

Ironically, Beth's obsessive preoccupation with her writing is what shields both women from confronting unpalatable truths. Now in full flow, Tory reminds Beth of when she had 'real' experiences, homing in on Beth's falling in love with the English mistress. She speaks of Beth's crush being 'so sloppy [...] one writhes about it when one's grown up [...] But it was real then'. This revelation about Beth's love for her teacher is resurrected from the depths of Tory's memory as something that 'for years you tried to forget, and God knows I wouldn't remind you, although I was as likely to fall in love with the gardener's boy as that creature' (VOH: 81). The youthful love for the schoolmistress, tolerated in adolescence as an immature crush, is not acceptable in adulthood.

²⁸ By revisiting this episode and accepting her complicity in the repression of its memory, Tory exposes Beth's fear of acknowledging the possibility of love for a woman as anything more than a youthful aberration. At the same time, Tory asserts her age, class and gender appropriate sexual identity in her scornful rejection of the gardener's boy. Finally, she accuses Beth of unscrupulously using that scenario in her work, suggesting that Beth's writing, rather than furnishing self-awareness, subsumes her identity. Emboldened, Tory issues her warning:

One day something will happen to you, as it has to me, that you can't twist into anything at all [...] and you'll have to be yourself to put up with it, [...] you'll be a bloody old woman before you can make a novel out of that (VOH: 81).

Beth is bewildered by the outburst, unable to understand why 'you seem all of a sudden to hate me'. Denying the suggestion of hate, Tory claims the pre-eminence of her love for Beth. Yet even in the drama of the scene Beth's repression prevents her from any more physical a response than putting her hand on Tory's shoulder since 'she disliked touching people' (VOH: 81). Beth's dislike of touching signifies not only a refusal of intimacy, but also society's imperative to repress uninhibited displays of emotion that might be construed as homoerotic. Her occupation as a writer permits Beth to distance herself from what Tory calls real life, aspects of which, when pushed into her consciousness simply embarrass her. Now Tory fears that 'If I throw away Beth... I throw away my best chance of happiness' (VOH: 174). In saying this she asserts that, notwithstanding her determination to attract and enjoy the company of men, she still believes enduring happiness remains in her love for a woman, for Beth. This

²⁸ Similarly, and disastrously, also characterised in Betsy's infatuation with her teacher in Taylor's *A Game of Hide and Seek*, 1951 pp. 270-273.

scene, in effect, reveals an affirmation of same-sex love; a love inexpressible in erotic terms but signalled as taking precedence over heteronormative relations. Paradoxically, it is Tory's heterosexual passion for Beth's husband that severs the crucial connection with her when, in the final analysis, Beth's daughter Prudence, 'confronted by their guilt', prompts Tory's withdrawal (*VOH*: 169).

In the mid-twentieth-century marriage is a primary route to women's economic stability, to sex, children and companionship. All the same, Tory's agreement to marry Bertram Hemingway, the older man, is an extreme remedy that will deliver neither financial security nor love.²⁹ This rash arrangement is, in effect, a disruptive reaction of the kind that Patricia J. Smith calls 'lesbian panic'. Tory opts for a less socially threatening, but more emotionally destructive, resolution than continuing the affair with Robert, let alone something more radical. Ultimately Tory's sacrificial act is an act of love designed to limit the damage to Beth despite the inevitable pain of losing her and ending the affair with Robert.

As Beth and Tory meditate separately on the prospect of their parting, Beth, still unaware of the truth of what drives Tory's actions, expresses her grief through the metaphor of her writing:

"I'll always remember your telling me [...] that one day something would happen that I'd never be able to bear writing about [...] and I feel this is it [...]"

A wild flash of thankfulness seemed to strike Tory's heart at these words, a sense of relief at unimaginable danger safely escaped. The appalling disaster she had so nearly not spared Beth she saw in all its enormity for the first time (*VOH*: 307).

²⁹ This is another instance of Taylor's referencing of canonical authors, but this time an American male. The connection with the sea and the name of Hemingway is perhaps obvious, but the character of Bertram Hemingway hints at an irreverent lack of equivalence with Ernest.

The viability of a continuing love between Beth and Tory is compromised by Tory's sexual love for Robert which she resolves to forego for Beth's sake. The affective strength of their attachment is stretched to the point of sacrifice on Tory's part when the acceptance of marriage to Bertram Hemingway offers an escape from her dilemma. The impossibility of a satisfactory resolution is confirmed in the final sequence of the novel where the metatextual reference to the completion of Beth's own novel dwells on the creative artist's emotions at that precise instant of bliss. Taylor reprises Lily Briscoe's climactic moment in *To the Lighthouse*: 'It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision' (Woolf: 1927[2000]: 198). Alone with her writing Beth is able, if only briefly, to appreciate the closure of her work:

She felt empty, clean, deserted, as if a
whole world had been swept away out of
her bosom, leaving her clear as crystal.
And her heart turned over painfully as she
laid down her pen (VOH: 312).

Beth's pleasure at finishing her novel is cut short by the inevitable and dreadful loss that she cannot avoid and, what is worse, does not understand.

This reading of the novel identifies a restraint exercised by Taylor and other women writers in the mid-twentieth century in articulating love between women. While the novel reveals no conclusive indications of homoerotic love between Tory and Beth, the presence of such emotions is suggested by Tory's extreme actions: the affair with Robert, her first ever row with Beth, and her attempted escape via remarriage to a decoy male. These reactions bear the hallmarks of panic, perhaps emotional and moral rather than lesbian panic. Although there are signs of a correspondence with Smith's axiom, the tragedy is that the situation deprives Tory and Beth of the most sustaining relationship of

their lives, an outcome fundamentally complicated by heteronormative expectations. The narrative pays no heed to the contentious distinction between female friends and female lovers, what Sharon Marcus calls 'a ridiculous controversy' (Marcus: 20). Whatever Tory and Beth feel for each other is profound and vital. Its loss is no less tragic for being inexpressible.

The absence of a neat conclusion to the novel offers instead a speculative 'reading beyond the ending', to adapt Rachel Blau Du Plessis' term.³⁰ The circular narrative delivers a final image of Tory's divorced husband sailing back into the harbour and reopening the gateway to a heteronormative solution to Tory's economic if not her emotional dilemma. The final two paragraphs serve to underscore Taylor's caution in attempting to reassert the status quo, however unsatisfactorily, as Teddy Foyle assumes he can pick up where he left off. Interestingly, there is a similar evasion in the closing scene of the next novel under discussion, *A Wreath of Roses*, in which the rescuing male, Morland Beddoes, is offered as balm to Camilla's distress after her disastrous experience seeking sexual excitement. Even as she exposes the forces that inhibit the lives of women Taylor hesitates to offer an alternative that breaks the normative pattern.

A Wreath of Roses

"No man stands a chance against you two. All that running to one another and giggling. You make fun of all the things you fear" (*WR*: 35).

³⁰ DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. 1985. *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

In Taylor's *A Wreath of Roses* Camilla and Liz share a bond, like the one between Tory and Beth, that was formed in their schooldays and renewed in 'the long series of these summer holidays from girlhood onwards' (*WR*: 51). The focus of the analysis is on Camilla's rash and painful reactions, comparable to Tory's in *A View of the Harbour*, in a dramatic narrative that encompasses suicide, deception, murder and sexual longing. This reading examines the representation of the shattering of intimacy between two more women friends also suffering under the pressures associated with heteronormativity. A second novel written by Taylor only two years after *A View of the Harbour* suggests the importance to her at that time of emotional bonds between women and points to an interest in the constraints women faced in expressing their feelings more openly.

As is the case with Beth and Tory, the two friends have both similarities and differences in their backgrounds. Liz has retained the capacity for loving gained in the early years of maternal nurture, despite the coldness of a strict father and the premature death of her mother. In contrast to Liz, Camilla's background, although in a similarly male-dominated Cambridge home, had rendered her cold and isolated, '*unable* to talk about hats. [...] Not abstract enough' (*WR*: 75).³¹ It was not until their school days in Switzerland that Liz's impulsive warmth was able to break through the coldness surrounding Camilla and there, in an all-female environment free from the repressive influences of male kinfolk, they forged their bond. The argument that women's experience of maternal nurturing has a significant effect on the formation of female friendship

³¹ The association of hats with feminine frivolity echoes Tory's attitude in *A View of the Harbour*.

is a feature of the work of feminist scholars.³² Camilla's attachment to Liz for the provision of the emotional warmth she has been denied in childhood can be seen in these terms as an attempt to fulfil the need for a mother substitute.³³

The relationship is renewed each year during the summer vacation at the home of Frances, a successful painter, Liz's former governess and now older friend/teacher/wise-aunt figure to both women. Leaving behind her job as secretary in a girls' school, Camilla exchanges one all-female environment for another for the duration of a holiday that returns her and Liz to their youthful attachment. A bond thus sealed is one that causes pain when threatened in adulthood. Like many other middle-class women of her time, Camilla has had to settle for employment deemed appropriate to her social status, with only the increasingly unlikely prospect of marriage to release her.

Their friendship begins to be destabilised after Liz's marriage to Arthur, the vicar, and the birth of their son, Harry. Camilla and Arthur's mutual antipathy reveals not just Camilla's resentment at the alteration to her exclusive friendship but also Arthur's perception of a threat to his marital relationship and, furthermore, to the state of marriage itself and to his 'position in the world'. He interprets Camilla's sharply critical comments about marriage, her 'idle, insolent and cool' manner, as an indication of 'destructive schemes' in the making. In contrast to Robert's role in the triangle of desire in *A View of the Harbour*, Arthur casts his wife's friend as 'an ambassadress of evil' to be resisted with religious fervour. As a vicar first, and a husband a poor second, he is convinced he must

³² For example, Jean E. Kennard's discussion on female friendship is based on the use of object relations theory and traces the work of feminists such as Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow and Adrienne Rich who relate female friendship to the mother-daughter bond.

³³ The connection between the mother-daughter relationship and female friendship is pivotal to the feminist analysis of the novels in this chapter and later in chapter five devoted to what Marianne Hirsch calls *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (Hirsch, 1985).

triumph in defence of 'the welfare of his flock, duty, example, respectability, and the institution of marriage', to the glaring exclusion of his wife's needs (*WR*: 60-1). His view represents more than a fear of the destabilising of his personal life, it articulates an exaggerated patriarchal orthodoxy. Indeed, the rivalry between Arthur and Camilla heralds gender battles to be fought on a larger stage over the next decades. In a microcosm of these soon-to-be embattled gender positions he perceives that what, to him, is a redundant female affinity now threatens his relationship with Liz and the sanctity of marriage. The rationale advanced by Arthur for his attitude to Camilla constitutes a defence of traditional gender roles that justifies a husband's possessive jealousy. Perhaps, too, he feels an implicit distaste for the closeness of the friendship between the women that he believes ought to have been superseded after adolescence by marriage. Camilla's relationship with Liz, therefore, is complicated by Liz's conflicted allegiances in her new roles as wife and mother.

Alarm at the perceived threat to the most important relationship in her life propels Camilla into what can certainly be classed as a panic reaction when she becomes perilously linked to a man clearly outside her social and experiential compass, but with whom she is determined to risk an emotional and sexual attachment. The two male stereotypes of Arthur and the stranger, Richard Elton, represent real and fantasy sexual partners in binary opposition; the 'good' man/vicar and the 'bad' man/imposter. The portrayal of differently unsatisfactory male partners highlights the opposing options available to women who feel strong pressure to marry but, destined to be disappointed in the romantic ideal, settle for security – a dilemma represented in other novels under discussion in

this thesis.³⁴ The disruptive consequences of the tension between reconciling to marriage, the injudicious pursuit of heterosexual experience, and the continuance of an essential female friendship in the novel generates the potential for ill-considered actions.

The novel's opening scene at a railway station offers a hint of the reference to popular film that Taylor will develop in *A Game of Hide and Seek*, this time using a 'brief encounter' between Camilla and a fellow traveller, Richard Elton. Witnessing the suicide of a man at the station brings Camilla into reluctant contact with Elton, 'a man of conventional good looks of the kind that she, Camilla, believed she despised'. As they weigh each other up she dismisses him as a man 'whose existence could not touch hers, which was thoughtful rather than active and counted its values in a different way' (WR: 1). Yet Camilla's peremptorily dismissive evaluation of Richard Elton as someone she 'believed she despised' conceals her interest in him for a brief adventure away from her old friends.³⁵ While bearing some comparison to Elizabeth Bennett's first encounter with Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, the unfolding narrative of this novel is not, however, to be resolved in the discovery of a 'good man'. A suicide signals for Camilla a violent fracture not only in the afternoon but also in her life as chaos replaces her 'feeling of eternity' with 'the presence of death'; an atmosphere that pervades the narrative. The abrupt schism in the day has a wider implication for Camilla who senses dread in that 'moment of fear and recoil, introduced by that happening, but related to the future as well'

³⁴ In particular, Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women* and Taylor's *A Game of Hide and Seek*, both considered in chapter three.

³⁵ This meeting, although similar in some respects to the Noel Coward play and popular film of *Brief Encounter*, develops in the darker manner of a thriller than a romance. It illustrates a recurring referentiality between fiction and film in this period of Taylor's career. A clearer echo of the film is found in the romance between Harriet and Vesey in *A Game of Hide and Seek*.

(WR: 5-8). She is already apprehensive about what is ahead in the altered configuration of her friendship and in her longer-term prospects thrown into relief by the events of that day.

An indication of their unravelling relationship is Camilla's response to the first sight of Liz's son, Harry. She experiences, 'an impulse of fear, which amounted to a cold unwillingness to see her friend's baby'. Her failure to come to terms with Liz as both married and a mother reveals the 'gulfs [that] began to yawn between them' (WR: 20) and communication, formerly easy and open, stutters as Camilla's attempt to speak of the baby is deflated by Liz foolishly 'trying to belittle her son, as sometimes a nice child will belittle a possession before another child who has nothing' (WR: 16). Curiously, Harry is the first baby Camilla has held and her recoil from him marks the beginning of her withdrawal from Liz, 'since the strangeness with Liz was binding her into intolerable confines' from which she is compelled to attempt an escape; a flight that leads her into unprecedented danger (WR: 37). The reality of her friend's sexual experience, embodied in the baby, is problematic for Camilla, as later events confirm. In a rash reaction, she steers her desire in a different but risk-filled direction as much doomed as the viability of an erotic triangle in *A View of the Harbour*.

Taylor underlines the intimacy between them in a vignette like the one between Beth and Tory having fun dressing up. An intelligently humorous scene springs from Camilla and Liz's shared love of literature. As girls, they had produced a satirical animation of the coming-together of English literary ladies for that staple event of domestic novels, the tea party. Just as they pay homage to their literary heroines they parody their stylised behaviours. Their pleasure is increased by the disruption of the great women's dignity that reveals an

intimacy at once frivolous and profound. They are prepared to lampoon the things they love - a characteristic of close friendships - yet their behaviour, playfully disrespectful to the great women of literature, differs from Tory and Beth's grossness, in so far as they demonstrate the value of a good literary education. The scene they dramatise is a 'very disintegrating' affair where everything goes wrong. It is wrecked by 'Charlotte's' inverted snobbery in telling 'Ivy' how much she paid for a shawl in Bradford, by 'Virginia's' lateness and 'Emily's' failure to come at all. 'Elizabeth Barrett' commandeers the sofa while 'George Eliot' goes out to look for 'Little Katie', who is lost. Above all they declare, "Virginia was right to feel wounded about the food. Women are not good enough to themselves and the indifferent food is the beginning of all the other indifferent things they take for granted" (*WR*: 29-30). Such explicit references to the female 'stars' of literature - dwelling on Virginia's thoughts about how women put up with less - gestures towards an emerging consciousness of the characteristics of women's friendships expressed in their fiction. The sharp wit of the two friends in combination confirms the power of their affinity. Sharing a satirical view, understanding the parody, or 'in joke', very effectively portrays the closeness between good friends that once more prefigures the developing concept of sisterhood. The scenario presented by Taylor also shows characteristics of postmodern writing demonstrated by the deployment of what Carol McGuirk has called 'playgiarism', a device that contains a 'strong ... element of parodic allusion [to canonical classics]' (McGuirk, 1994: 947, in eds. Richetti, John et al). Noting that 'Woolf's work haunts Taylor', Clare Hanson draws attention to the many references in Taylor's work which serve not only as homage but position her art as going 'beyond

Woolf' (Hanson, 2001: 80). The breadth of Taylor's influences and her forward-looking vision are apparent throughout her writing.

While the narrative uses intertextuality to playful effect it also shines a retrospective light on historically entrenched gender traditions in the form of a nineteenth-century female conduct book. The introduction of an authentic object augments this interrogation of an ideology inhibiting to the free expression of female friendship. Camilla's discovery of the 'beautiful book', *Exemplary Women*, invites an appreciation of the artefact and, more importantly, a consideration of what its text reveals about their respective situations. The contents page of the volume lays out the opposing positions now allocated to Liz and Camilla in society, married and spinster.³⁶ Taylor's deft insertion of *Exemplary Women* allows someone else's words to create enough distance for the free expression of Camilla's laconic view of marriage. She quotes at length from a chapter entitled 'The Solemnity of Wedlock'. 'Listen Liz! Here is one for you'. The passage reflects the unappreciated sacrifice made upon marriage and

"the awful breadth and depth of the chasm that lies between her wifhood and her maidenhood [and] the delightful yet sober freedom of her blissful girlish days [...]. Unless she loves – loves long and deeply and worthily – she sees a blank and dreary void, and her heart aches with a dumb, dull pain" (WR: 33).

Liz's response is telling, firstly accusing Camilla of fabrication but then, more suggestively, warning that it 'sounds like Sappho' in its effusive endorsement of female to female affection, both familial and 'girlish'. This fear-inflected response echoes Beth's reference to the 'smart young ones' that

³⁶ Accessed in the Bodleian Library, 08.01.15. It is indeed a 'beautiful book'. Davenport Adams, W. H. 1882. *Exemplary Women: A Record of Feminine Virtues and Achievements*. London: John Hogg (abridged from *Women's Work and Worth in Girlhood, Maidenhood and Wifhood*, 1880). Adams wrote copiously on such topics as, 'Plain Living and High Thinking', 'The Secret of Success' and many more.

similarly disavows any suspicion of unnatural feelings (*VOH*: 69). Cutting short this interchange, Taylor reworks, albeit in a more restrained manner, the scene from *Mrs Dalloway* when the interruption of Peter and old Joseph frustrates the intimacy between Sally Seton and Clarissa (Woolf, 1925 (1996): 40). The revelatory moment of reference to Sappho's writing and the connection to the loss of 'blissful girlish days' is for them curtailed by the interruption of the everyday sound of the milkman, just as Beth and Tory's discussion is cut short by the mundane preparations for tea.

To moderate her critique of wedlock, Camilla finds a passage to represent her own position. She quotes again from *Exemplary Women*: 'And here is something for me. "Surely a cheerful and happy old maid is less to be pitied than a loveless or neglected wife." And now, Jeremy Taylor on celibacy' (*WR*: 33-34).³⁷ In fact, each quotation carries negative implications for both female states, married or celibate, and leaves no room for other options. Elizabeth Taylor's reference to the historical condition of women this time looks back further than the 1920s and 30s period, referenced in *A View of the Harbour*, during which gender norms were challenged, only to be reaffirmed in the postwar. This time she uses Jeremy Taylor's much-quoted thoughts on celibacy to summarise seventeenth-century patriarchal attitudes to marriage and spinsterhood, ironically still holding sway in the mid-twentieth century. He styles celibacy with characteristic eloquence:

Celibacy, like the fly in the heart of an apple
dwells in perpetual sweetness, but sits alone,
and is confined and dies in singularity; but
marriage, like the useful bee, builds a house,

³⁷ Jeremy Taylor, (1613-67) was a writer of religious tracts during the protectorate of Cromwell. He was known as the 'Shakespeare of Divines' for his poetic style.

and gathers sweetness from every flower, and
labours and unites.³⁸

Neither Camilla nor Liz taste the sweetness of their respective predicaments. Camilla's position reveals conflicting emotions veering between distaste for her friend's convenient, if puzzling, marriage and despair at her dwindling prospect of a passionate introduction to sex. The cracks in their comfortable intimacy deepen as they bicker about Arthur and the wretched Richard Elton. But the habit of openness between them cannot easily be curtailed and Camilla's feelings about Liz's marriage and motherhood move easily from the implicit to the explicit. As readily as Liz concedes that she falls short of expectations as a dutiful clergy wife, she feels inadequate too, as a mother. Clearly conflicted she is openly critical of her husband, yet defends herself by protesting loyalty to him as a subservient wife, claiming that lapses in marital discretion occur only in the company of Camilla and of Frances, demonstrating, ironically, that exceptions to the rule of matrimonial loyalty apply, but only to close female friends.

Frances slides easily into her former role with a time-served insight into Liz and Camilla's individual personalities, although her position as governess is by now conflated with that of older friend, distanced by her painting. Her infrequent but influential interventions have the effect of maintaining the condition of adolescence – a condition in which the two women friends appear to be stranded, awaiting the maturity that is supposed to be gained through marriage and childbirth, in other words, through sex.³⁹ Liz's resistance to acting out the submissive role of wife and mother is encouraged by Camilla who, in

³⁸ Columbia World of Quotations. Columbia University Press, 1996. Accessed 23 Jan. 2015. <Dictionary.com http://quotes.dictionary.com/A_celibate_like_the_fly_in_the_heart.

³⁹ See Sharon Marcus (2007: 28), mentioned in the chapter introduction, about the importance of developmental models that equated maturity with heterosexuality.

failing to endorse Liz's duties, prefers a comforting adolescent stasis. On the other hand, Frances, as teacher and elder, upholds a belief in duty within marriage even though she has not chosen it for herself. Her career trajectory as an artist has provided both subsistence and emotional sustenance but she has freely chosen to remain single and channel her energies into her art. Her character – like that of other artists created by Taylor - although not examined closely in this context, represents the pull of the creative life that delivers a different kind of heartache. Yet, in relation to the two friends, Frances retains her schoolmistress' role, offering her definition of duty as 'nearly always something you don't *want* to do' (original italics) when Liz shrinks from the demands of her role as a vicar's wife (*WR*: 59).

Camilla is rendered powerless to influence her friend, whom she sees as having lost her autonomy to the male duo of husband and son who have displaced her in Liz's hierarchy of affection. Amidst her unease at the changed basis of her friendship she enters a state of erotic fantasy that propels her into uncharacteristically irrational behaviours. She embarks on a dangerous, short-term, and ultimately self-destructive path that digresses widely from what would be deemed socially acceptable for a woman of her age and social class. The shared trauma of witnessing a violent death draws her towards Richard Elton, a caricature of masculinity. Although not convinced by his self-history - allegedly brought up in the colonies and at public school, a wartime officer and spy with film star looks now attempting to write his memoirs - Camilla still confides in him the sadness of her early life, seeing parallels with his, albeit wholly fabricated, childhood. In her willing suspension of disbelief, she substitutes the confidential intimacy she has had with Liz for an imaginary equivalence with Elton.

The same thing happened to us both [...].
Starved as children, but he, (perhaps because

he is a man) reacting to violence, inviting danger, attempting everything and everyone. While I am stiffening into an old maid, recoiling fastidiously from life. Closed, exclusive, self-contained, sarcastic' (*WR*: 74).

As Neil Reeve observes: 'She comes to think of herself and him as virtually the missing halves of each other – a notion which allows her to regard her relationship with him as neither perverse nor irrational' (Reeve. 2008: 13). Her illusory interpretation of their position as kindred spirits, while lending legitimacy to her actions, is indicative of a shock or panic reaction to the loss of her real missing half, Liz. Camilla's self-description as 'closed, exclusive, self-contained, sarcastic' contains Freudian implications of sexual repression (*WR*: 74). Her desire to embark on 'a small adventure' with Elton is fuelled by the suspicion that she is being left out of a life that 'was enriching everyone but herself, that education had taken the place of experience and conversation the place of action' (*WR*: 44). As she examines her motives she wonders whether it is also 'a little bit to punish Liz [...]. Because I feel she has left me out?' (*WR*: 48). Liz has achieved the hegemonic ideal of marriage from which Camilla has effectively excluded herself by declining offers that in time ceased to be made. Her first motive in pursuing Elton had been to show off to Liz, to dispense with the burden of her virginity, and 'to punish her for the baby and all the physical experience it symbolised' (*WR*: 76). Her self-analysis amounts to an admission of sexual jealousy. The physical experience Camilla seeks, and that Liz has had, releases a fantasy desire for the unreliable, though oddly sympathetic Richard Elton. A form of panic seizes Camilla and her yearning for a sexual awakening turns itself indiscriminately towards the unstable figure of the mysterious incomer. She prepares to become 'a different woman and ready to behave differently to match', changing her hairstyle and dress (*WR*: 37). It

takes only a small change in Camilla's style from her usual rather repressed and dowdy look to enhance her femininity and switch on her sexual allure.⁴⁰ The acknowledgement of this as artifice emphasises Taylor's visionary grasp of the issue of the performativity of gender, already suggested in *A View of the Harbour*.

As a potential alternative to valued female friendship, Camilla's attraction to Elton is disproportionate. Her ready acceptance of a revised image of Elton, supplied as part of his elaborate deception and later embellished by her own fantasy of the heroic alpha male, offers him up as a tragically damaged revenant from a mysterious wartime career in espionage. He supplies the necessary raw materials for Camilla to weave a fantasy wildly unlike anything she has known before. He appears to her as the stereotypical, über-masculine, snobbish, sexist, colonial ex-army officer, as handsome as a film star; in fact, all that she had previously scorned in a man. Yet she finds herself caught in an irresistible sexual attraction to him. This aberration does more than typify the desperation of a spinster virgin. It shows how unarticulated panic may fabricate an idealised male sexual partner in response to the change in the loving relationship with her essential female friend. The association with Elton even contains a proposal of marriage which would place her on an equal heterosexual footing with Liz while simultaneously disavowing any transgressive desires. Camilla, however, is not prepared to take the risky step of matrimony with Richard Elton. This is still a small adventure for her and for the moment she is not thinking of anything more long-term than to show off to

⁴⁰ The trope of a woman removing her glasses and letting down her hair to become sexy is used frequently in popular movies and fantasy comics; for example, Lois Lane, Superman's girlfriend and female leads in 1940s and 50s movies of Raymond Chandler novels.

Liz and to hope for letters in the new school term to ease the loneliness of 'the evenings by the gas fire in the bed-sitting room' (WR: 98).

For her part, Liz is in the process of adjusting to the institution of marriage, justifying it to herself and to Camilla. 'It is a thing we build up, not perfect, but real. I can't express myself', conceding that she must ultimately become reconciled to the heteronormative master narrative. Arthur quietly triumphs, demoting Liz to the category of the dutiful little wife, kissing her face and hair while thinking her 'so very sweet, in a way no other woman is, even the women whom I most admire' (WR: 188-9). Liz is reduced to the characteristic of 'sweetness', denying her even the value afforded to the other women most admired in Arthur's life.⁴¹

Liz is, nonetheless, acutely aware of the danger confronting her friend, but Camilla, while acknowledging the folly of her compulsion to seek short-lived sexual excitement, appeals to Liz for forbearance: 'I shan't see him again, I expect, but the thought of him... colours my life for the moment'. Lacking prospects, Camilla's loneliness is expressed poignantly: 'I feel such utter blankness, the future looks so desolate. No worse for me I know, than for many other women; but you have Harry and Arthur'. Accepting that she will have to continue without the profound love that she and Liz have shared she awards Liz the compensation of husband and son denied to the 'many other women' who have not proved their femininity in the conventional way through marriage and motherhood. While Liz demurs, at the same time reminding Camilla of her earlier scorn for Arthur, Camilla concedes that 'he has the faults of his sex, but

⁴¹ Arthur's exclusion of Liz from the list of women he most admires does not even give him the self-satisfaction that Stephen Guest found in his choice of Lucy as a prospective wife, as 'exactly the sort of woman he had always admired' in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).

much of the excellence, too', in contrast to the thrillingly transgressive Elton who holds the perverse appeal of the bad man (*WR*: 188-9). The strength of the heteronormative imperative is emphasised by Liz's self-justified capitulation to marriage, tempered by her assurance to Camilla of her enduring devotion: 'I do want you to know that I care for you very much, and that I want you to be happy' (*WR*: 190). While Liz offers the basis for a continuation of their friendship, it is impossible to reconcile Camilla's abjection. She has lost Liz and is about to lose much more to the enigmatic Elton; a figure who stands as a metaphor for the price to be exacted from a woman who transgresses social norms.

In persisting with her illusory desire Camilla disregards all the rules of propriety, displaying, in effect, a panic reaction. She is oblivious to the genuine concern of her friends, including the newly integrated Morland Beddoes - significantly a film director and therefore able to 'realise' outcomes - who all sense impending disaster. Camilla's flight from the anguish of her lost friendship drives her towards a quest for 'treasure, love, adventure' that only leads her to 'inadvertently disclosed evil' (*WR*: 203). Yet, at the moment of escaping from Elton, Camilla's thoughts return to Liz's words: 'Only remember that I love you [...] and I wish you to be happy' (*WR*: 203-05). Memories invoked *in extremis* prove the depth of their bond.

Elizabeth Taylor's representation of relationships between women in the two novels discussed here contains the seriousness that Virginia Woolf seeks in women's writing. Taylor confirms her admiration for Woolf in textual and

metatextual references throughout her work and very clearly in the epigraph to *A Wreath of Roses* taken from *The Waves*.⁴²

So terrible was life that I held up shade after shade. Look at life through this, look at life through that: let there be rose leaves, let there be vine leaves – I covered the whole street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind, with vine leaves and rose leaves' (Woolf, 1931 [1992]: 170).

Reconsidering Clare Hanson's observation that 'Woolf's work haunts Taylor, part of the purpose of *A Wreath of Roses* is to make a (painful) distinction between Woolf's "great" art and Taylor's different aims and achievement' (Hanson: 80), it can equally be argued that *A Wreath of Roses* echoes *Mrs. Dalloway*. Patricia Cramer identifies three characteristic endings in 'coming out' narratives predating the liberalisation of the laws on homosexuality in the late 1960s. These endings, Cramer suggests, are identifiable in *Mrs. Dalloway*: 'marriage and suppression of homosexual feelings (Clarissa); loneliness and ostracism (Miss Kilman); and suicide (Septimus)' (Cramer, 1992, cited in Smith: 47). Bleak outcomes are similarly reflected in the fate of the characters in *A Wreath of Roses*. Liz has married in haste, to a caricature of the conventional good man, a vicar, to achieve 'normality'. Camilla, who feels 'such utter blankness' at the prospect of a desolate future, tries desperately to experience heterosexual excitement with a man who strangled a girl because she irritated him, because for him 'love was nothing... making love exasperated [him]. Every depravity angered [him]' (WR: 202). Septimus Warren Smith's visions of Evans, combined with his abhorrence of the sex act with his wife Rezia, point

⁴² Taylor's longstanding admiration is affirmed in a letter to 'Mrs Virginia Woolf', signed 'Elizabeth Coles (aged 20)' and stating that she had been reading Woolf's works since 'I was still at school'. It was sent in 1932 in gratitude for *The Waves* (In Neil Reeves ed. *Elizabeth Taylor: A Centenary Celebration*, 2012: 97).

suggestively to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of homosexual panic, exacerbated by shell shock. Richard Elton's wartime experience, while withheld specifically in the narrative, is assumed to be the cause of the damaged psyche that brings him to murder a woman during the sex act. Elton's suicide releases him not only from the guilt of murder, but also from a feared sexual perversity, suggested by his extreme distaste for heterosexual sex. It is ironic that Camilla is so strongly attracted to the facsimile of masculinity adopted by Elton, who hides behind a macho mask, perhaps to compensate for his own homosexual panic.

The conflict that is woven through both of Taylor's novels is exacerbated by a model of compulsory heterosexuality that denies the open manifestation of homoerotic desire and complicates homosocial bonds between women. While Liz settles for the institution of marriage and family, Camilla's catastrophic adventure leaves her with nothing except an entanglement 'in this horror for the rest of my life' (*WR*: 203). Her actions and reactions are extreme enough to be cast as panic, if not lesbian panic. With a retrospective gaze an alternative interpretation can still, however, only be speculative but there are strong indications of a passionate attachment.

The outlook for Camilla is bleak but rather than leave her in desperate stasis Taylor offers Morland Beddoes as Camilla's potential heterosexual saviour: 'as he turned the corner she ran into his arms' (*WR*: 206). An alternative way forward for the love between the two women is not yet ready to be explicitly represented but the desolation caused by its loss is articulated starkly. Liz and Camilla may no longer 'make fun of all the things [they] fear' when those things are menacingly real (*WR*: 35). If the endings to each of Taylor's novels are not to be read as evasions, the question may be asked

whether the author arrives at an unsatisfactory resolution to a heteronormative romance plot as a disguise for another, less expressible, outcome.

The friendships in the three novels, although different in detail, reveal a powerful dynamic at work at a significant moment in women's literary history. Margaret Steggles' journey of development is compared to the female *bildungsroman* that Ellen Morgan has suggested is "the most salient form of literature" for contemporary women writing about women' (in Abel, Hirsch, Langland: 13). In this analysis, Margaret's quest is a metaphor for women's desires for a different kind of fulfilment and the constraining forces acting upon them if they step outside the parameters of acceptable womanly behaviour. Her story reaffirms the value of friendships that survive the years after school, at the same time as it explores possibilities for crossing the borders of race and class newly opened during wartime and set to continue afterwards. While the heterosexual romance plot underlies the narrative, the emphasis on Margaret's personal growth is a positive precursor of the desire for female agency that second wave feminism takes forward. Her use of friendship for ulterior motives, while worthy of censure, enables her ultimately to throw off illusions and to begin to resist societal pressures before finding an individual way forward.

Taylor's two novels render the disruptive effects of the heteronormative master narrative on essential and longstanding female friendships. The friends, Beth and Tory, and Liz and Camilla, suffer the pain of the destruction of friendship as a corollary of normative expectations. They are inhibited from showing hidden desire, whether homosocial or homosexual, by social norms. Taylor's novels each portray the negative effects of the inhibition of openly expressed emotion in female-to-female relationships. In this respect they

express feminist sentiments, not just by laying out the problem, but also in revealing the damaging effects of the stifling of deeply felt love between women.

The presence of women as friends, mentors and rivals continues in the novels of Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor under review in the next chapter. The emphasis shifts, however, to the anti-romantic position discovered in the novels. In styles imbued variously with irony, comedy and tragedy, Pym and Taylor render pairings or communities of women who are caught up in the illusions of romance.

Chapter Three

The 'Anti-Romance' in the 1950s' novels of Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor

Barbara Pym: *Jane and Prudence* (1953), *Excellent Women* (1952)

Elizabeth Taylor: *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1953)

The novels characterised as 'anti-romance' in this chapter do not completely deny the expression of women's insistent yearning for love, at times realised as sexual fulfilment and at others as security. While acknowledging that the power of love has long been a fundamental element in literature, the exposure of some of its shortcomings in writing by women about women exemplified in the novels of Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor acts as a corrective or 'antidote' to romance. The sustained popularity of romance in popular culture in the early 1950s is not courted by these writers. At the same time as they speak to their historical moment, Pym and Taylor use their art to suggest something other than the conventional romance plot. In drawing attention to the nature of woman's interest in romance, the novels offer opportunities to explore the ambivalences and contradictions that surround that experience. This they execute skilfully using humour, irony and tragedy and, for

Taylor, the co-option and corruption of other genres to strengthen the narrative. The combination of affect and intellect in these woman-centred novels challenges the received notion of the romance, providing a female perspective that shows signs of incipient feminist sentiments.

It is significant that the four novels under consideration in this chapter were published between 1951 and 1953 during a period when the popularity of romance in fiction, women's magazines and film extended the wartime appeal of the happy ending into postwar austerity.¹ Although the fascination with the romance seems at odds with the broader demands articulated in movements for women's equality, the 'extraordinary power and seduction of the romantic discourse', identified by Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey, is undeniable in writing that uses the literary tradition of the novel of manners to subvert the effect. Pearce and Stacey's definition of the romance plot is of a narrative that 'offers the potential of a heterosexual love union whose fulfilment is threatened by a series of barriers or problems, a *quest* for love' (original italics), such as the one represented in the 1951 film *The African Queen* cited in chapter one of this thesis (Pearce and Stacey, 1995: 13). The refusal of the expected romantic resolution in the four novels by Pym and Taylor discussed here reveals a resistant approach to the romance plot that, while characterised by ambivalence, still evokes an emotional response.

In common with other literary genres, the romance is guided by a set of conventions that Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* describes as a 'social contract' between the writer and the intended reader. This 'contract' dictates how a genre is used in such a way that, when broken, it unsettles the

¹ Alison Light lists middlebrow novels by Monica Dickens, Mary Stewart, Anya Seaton, Jean Plaidy and Josephine Tey among bestselling authors of the time (in, Jean Radford's *The Progress of Romance*. 1986: 148).

reader (Jameson, 1981: 69). Paradoxically, a corrupted framework of the romance genre such as that discussed in this chapter may call up responses more typically associated with the traditional genre through identification and affect. The dichotomy that Hilary Radner finds in the 'woman's novel' between the 'identificatory mode', characterised as feminine and emotive, and the masculine and intellectual 'discourse of mastery' complicates the effect of the novels. In simple terms, the first mode is enjoyed for the pleasure of feeling while the second requires intellectual interpretation. However, the representation of romance in the novels by Pym and Taylor invites both emotional engagement and interpretation.² Radner also suggests that 'the ambiguous social position of its (the woman's novel's) preferred reader – the educated woman' further complicates the expected response (Radner, 1995: 105). Interestingly, the reference to 'the educated woman' feeds into the discussion of the romance in Pym's two novels.

There is critical agreement on the ambivalence in the versions and subversions of romance rendered by both Pym and Taylor. Jean E. Kennard's assertion that 'Pym works systematically to undermine her readers' expectations of the romantic love plot' offers a starting point for my reading of her two novels (Kennard, 1993: 47). Similarly, this discussion of Taylor's novels extends Alice Ferrebe's work on Elizabeth Taylor's 1950s novels in which she notes that 'Taylor's writing relies upon romance only ultimately to undermine the genre' (Ferrebe, 2010: 61). Yet Pym and Taylor do not disregard the yearning for love, even if it is not to be obtained by means of the traditional romance plot. Their subtle undermining of the genre's conventions places them in the

² Erica Brown provides a comprehensive account of this dichotomy in the conclusion to her 2013 monograph *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth Von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor*.

category of women writers described by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as 'simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 73).

Barbara Pym's novels, *Jane and Prudence* and *Excellent Women*, invite a reading that takes account of conflicts in the desires and needs of spinsters and wives in a cloistered world composed mostly of women confronting the challenges of postwar austerity, both material and sexual. The protagonists' 'quest' is a conflation of the conventional romance with the more realistic prospect of an alternative set of outcomes that might, in a progressive turn, prove favourable to women. Pym exposes, at once mercilessly and with humour, the shortcomings of the men cast in the role of 'romantic lead' and lays bare the realities of married life and the single woman's attempts to attain that dubious position.

Elizabeth Taylor's *A Game of Hide and Seek* and *The Sleeping Beauty* represent a corrupted romance narrative in a manner that emphasises its instability; what Ferrebe refers to as 'Taylor's deployment and deconstruction of the romance genre' (Ferrebe: 62).³ The manner of her deconstruction, however, differs from Pym's realism in its co-option of the motifs of a children's game in one and a fairy tale in the other. The subversive potential of the fairy tale, explored at length by Jack Zipes in his monograph *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, is summarised in his assertion that the literary form of the fairy tale is 'a kind of intervention in a continuous discourse, debate and conflict about power and social relations' (Zipes, 1983: 3). By deploying the fairy tale analogy so openly Taylor engages with the gendered discourse of power

³ Taylor's 1957 novel *Angel*, overtly satirises the romance plot in the form of a parody of the writer Marie Corelli and her popular, though critically disparaged, romance writing. The novels considered here show Taylor's developing interest in deconstructing the romance plot.

intrinsic to the romance in a way that challenges expectations and obscures outcomes. The untypical nature of the romantic 'hero' in Taylor's two novels contributes to the destabilising effect of a plot in which the 'rescue' of the heroine is left unresolved. The first putative hero, Vesey, neither handsome nor physically strong, is, in fact, absent from the scene for prolonged periods of time, pursuing a mediocre acting career – significantly cast as Laertes rather than Hamlet - although his absence and brief reappearances sustain his influence on Harriet, the childhood love. The second, Vinny, is middle-aged, secretly married and, although a sympathetic listener, appears not to be sexually attracted to women nor women to him. He does, nevertheless, undertake a 'rescue' of a kind, albeit with a doubtful prospect of happiness ever after. Paradoxically, such unpromising male characters manage to secure and retain the strong commitment of the female protagonists. Taylor's fairy tale analogy prefigures in a subtle way, and leaving out the certainty of the heroine's fate, Angela Carter's post-second wave re-workings of fairy tales that question the basis of heterosexual romance and foreground aspects of woman's isolation and exploitation before a bold fight back; something suggested in Taylor's use of the signs and symbols of the fairy tale.

Rachel Blau du Plessis offers a helpful way in to the analysis of the novels' subversion of the romance plot. They make a mid-century contribution to what Du Plessis' calls the 'project of twentieth-century women writers to solve the contradiction between love and quest and to replace the alternate endings in marriage and death...by offering a different set of choices' (Du Plessis, 1985: 4). This chapter, in keeping with the objectives of the overall thesis, looks for different choices emerging that would indicate feminist sensibilities at a seemingly inauspicious time of conservative retrenchment combined with the

increased appetite for all forms of classic romance in popular culture. Paradoxically, while none of the novels discussed in this chapter can be described as classic romance, there is in each of them a sense of obstruction that must be negotiated or set aside.

Jane and Prudence and Excellent Women

A recurring focus of critical attention on Barbara Pym's novels - famously rediscovered and re-valued by Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil in 1977 after thirteen years of publishers' refusals - ⁴ is on the representation of women's perception of romance. It is, however, Pym's lack of appetite for imagining the traditional romance narrative that is a consistent preoccupation with critics and commentators. For example, in her chapter on 'Barbara Pym and Romantic Love', Jean E. Kennard observes how Pym consistently subverts the romance (Kennard, 1993: 47), while Estella Tincknell comments on the characters' conflict between 'the intolerable amount of effort romance seems to involve' and the 'desire to be loved' (Tincknell, 2006: 37). Hilary Hinds situates 'domesticity [as] an arena for feminine disappointment' and 'deluded romanticism' (Hinds, 2009: 300) while Ellen Tsagaris' expands at length and exclusively in her monograph *The Subversion of Romance in The Novels of Barbara Pym* (1998). This reading of two of Pym's novels seeks a feminist sensibility hidden behind what amounts to a humorously articulated critique of the romance plot. Women's fascination with romance is represented as a source of perplexity mingled with curiosity and scepticism.

⁴ Both Larkin and Cecil named Pym's work as 'underrated' in a *Times Literary Supplement* survey. She was the only writer to be named by more than one contributor.

This analysis takes an alternative and productive line of inquiry concerning the effect of the educational status of the heroines on their susceptibility to the fantasy of romance. The terms, 'Nymphs and Bluestockings' – the title of Mary Warnock's 1958 article in the journal *The Twentieth Century* special edition on 'Women' - epitomise succinctly the conflicting models for educated women in the mid-century that inform this section. While Jane Nardin asserts that many of Pym's women are 'marginal people' who tend to be 'older, less involved with other people, especially less involved sexually, and tend to have achieved less than the characters of many other novelists', in these two novels three of the female protagonists, Jane Cleveland, Prudence Bates and Helena Napier have university qualifications (Nardin, 1985: 11). Jane has been engaged in academic research at Oxford where she acted as college mentor to Prudence, who is now employed in a role beneath her educational level. The third, Helena Napier in *Excellent Women*, is an anthropological researcher. Pym's characterisation of these three women exemplifies much of what is at stake in an ideological environment subject to uneven progression in women's education and career opportunities. Although marriage retains its position as the pre-eminent aspiration for women, the *plaisirs d'amour* have a powerful pull, either real or vicarious, giving rise to Warnock's ambivalence about 'nymphs and bluestockings'.

Although in the 1950s women's access to higher education was increasing the question of its purpose was still a vexed one. It carried with it the expectation that the educated woman, once married, would cease to pursue a career, an attitude slow to change after the removal of the employment

'marriage bar'.⁵ A popularly held, if reductive, rationale for university education for women emphasised the opportunities for meeting a suitable partner of one's intellectual and social equal. In her article, Mary Warnock considers the implications for women who enter higher education. She dismisses the idea that 'marrying should be regarded as a waste' since she sees that 'the most admirable feature of these (women) is [...] that they appreciate their education for its own sake' (presumably men do not?). Warnock reasons that the corollary of a belief that education is wasted after marriage risks the contention that 'they had better not have any more of it', an attitude she strongly opposes. Such a purist belief in education for its own sake is admirable if, sadly, less commonly held nowadays. However, viewed through a twenty-first-century feminist lens her concession that some women might work after marriage, 'but mainly for financial reasons', appears regressive given that the woman would be serving the interests of the married unit, not her own (Warnock, 1958: 46-47). Nevertheless, at the time her article, written in the context of the recent relaxing of the marriage bar that offered wider career opportunities for women, was perceived as supportive of the broader aims of higher education for women. In 1971, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* takes the argument a stage further in a study that proved to be an important milestone in the developing movement for Women's Liberation. Millett positions an education in the humanities, the academic area most frequently pursued by women, as anachronistic and still unlikely to create the necessary foundation for serious change in their prospects (Millett, 1971: 42-3). Her argument that women must engage with predominantly

⁵ The marriage bar discriminated against married women in public sector professions. Employment was terminated upon marriage. It was not deemed unlawful until the 1960s, although attitudes were rather slower to catch up. It is still an area of contention in the arena of women's employment rights. Although employment tribunals monitor infringements the 'glass ceiling' remains intact in many companies.

masculine disciplines, for example in science and technology, to really achieve parity is still an issue in the twenty-first century when the shortfall of women in the STEM subjects is marked.⁶

For the educated women of the 1950s, however, the impetus that had allowed them access to university tended to stall as they felt the pressure to choose between marriage and a fulfilling career. They could not yet hope to 'have it all'. It is interesting to note that the successful anthropologist, Helena Napier, in *Excellent Women*, who might just qualify as a member of a 'masculine profession' in the hybrid, 'soft' science of anthropology, had proved susceptible to a wartime marriage in the romantic ambience of Italy behind the frontline. The conflict between romance and mutual professional interest that is a 'side-effect' of educating women is highlighted in the novel as Helena falls in love with a male colleague, Everard Bone, notwithstanding her romantic Italian marriage.⁷ Interestingly, in contrast to the ambivalence of the educated woman, Jessie Morrow, the Victorian stereotype 'ladies' companion' in *Jane and Prudence*, actively 'sets her cap at' the vain Fabian Driver and removes him from Prudence's half-hearted clutches. She is, however, exceptional among

⁶ STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. There are active initiatives to encourage more girls into these areas today. The difference between 'soft' and 'hard' sciences implies an emphasis on human behaviour in 'soft' science as opposed to physical and material changes in 'hard' science.

⁷ In 2015, the leading scientist and British Nobel laureate Tim Hunt made his catastrophic statement, for which he was roundly castigated, at the World Conference of Science Journalists in Seoul, South Korea: "Let me tell you about my trouble with girls ... three things happen when they are in the lab ... You fall in love with them, they fall in love with you and when you criticise them, they cry." *The Guardian*: 10.06.15, accessed 16.07.15.

Pym's heroines in using feminine agency to achieve her objective. The watchful, clearly intelligent 'excellent woman', Mildred Lathbury, like Jessie Morrow, of unstated education and limited life choices, observes wistfully and listens with interest to the romantic complications of the married Helena's desires, finding herself briefly, but inconclusively, susceptible to Rocky Napier's charms. Both of Pym's novels convey the powerful pull felt by women at all levels of education to the fascination of romance and, in a naïve yet faintly prurient manner, to the mystery of sex, at the same time as they satirise the truth about marriage.

Jane and Prudence

By sharing the centre of the narrative of *Jane and Prudence* between the under-utilised clergy wife and her younger spinster friend, Pym foregrounds two women displaying opposing attitudes to their life's occupation and romantic engagement. She portrays Jane as a married woman who has very little of substance in her daily round where, as a former high achiever in teaching and research at Oxford, she is now unfitted to the role imposed upon her as a vicar's wife in a rural village. What is more, Jane has failed to meet the expectations of her conventional marriage by producing only one offspring, the capable Flora. Prudence is a younger, differently under-utilised woman also with an Oxford education and now employed in an unspecified clerical role as 'a sort of personal assistant to Dr Grampian' with whom she imagines herself in love (*JP*: 4). Her infatuation with the boss represents a typical trap for the woman at work that undermines both her academic status and an otherwise independent nature. The novel emphasises how Jane's dismissal of Prudence's chosen lifestyle, added to boredom and frustration in her own married role, leads her to occupy herself in trying to find a 'suitable' match for her friend.

In a novel of manners of the mid-twentieth century, Pym's Jane Cleveland recalls Jane Austen's matchmaking Emma Woodhouse.⁸ Bringing the plot forward two hundred years, however, she also offers an Anglican clergy wife's prototype of Betty Friedan's 'problem that has no name' (Friedan, 1963); a connection that has wide resonance within the broad parameters of this thesis and is considered in depth in the analysis of Penelope Mortimer's *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* in chapter four. Jane's project would, perversely, lock her educated and under-stimulated friend into a situation like her own. Her Austenian parameters are suitably narrow; composed of the Church, the social life of the parish, and a shared interest in the romantic liaisons of the characters. Yet Prudence, an early prototype of the liberated single woman, occupies her life pleasurably with love affairs and her work. The two female types, married and stubbornly single, are well realised in the characters of Jane and Prudence who, in representing opposing aspirations, highlight the conflicted positions of women in changing times. Significantly, although their association and lasting friendship originated at an elevated seat of learning, it is the preoccupation with the romance of new relationships on Prudence's part and the hope for a proper resolution in marriage on Jane's that dominates the narrative of their association. The confusion that surrounds the two, however, emphasises the uncertainty about what it is a woman really wants, or should want. Rather than opening new vistas of possibility to women, their educational experience actively contributes to a nagging ambivalence.

⁸ Barbara Pym's fiction has often been described as a twentieth-century manifestation of Jane Austen's novels. There are indeed many resonances with Austen's themes in the two novels considered here in terms of setting, plot and characterisation although, as Janice Rossen asserts, while Pym can be placed in an English literary tradition, she is 'the creator of her own distinctive style' (Rossen.1988: 6).

This ambivalence is made evident in the novel in the form of matriarchal pressure dictating the norms to which the educated woman should adhere. In her address at the Oxford reunion their former tutor, Miss Birkinshaw, prefigures Mary Warnock's discourse on the dilemma facing educated women. Miss Birkinshaw, however, shows no progressive alteration to her entrenched views on women's nature and roles. She 'liked her Old Students to be clearly labelled – the clergymen's wives, the other wives and those who had "fulfilled" themselves in less obvious ways, with novels or social work or a brilliant career in the Civil Service' (*JP*: 4). Her limited range of accepted futures for educated women, however, does not radically alter the normative performance of gender through marriage and motherhood, with allowance for fulfilment in 'less obvious ways'. It is not surprising then, that Prudence's position outside these narrow parameters incurs disapproval. There is further pressure on her to conform to the stereotype since she is, at twenty-nine, reaching 'an age ...rather desperate for a woman who has not yet married', yet still without a 'brilliant career' (*JP*: 4). Jane's efforts to lead Prudence towards one of the roles sanctioned at the Oxford reunion, that of wife and mother, deny Prudence's agency by attempting to achieve that end without reference to her friend's mature wishes.

Although the interest that Pym's female characters have in all aspects of romance supports the impression that it dominates women's lives, the novel also undermines the myth by laying out a more prosaic version of married life. For example, Jane's memories of her husband's 'delphinium blue eyes' are cut short by her thought that 'a middle-aged man – and he is that now, poor darling – can't have delphinium blue eyes' (*JP*: 1). She remembers, too, the 'strange and wonderful things that men could make women do!' such as trying to learn Swedish or Greek (*JP*: 171). The question of women's adaptation to men's

interests is a telling one. Learning such difficult languages to be more attractive to a man is something accessible largely to the educated woman, already proven to have the aptitude, but the question of making this kind of effort to win the man is not too far from the advice columns of women's magazines. Jane accepts that it falls to women to create the conditions for a romance to blossom although with a sadness that the pleasures dwindle after what Carolyn Heilbrun calls a 'brief period in the limelight ... to encourage the acceptance of a lifetime of marginality' in married life (Heilbrun, 1988: 21). It is perhaps surprising that her location in this liminal position nonetheless leads Jane to seek a suitable marriage for Prudence. Interestingly, in *Westwood*, Margaret Steggles' mother takes it one step further in encouraging a life of potential misery for her daughter. Another perspective is that of Liz's husband, Arthur, in *A Wreath of Roses*, who feels himself and the institution of marriage threatened by the unmarried Camilla.

Sex, however, is only obliquely mentioned in the novel, and then with the expectation of female restraint and a bemused acceptance of masculine needs. Pym uses a comic passage to express the individual impressions about men held by the women of the parish in an exchange of views between Miss Doggett, an elderly spinster, and Jane about 'what men really want':

"We do know that men are not like women [...]
Men are very passionate," she said in a low
tone [...]. "But you and I Mrs Cleveland – well I
am an old woman and you are married, so we
can admit honestly what men are."

"You mean that they only want one thing?" said
Jane.

"Well yes that is it. We know what it is"

"Typing a man's thesis, correcting proofs,
putting sheets sides-to-middle, bringing up
children, balancing the housekeeping budget –
all these things are nothing really" said Jane in
a sad, thoughtful tone (*JP*: 136).

The views of the sexually inexperienced older women in Pym's novel are humorously reflected in Taylor's *In a Summer Season* in the characters Aunt Ethel and her friend Gertrude who attribute heightened libido to warm climates and the consumption of olives. While the sayings of the cloistered women give a naïve view of what men want, the truth about what women really want remains elusive and the atmosphere of disappointment implies that they are not receiving it.⁹ Jane's insight into what men really want shifts from the prurience of Miss Doggett to the childlike ordinariness of daily life: "If it is true that men only want one thing", Jane wonders, "is it perhaps just to be left to themselves with their soap animals or some other harmless little trifle?" (*JP*: 138). Pym's use of humour effectively debunks the myths of what both men and women want and with it the myth of romance.

The novel challenges the constraint on women's proactive pursuit of sexual liaisons in the representation of the efforts of Miss Doggett's knowing companion Jessie Morrow to seduce Fabian Driver, the vain widower who has placed a photograph of himself on his wife's grave. The gulf in formal educational standards between Jessie and Prudence in this instance is not an inhibiting factor to Jessie's plan of action; it might in fact be an extra incentive in the contest played out at afternoon tea in Fabian's garden. Jessie is anxious to deprive her rival of the symbolically power-laden task of pouring tea that would suggest prominence in Fabian's household. In an act calculated to remove Prudence from the domestic scene she hopes soon to dominate, Jessie deliberately spills tea over Prudence's dress - a telling metaphor for spoiling her

⁹ The question of what women 'really, really want' is returned to many times in popular culture of the following decades; most famously by The Spice Girls in the refrain of their 1996 hit record 'Wannabe' which instigated an outbreak of 'Girl Power' that encouraged women take the sexual initiative. In more learned considerations, even Freud confessed himself puzzled by the conundrum of what women want.

rival's attractions. However, Fabian and Prudence are not set on a romantic liaison, leaving the pitch clear for Jessie to spend her half-days off with Fabian in a teashop and later, suggestively, in the privacy of his own home. For her campaign, Jessie sheds the subservient role and becomes the 'nymph' or *femme fatale*. Her proactive strategy is successful in achieving the promise of matrimony that will release her from a life of service. She uses her sexual agency to compete with Prudence and, unusually for a Pym spinster, she gets what she wants.

Jane and Prudence's preoccupation with matchmaking, although differently executed, reveals opposing feminine attitudes to the vexed questions of romance, love and marriage. The position of the two friends at each end of the spectrum, one entrenched in marriage the other happily single, offers an object lesson both in the power of the romantic and the realistically limited options for women who still need, above all else, to gain security. While Jessie Morrow's path to security lies in the unabashed use of sex to obtain Fabian Driver's commitment, the contrasting views of Jane and Prudence make clear the ambiguity about what women want and what they might expect to have. With the benefit of their high level of education ought it to be that they had the world to choose from? Jane's regretful thought: "All the things one was going to do, the books one was going to write" is nonetheless qualified by "the brilliant marriages one was going to make" (*JP*: 183). She seems to want to 'have it all' and, in a not too distant future she might, but for the time being she uses her energies in the lower level game of matchmaking for Prudence. Her failure to understand Prudence's stance is what animates the novel's dilemmas in which, rather than attempt an understanding, Jane's is a stereotypically feminine and somewhat archaic response that ignores Prudence's preferences.

The novel demonstrates that while neither of the protagonists enjoys the personal satisfactions to be gained from their status as 'Bluestockings', they each have a measure of economic security attributable directly or indirectly to their education; Jane married to a vicar with a 'living' and Prudence employed in a comparatively well-paid job. Jane's plans in the pursuit of romance on behalf of her friend are outdone by the wily, but less well-educated, Jessie Morrow. Nevertheless, the fantasy remains intact for Prudence who will continue to indulge in short-lived but enjoyable love affairs and take advantage of a way of life that transgresses the norm. Prudence is the personification of a female agency in which, through her pursuit of romance, she marks out an individual path to pleasure that avoids the inevitability of marriage. She is, in a sense, a prototype for the twenty-first century definition of spinster proposed in 2015 by Kate Bolick in *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own*, in which she describes the growing phenomenon of women who work out how to live their lives in or out of marriage - a position admirably prefigured by Miss Ranskill in her freely chosen celibacy and the devotion of her restored life to the useful support of others.¹⁰ Bolick's account highlights how prescient were Pym's portrayals of the spinster wishing to lead a 'full life'. Bolick writes to deny her opening comment, a parody of Austen, that 'whom to marry and when will it happen [are] two questions that define every woman's existence', before setting out some less conventional options (Bolick: 1). She suggests a new definition of 'spinster' that might also apply to a married woman leading an independent life. Sadly though, for Jane Cleveland in the 1950s this is not yet available either by education or career.

¹⁰ A sample survey of 15,000 women carried out by the Office for National Statistics in 2013 found that fewer than 50% of women over the age of 16 were married and one in five childless at the age of 45, the highest proportion since the 1920s when the aftermath of the First World War limited the numbers of marriageable men

Jessie Morrow, on the other hand, bereft of education or other prospects, exploits her sexual agency in a manner that produces the desired improvement in her status (and demonstrates a milder version of Deborah Robertson's sexual exploits for gain in *To Bed with Grand Music* considered in chapter four).

In contrast to Jessie Morrow's cleverly laid plans, Jane and Prudence's opposing attitudes towards romance are summarised at the end of the novel in a conversation between them in which Jane tries to understand Prudence's thinking. As Jane considers the inauspicious pairing, that she had no part in forming, of Prudence and Geoffrey Manifold - an 'ordinary and colourless young man' - she meditates on the feminine skills that support masculine inadequacies: 'that was why women were so wonderful; it was their love and imagination that transformed these unremarkable beings' (*JP*: 236). Jane's insight credits women with qualities of self-sacrifice that require the exercise of effort and imagination to sustain unequal heterosexual relationships. Pym's ironic demolition of heteronormative expectations must surely be claimed as inchoate feminism.

Jane's probing into the relationship with Geoffrey only succeeds in establishing that they "get on quite well together [...] it's the attraction of opposites really. But of course it wouldn't *do* at all". Prudence explains the paradox to a puzzled Jane. "Everything would be spoilt if anything came of it. [...] That's almost the best thing about it". Jane's incomprehension makes her feel 'very humble and inexperienced before such subtleties', more so when Prudence explains, with a smile on her face; "We shall probably hurt each other very much before it's finished, but we're doomed really" (*JP*: 235). Jane is perplexed by these revelations, wondering whether it must be 'rather depressing to embark on a love affair that one knew to be doomed from the

start?'. Yet it seemed that 'people were doing it all the time, plunging boldly in with no thought of future misery' (*JP*: 236). In an interesting contrast the scenario of interference in romance plays out differently in *A Game of Hide and Seek* where Harriet is discouraged from recognising openly her feelings for Vesey, yet, as a result still suffers 'future misery'. The link between romance and misery is clear, but, as Jane recognises, the pull is mysteriously irresistible.

Fittingly, Jane's best chance of understanding the complexities of love is drawn from her elevated status as a scholar. She grasps at Andrew Marvell's seventeenth-century 'Definition of Love' to clarify the situation for them both:

*"Therefore the Love which us doth join
But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the Conjunction of the Mind,
And Opposition of the Stars"*
(original italics, cited in *JP*: 235)

Although Jane is to an extent redeemed by the knowledge and understanding of a bluestocking, Prudence reserves that option for another day but for now she will perform more happily as a nymph. Nevertheless, Pym's imagined women confront many of the issues that will soon preoccupy feminist discourses and it is in this respect that the novel represents a progressive impulse in favour of choice for women.

Excellent Women

Barbara Pym had first introduced a 'systematic attack on the romantic love plot' in her debut novel *Excellent Women*, published just a year before *Jane and Prudence* (Kennard, 1993: 44). However, the effect of the war is palpable in this novel that, while conceived in the early postwar period, was not published until 1952. The aftermath of war was experienced most acutely through a scarcity of commodities in the feminine areas of focus of food and

clothing, living space, and eligible men. This added to the undercurrent of loss amidst an atmosphere of resignation to the inevitability of shortfalls in every area of life. It is this postwar milieu of lack that brings together in Pym's novel the participants of unlikely romance plots in scarce, short-term rented accommodation in London. Mildred Lathbury, the novel's narrator, is a spinster of thirty living alone in London in a 'house in multiple occupation'.¹¹ The novel draws upon a postwar ambience in which female characters who have known different times stand as testimony to women's fortitude in the face of the destruction of a way of life and an unpredictable future. The impact of improvements in women's status during and after the war appears to have been limited for the 'excellent women' in the novel and the ways in which they fill their lives give scant indication of the benefits of the employment, welfare and legal transformations of the material conditions of women. Yet, from the allegedly becalmed area between two manifestations of feminism, the representation of a way of life feeds into the discourse about the viability and desirability of a position for women outside of marriage proposed in the twenty-first century by Kate Bolick. Laura Doan's impression of Pym's women anticipates some of the changes that Bolick describes. Doan notes that Pym endorses women like Mildred in whom

mere self-acceptance gives way to a more radical and subversive strategy designed to question the very validity of marriage. The life of a spinster only *seems* dreary to those on the outside [...] the lifestyle is a viable option and often preferred (Doan, 1991: 140).

¹¹ The shortage of housing following the war forced many people to share houses and bathroom and kitchen facilities in a manner hitherto unfamiliar to many of them.

The subversive undertone in Pym's novel reveals a broader-based vision for women not generally viable until the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Whether the single option is preferred or inevitable, Mildred is another of Pym's heroines whose curiosity is compellingly drawn towards the puzzling mismatch between romance and the state of marriage in which she sees no semblance of former or current passion. The figure of the president's wife, knitting and nodding off at the Learned Society meeting, should have been a warning to Mildred about a future occupied with proofreading and making an index that marriage to a researcher would bring.¹² The throwaway comment issued by Everard Bone – the priapically-named anthropologist and 'love interest' of Helena and later, ironically and conclusively, of Mildred – that '[a]fter all, it's what wives are for' (*EW*: 104) may be mischievous but is nonetheless true to his world-view. The 'happily ever after' resolution of the romance plot is comprehensively undermined.

The novel's thematic concern is foregrounded on the opening page when Mildred betrays a sardonic ambivalence towards marriage; although she concedes that she quite enjoys living alone she is also aware of other people's negative perception of her as a single woman. She introduces her predicament in a pastiche of Jane Austen:

I suppose an unmarried woman just over thirty, who lives alone and has no apparent ties, must expect to find herself involved or interested in other people's business, and if she is also a clergyman's daughter then one might really say that there is no hope for her (*EW*: 1).

¹² Mildred does exactly this as revealed in passing in Pym's later novels, among them *Jane and Prudence* (1953) in which Miss Doggett receives a letter from Mildred telling of her marriage to Everard Bone.

Mildred's observant, first-person narration in the novel is characterised by introspective, intertextual self-deprecation. Her claim that she is 'not at all like Jane Eyre, who must have given hope to so many plain women' introduces a harsh self-judgement, and one that falsely disassociates her from the tradition of Victorian fiction that still shaped women's expectations even after the war (*EW*: 2). Yet her denial is disingenuous since she does bear comparison to her literary antecedent. She may justifiably be positioned as an anti-romantic heroine, who, despite her dowdy lifestyle, has a lively interest in people and a quietly intelligent manner of assessing their characters. Like Jane Eyre, Mildred's mode of life is essentially focussed on an ethic of duty and service and like Jane, she yearns for something more. Mildred is also susceptible to an archetypal romantic hero - the hyperbolically named Rockingham Napier - who is the source of a brief and unfamiliar excitement, and whose name clearly resonates with Rochester.

The opposing figures of Mildred the spinster and Helena the educated wife highlight the state of flux governing two female positions at this moment in history. Mildred's postwar world contains more spinsters than married women so her curiosity in observing a marriage at close quarters is readily aroused. In a style that sets the scene for future disappointments, Mildred's first meeting with Mrs Napier is an undignified moment at the shared dustbins, rather than her imagined 'gracious civilised occasion, with my best coffee cups on little silver dishes' (*EW*: 3). The contrast between the two, the dowdy spinster and the modern wife, is suggested in Mildred's thumbnail description:

[Helena] was fair-haired and pretty, gaily dressed in corduroy trousers and a bright jersey, while I, mousy and rather plain, drew attention to these qualities with my shapeless overall and old fawn skirt (*EW*: 3).

Helena is the third female character in the two novels considered here to have a university education but unlike Jane and Prudence she has a career that absorbs her. However, she is conscious of the need for a convincing performance of femininity in her role, fearing that '[one] mustn't *look* like a female anthropologist'. Her attitude is reminiscent of Tory's in *A View of the Harbour* though more closely aligned with Joan Rivière's notion of 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' that observes professional women taking care to appear hyper-feminine to succeed in male professional spheres.¹³ While Helena appears at the Learned Society meeting looking 'very elegant in black', Mildred's brown dress is not improved by the addition of a new hat (*EW*: 95-96). The inclusion of details of colour in the descriptions of clothes resonates in a period in which the introduction of colour to movies and magazines enhances images of sexuality, style and hence, of romance. Where Mildred is imagined in the sepia tones of a Victorian photograph, Helena appears in the 'glorious Technicolor' of a film star. Christian Dior's 'New Look', and the iconic 'little black dress' - designed in 1947 and seized upon voraciously by cheaper imitators in response to the huge demand - had offered welcome relief from the meanness of wartime utility clothing. Mildred, who has only worn black in mourning, looks on Helena's elegance in a black dress, set off by her fair hair and complexion and 'some brilliant touch of colour or "important jewel" as one was told to do in the women's magazines' as confirming that Helena knows how to dress fashionably (*EW*: 279). Helena is, in Mary Warnock's terms, both 'nymph and bluestocking', like Prudence, a blueprint for the later twentieth-century career woman (Warnock: 144).

¹³ It is significant that Joan Rivière published 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' in 1929, the year after women over 21 attained the right to vote.

Mildred finds the pairing of Rocky and Helena Napier both fascinating and appalling because of the apparent absence of neither passionately reciprocated romance nor of evidence of a companionate marriage. While Helena is absorbed in a life in the public sphere through her anthropological research, she is a poor fit for the domestic role. Mildred's shock at Helena's lack of 'wifely' attributes is moderated by her musing that 'perhaps Rockingham with his love of Victoriana also enjoyed cooking, for I had observed that men did not usually do things unless they liked doing them', a cutting appraisal of the motivations of men as selfish as opposed to women's as self-denying (*EW*. 6). The disjunction between Helena's role as married woman and career academic is confusing to Mildred who casts her as eccentric. Helena's failure to adhere to the conventional narrative of the middle-class wife undermines the cultural inscriptions that marriage is supposed to reproduce. She is an intelligent and sexually attractive woman who actively sustains her sexual allure after marriage at the same time as she strives to succeed in the male domain of anthropology; a confusing anomaly for Mildred but an example of the incipient tendency towards a new version of independent womanhood.

Helena's own assessment of her married situation is clear-sighted and blunt. She had not looked forward to the return of her husband from his extended posting overseas, confiding to Mildred that 'we met at a party during the war and fell in love in the silly romantic way people did then. You know...' (*EW*: 25). Her cool dismissal of romance as 'silly' suggests a view that it is not a solid basis for marriage but one that, in the extraordinary circumstances of war, had progressed rapidly to matrimony. Mildred understands this all too well, albeit at second-hand. Her occupation in the Censorship Office during the war had often made her wish 'to intervene and tell them to wait...' when faced with

young people rushing to make wartime marriages, with potentially disastrous consequences.¹⁴ Mildred holds onto the 'romantic ideals of the unmarried'; aspiring to the perfect match or nothing at all. In contrast Helena, in pointing to Rocky's possession of a good fortune, handsome looks and charm, describes qualities that would have impressed a Jane Austen heroine rather more than a twentieth-century careerist who finds his lack of interest in anthropology grounds for a charge of incompatibility (*EW*: 25-27). Helena is written as a strong, assertive, self-defining woman; features that introduce in the minds of the community of 'excellent women' an underlying suspicion, even fear.

Curiously Mildred, possessing none of these transgressive characteristics, reveals a grudging admiration for Helena's unconventional turn of mind. She is convinced that Helena would never become one of the 'impoverished gentlewomen' whom she serves in her part-time job (*EW*: 27). The pursuit of her colleague Everard Bone suggests on the one hand a belief in the freedom to engage in an extra-marital affair at the same time as it undermines the basis of her marriage, wilfully disregarded for the sake of a commonality of interest with and sexual attraction to Everard. In disclaiming any desire to marry Helena, even if she were not already married, Everard reveals a fear of Helena's 'type' and expresses instead his admiration for an 'excellent woman' of another kind, his colleague Esther Clovis, who could do so much to help him in his work. Mildred's alarm that Everard should consider marrying an 'excellent woman' brings her to articulate her belief that on the contrary 'they are for being unmarried ...and by that I mean a positive rather than a negative

¹⁴ The postwar rise in divorce included many hurried marriages such as these. The divorce rate both in Britain and USA decreased during the 1950s but rose again in the 1960s and 1970s (Jessica Weiss. 2000: 179).

state'; a belief that gives weight to Doan's suggestion, restated and extended by Bolick, that it is a viable option for women to choose to remain single (*EW*: 213).

The excellence of the women in the novel lies not in the arena of education, career or creative endeavour but in the feminine skills of coping. Mildred knows herself to be 'capable of dealing with most of the stock situations or even the great moments of life – birth, marriage, death, the successful jumble sale, the garden fête spoilt by bad weather [...] "Mildred is such a help to her father", people used to say after my mother died' (*EW*: 3). She finds herself replicating her mother's role as a vicar's helpmate with none of the assumed advantages of marriage. Mildred voices a subtle challenge to a position in which the coping qualities she lists are undervalued in the same manner as 'women's work' in general. The injustice of the absence of validation for all the things women do is to become one of the rallying cries of second wave feminist demands for recognition of the value of domestic labour.

Pym's endorsement of 'excellent women', while in some ways appealing to the feminist reader, nonetheless retains the notion of service to men. Mildred observes that 'it was not the excellent women who got married but people like Allegra Gray who was not good at sewing and Helena Napier who left all the washing- up', women who are short of domestic attributes but possess 'other' elusive qualities (*EW*: 158). Her understanding of what makes a woman marriageable stems conspicuously from the idealised version of the good housewife propagated not just by state and media after the war, but also by the effects of her upbringing. For Mildred, however, the reality shown in the narrative is disturbingly different from her ideal. In line with the double standard, Rocky's stereotypical masculine charm excuses his philandering while Helena is subject to disapproval for her unbecoming pursuit of a man with whom she

has more in common than her husband. Like Prudence, Helena disrupts expectations of gendered behaviour in a way that previsions the progressive impetus of the 1960s and onwards.

The acceptance of a self-denying, caring role combined with a reluctance to countenance a threat to the sanctity of marriage is briefly threatened by Mildred's romantic attraction to Rocky Napier. Her infatuation with Rocky initiates a short-lived vision of romantic awakening when the defiant purchase of a lipstick named 'Hawaiian Fire' signifies an impulse to break out of the constraints of her position. Unable to sustain the 'masquerade', however, Mildred simply embarrasses herself and regains her earlier suspicion of the myth of romance.

With a touch of irony typical of Pym, Mildred will eventually 'land' the man whom Helena desired, while Rocky and Helena separate to work out a renewed basis for their relationship.¹⁵ The resolution for Mildred is, however, conspicuously devoid of romance. Correcting proofs and making an index is to be her lot after all. Although she sees the merits of a 'full life' in serving the needs of others she is destined to settle for less. The disappointing prospect (for this reader) of marriage to Everard highlights the force of a socially constructed feminine sense of duty that subverts arguments for a different way of living for women. Romance and marriage remain separate and differently desired entities for Helena and Mildred. Pym not only exposes the myth of romance in the representation of the Napiers' marriage, she proposes an alternative scenario that privileges compatibility of interest and temperament over passion, more like the relationship between Reid and Miss Ranskill.

¹⁵ In a technique often used by Pym in which characters reappear in subsequent novels, it is revealed that Mildred and Everard Bone marry and Helena and Rocky Napier are later reconciled and have a child.

The undermining of the romance plot in *Jane and Prudence* and *Excellent Women* is executed with the kind of 'humour, wit, and comic effect' that Sophie Blanch suggests is a distinctive feature of a group of British women writers whose work effectively 'underscore[s] their own social, sexual and artistic differences' (Blanch in Joannou, 2012 (2015): 114).¹⁶ The evident disappointment inherent in women's experience described in the two novels is a salient feature of Pym's style that proposes realistic contemporary truths about the attractions and disappointments of romance and the shortcomings of marriage. She exposes the dilemma in deciding 'what women want' and what they should be entitled to achieve.

A Game of Hide and Seek and The Sleeping Beauty

Childish Games and Fairy Tales

In a different manner to Barbara Pym's two novels, Elizabeth Taylor's 1950s' novels also shine a spotlight on the condition of being a woman at a time when femininity was experiencing a transformation; a 'facelift' after the ugliness of wartime. As pointed out earlier, the time of the publication of Taylor's two novels coincides with the renewed popularity of romance in literature and popular culture but although they contain some of the ingredients of the classic romance, their outcomes overturn the traditional version. The suggestion implicit in both titles is of a child's route through an adult experience that, echoing every parent's warning, is likely to end in tears. This section considers Taylor's analogy of a children's game and her extended deployment of the fairy

¹⁶ These include Virginia Woolf, Edith Sitwell, Stella Gibbons, Rosamund Lehmann, EM Delafield, Rose Macaulay, Ivy Compton-Burnett.

tale genre, tentatively in *A Game of Hide and Seek* and more explicitly in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

A Game of Hide and Seek

No road was before her. Only a thicket of briers (*GOHS*: 131)

A title that corresponds to a children's game introduces a vacillating romance plot that reveals the tension between a young woman's yearning for love and the need for domestic security. *A Game of Hide and Seek* disrupts the conventionality of the romance plot and of social norms through a series of unsatisfactorily brief and inconclusive encounters between the putative lovers, Harriet Claridge and Vesey Macmillan. The eponymous game of hide and seek that began in their childhood continues during the adult Vesey's absences and periods of quiescence in Harriet's marriage to someone else. The novel engages with the romance plot at the same time as it undermines it in what Alice Ferrebe has called 'a broken narrative' that offers an ambiguous resolution to a long-deferred childhood love rather than a happy ending (Ferrebe: 56). This reading considers the novel's problematic positioning of romance as an immature, even childish experience in opposition to the desired security of marriage as the fate of a mature woman.

The essence of the narrative is distilled through the unfulfilled love story of Harriet and Vesey who play the game of hide and seek for most of their lives. By the age of eighteen, after many childhood summers spent with Vesey, Harriet is overwhelmed by a deepening love first for the boy then for the man whose 'personality had for long influenced hers, as the moon influences the sea, with an unrelenting and inescapable control' (*GOHS*: 11). This poetically expressed influence has a periodically turbulent effect on the course of a life

dominated by a repeatedly thwarted but never extinguished love. Taylor characterises Harriet and Vesey as outsiders who are drawn together in their failure to live up to the expectations of others. The barely disguised disappointment of her mother Lilian in her daughter's refusal of scholarly effort places Harriet outside the aspirations of her feminist foremothers. Vesey is also out of tune with the expectations of his uncle Hugo who, married to Lilian's closest friend Caroline, feels a sense of disappointment in the lack of a tangible legacy of the reforming zeal that he shared with Caroline and Lilian in their youth. Hugo's antipathy towards his nephew, whom he considers to be physically and intellectually inferior to him, demonstrates a disheartening inter-generational dissonance. His participation alongside the 'feisty suffragettes' in a culturally and politically radical period of the early twentieth century means little to the next generation.¹⁷ Hugo, whom Taylor satirises for having 'gone on being Rupert Brooke all through the war – a tremendous achievement', finds in Vesey's heedless ignorance of the estimable socialist poet, Edward Carpenter - homosexual advocate of sexual freedoms and supporter of the suffrage campaign – an endorsement of his mistrust of the young man (*GOHS*: 12).¹⁸ Taylor's backward glance at the history of feminist struggle and sexual enlightenment highlights the phenomenon of ideals that fade over time. The novel juxtaposes this diminishing political relevance with a romance plot in which the outcome does not reflect that expected of Jameson's 'social contract', replacing the 'quest' with sustained disappointment, mitigated only at brief

¹⁷ The issue of intergenerational conflict is discussed more fully in chapter five.

¹⁸ As well as a radical socialist and activist for sexual freedoms, Edward Carpenter (1844 – 1929) was a poet, philosopher and friend of many important figures, including William Morris, Havelock Ellis, John Ruskin, Isadora Duncan, Annie Besant, Olive Schreiner. He influenced D.H. Lawrence and is thought to have been the inspiration for E.M. Forster's *Maurice*.

moments along the way and having an ultimately tragic, albeit powerfully affective, ending.

Taylor disrupts the formula by including some of the typical characteristics of the romance in the novel, the most significant of which Janice Radway describes as 'a slowly but consistently developing love between hero and heroine' (Radway, 1987: 66). For a narrative that withholds the expected ending it nonetheless has the power to evoke an emotional response. Although the impression of a 'consistently developing love' is weighted on Harriet's side, there are scattered moments when the smouldering mutual love might burst into flame but does not; a device that adds to the suspense of a narrative that frustrates the traditional expectation of the romance plot. Additionally, Taylor's scenes contain elements of the fairy tale romance – something she revisits more explicitly in *The Sleeping Beauty* – as she teases the reader into dead-ends of frustrated hope at points along the way. Scenes set in a wood, in a deserted house and, most evocatively, at a ball, resonate with a fairy tale romance that, perversely, is left unresolved.

Harriet and Vesey's walk in the woods is described in language conveying an atmosphere of restriction and menace that typically sets the scene for a fairy tale:

Plunging through dead leaves, they were obliged to walk in single file, twigs snapped under their feet, briars tripped them. Cool and vast, the wood seemed a whole world; the light was aqueous; when a cuckoo gave its broken, explosive cry it echoed like a shout in a closed swimming bath – for some reason, chilling and hysterical as these sounds are (*GOHS*: 18).

The paralysing shyness between the two, in what might have been the perfect spot for a tryst, is almost broken by the touch of Vesey's hand over Harriet's and a tentative embrace against a tree. Here Taylor expresses Harriet's

response to Vesey's touch in an uninhibited romantic style, leaving an impression of enchantment accentuated by the repeated analogy of swimming.

She seemed to have stepped over into another world; confused as though the demarcation had been between life and death, she imagined herself swimming, floating, in a strange element where hearing and sight no longer existed (GOHS: 19).

While Harriet's nervousness reduces the intimacy to a kiss on the cheek, Vesey's loss of nerve mingled with relief at dodging the consequences of a scene about her future draws the cruelly dismissive comment; 'Someone will marry you' – a promise not unlike 'someday your prince will come' - but it will not be him (GOHS: 21). The attraction that Vesey feels towards Harriet is stunted by the difference in their respective aspirations. Harriet's blush at his ambition to be a writer not of novels – 'Virginia Woolf has brought it (the novel) to the edge of ruin' - but of *belles lettres*, reveals her ignorance of literature and the arts (GOHS: 17). Even as they are confirmed as outsiders by their deviation from the path earmarked by Harriet's mother, Lilian, and Hugo and Caroline, the gulf between Harriet's uninstructed state and Vesey's overblown ambition separates them. At this moment, for Harriet love is indeed 'the only possible interpreter', an idea dismissed by Virginia Woolf's famously imagined, and often cited, novelist "Mary Carmichael" in *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf, 1929: 97). Yet, in stereotypical fashion, Harriet's whole, youthful existence revolves around her thoughts on Vesey, while for him love is 'a thing apart'.¹⁹

¹⁹ From Lord Byron's 'Don Juan', Donna Julia's letter. Canto I lines 17-18

Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence.

The youthful pair are no more in command of their own fate than they will be in maturity and the role played by other people in the frustration of their unacknowledged love is deeply inhibiting. The deserted house where they play hide and seek is another space of potential enchantment in which the young Harriet's desire for Vesey is first awakened then blocked by the children's calls. Flustered by this intrusion, Vesey's dismissal of Harriet's finer feelings leaves no time to redeem his careless responses before they are forced away from each other. The untimely death of her mother causes a further redrawing of Harriet's life trajectory. There is, as Vesey had predicted, someone who will marry her; a rigid and conventional man - significantly named Charles - who offers security and a comfortable home just as Flaubert's Bovary provides for Emma. Tempted into marriage after her mother's death Harriet, more cautious than Madame Bovary, is inhibited for many years from actively pursuing her passion for Vesey at first by a fear of rejection and, once married, by the conventions of feminine behaviour. Harriet continues to develop a sexual need without romantic love; a need that disconcerts Charles when he first kisses her.

She embraced him with an erratic but extortionate passion. He was profoundly moved, though shocked by her desperation, and felt pity for her and a sense of responsibility. But to her, life seemed all at once simplified. She was elevated and appeased (*GOHS*: 88).

As Harriet approaches a renewed sexual awakening she once more stops short. Haunted by the memory of children's voices she is beset by a 'flurried shame' and her confusion at the 'nature of love' becomes unbearable (*GOHS*: 95). Charles' shock at the ardour of her sensuality is indicative of the dominant masculine view of the inappropriateness of the open expression of

sexual desire by respectable women.²⁰ Repression is powerfully at work in the 1950s (this is before the release of the Kinsey reports), when female desire is still considered less than decent, an attitude endorsed by Charles's reaction.²¹ Inhibited by Charles' recoil from the physicality of her passion, Harriet returns instead to reflecting on the disembodied nature of the love she harbours for Vesey. The separation of sexual desire from love exposes the inhibitions facing women in fulfilling their physical needs before sexuality was once more released from censure by the so-called 'sexual revolution'. Harriet's shame and confusion about love also reveals the inchoate nature of her desire for Vesey, a childlike attachment that remains pure because it is not consummated. Unable, too, to move on from his immature emotions, Vesey's personality displays what Clare Hanson describes as 'an oscillation or instability [...] as though he cannot connect the love which he feels with sexual desire for her'; a position that puts into question Vesey's own sexuality (Hanson: 86). So, as a prerequisite of the resolved romance plot, anticipated sexual fulfilment remains absent from Harriet and Vesey's story, at least for the time being.

As a measure of Taylor's broader engagement with the culture of her time the final section of the novel recalls the almost contemporaneous film *Brief Encounter*,²² a movie that, as Gill Plain observes, represents 'the force of physical desire while simultaneously rejecting it in favour of stable, rational conventionality' (Plain, 2013: 74). Taylor tantalises the reader through a series of 'brief encounters' over the years - sufficient to sustain Harriet's love for Vesey

²⁰ Taylor's representation of Harriet's experience of sexual desire before the so-called 'sexual revolution' provisions the debates around sexuality, gender and subjectivity.

²¹ The Kinsey reports on Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male, and Sexual Behaviour in the Human female, researched in the USA, were published in 1948 and 1953 respectively.

²² The film, *Brief Encounter* (1945) directed by David Lean was based on Noel Coward's play *Still Life* (1936) with Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard in the leading roles.

and which endorse Oscar Wilde's lament, (from the lips of Mrs Cheveley in the play *An Ideal Husband*), that 'it is every woman's tragedy that her past is always her lover and her future invariably her husband' (Wilde, 1895. Act iii). In Vesey's absence Harriet's metamorphosis into the stereotypical 1940s middle-class suburban wife echoes that of Laura Jesson, the heroine of *Brief Encounter*. They each perform the role to perfection, taking virtuous care of child and husband, engaging in shopping excursions to town, taking a close interest in the child's education, managing the home, and visiting the cinema and lending library on a weekly basis. Harriet is aware that, '[W]hen she had married Charles she had seemed to wed also a social order' (*GOHS*: 262). Her life disrupted by the circumstances of her mother's death, a hasty marriage and Vesey's exit, Harriet appears to have made a bargain with herself to repress true feeling for the sake of stability, family and economic security. However, unlike Laura Jesson, who is urged by her own and her lover's consciences to curtail their seven-week long affair, Harriet's long-lasting yearning for Vesey is the force that ultimately draws her towards him and away from the domestic sanctuary.

The decisive reconnection of the childhood lovers happens almost twenty years on, significantly at a dance, that marks the start of their grown-up love affair. The reunion is rendered through a re-working of *Brief Encounter* initiated in a scene lifted from the fairy tale *Cinderella*. Describing Harriet and Vesey's reunion, Taylor introduces the 'prince' but omits the heroine's downtrodden poverty and, in a reversal of events, it is the prince who disappears. Harriet's worldly friend Kitty recognises the correspondence.

"I felt something rehearsed yet fatal about you,
a part of a ballet, perhaps – yes that – his just
coming out of the crowd and claiming you, then

disappearing [...] the clock might almost have struck twelve" (*GOHS*: 144).

The scene is a pastiche not only of the fairy story but also of the formulaic Hollywood musical weighted with romantic resonances. It seems that Kitty fears that "there may be trouble ahead" seeing Vesey gathering up Harriet to "face the music and dance" the sexually charged tango as a public flaunting of his power over her.²³ The couple make their own music, almost audibly to the reader, while occupying 'their enchanted space of floor' (*GOHS*: 139). The Latin nuances of the perfect tango, different in tone from Rachmaninov's Concerto no. 2 in C minor soundtrack of *Brief Encounter*, signify the acting out of forbidden sensual pleasure, a situation profoundly disturbing to the inhabitants of Harriet's suburban milieu. Vesey's flouting of social niceties menaces Charles' 'beautiful and well-ordered' household. The jealous husband foolishly insults Vesey; 'I always said he looked like a dago' (*GOHS*: 143), but what is perhaps worse for Charles, the typically English upholder of good form, is seeing them making an exhibition of themselves. While Harriet is to suffer for that 'terrible evening', it reaffirms her love for Vesey (*GOHS*: 190).

The game of hide and seek continues to haunt Harriet for years, a time in which her life seems as aimless as Madame Bovary's. Indeed, the Bovary analogy is used by her friend Kitty, who despite being in a far from satisfactory marriage herself, cautions Harriet against re-kindling her adolescent passion for Vesey. At a time when financial independence for women was unreliable, this advocacy of the security of marriage is indicative of the willingness of many women to settle for the comforts of a middle-class existence rather than suffer the material deprivations of a passionate relationship, often doomed to be short-

²³ This is my reference to the iconic scene in the 1936 film *Follow the Fleet* in which Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance to Irving Berlin's song 'Let's Face the Music and Dance'.

lived. Echoing *Brief Encounter*, Taylor's portrayal of the absence of agency for women who are locked into respectable matrimony makes use of those features of the romance plot that move the viewer/reader to hope for the lovers to be united against the grain of society's conventions.

Taylor represents Harriet and Vesey's affair without the linearity and incremental force of the seven intense weekly meetings between Laura and Alec in *Brief Encounter*. Instead she deploys Ferrebe's 'broken narrative' where yawning spaces are left as Vesey leaves Harriet who, paradoxically, during that time is relieved of the tension between her and Charles.

Through the summer, Harriet lived at peace without Vesey, and could have lived a long time thus, she thought, serene in her indecisiveness, freed from the machinery of deceit (*GOHS*: 279).

The marital deception continues in the same vein as *Brief Encounter* and, in another parallel with the film, Taylor uses the device of the train journey to expose Harriet's internal thoughts. Travelling to London to meet Vesey, Harriet reveals what Ferrebe calls her 'creed of the precious nature of individuality' (Ferrebe: 54). Observing an opinionated man in the carriage claiming to be 'an ordinary chap', she reflects on how disingenuous he is, asserting that 'I never think that I am an ordinary woman... I represent no-one. I am typical of no-one. No-one else shares my thoughts or understands my hopes or shares my guilt' (*GOHS*: 227). In adult life Harriet displays an attitude consistent with her previous youthful antipathy to 'causes' that is the antithesis of the solidarity expressed by Lilian and Caroline as militant suffragettes and demonstrates the intergenerational dissonance she shares with Vesey. In this aspect of Harriet's personality Taylor creates a character akin to the soon to be imagined 'angry young men' such as Arthur Seaton and Jimmy Porter who refuse 'good brave

causes' and proclaim loudly their individuality.²⁴ Unlike those young men who are motivated to undertake a form of masculine quest, Harriet must suppress her own desires, and her anger, to fit in with society's expectations and fulfil her need for security.

Although the narrative dwells upon Harriet's conflicted feelings, once her love is clearly reciprocated its progress conforms to the paradigm of the romance plot complete with obstacles to overcome. Sadly, though, the consummation of 'her girlhood's inconsolable love' (*GOHS*: 178) is inhibited by Harriet's conviction that, 'I'm too old. We are too late' (*GOHS*: 174). No longer young, Vesey has proved that Hugo's judgement of him as 'feckless, penniless, indolent' was accurate (*GOHS*: 121). He adopts a confessional mode when at last the two lovers talk freely, articulating regret and accepting responsibility for harming Harriet. At this late stage, however, the compulsion to go through with the affair is blocked by Harriet's doubts: 'I thought it could be above board. I thought I could tell Charles'. She expresses reluctance to hurt Charles and her daughter. 'We are happily married ... I could not betray him'. Forced to accept that 'we can't not be sordid', Harriet's guilt-filled deviation from conventional morality demonstrates the close correspondence to *Brief Encounter*, complete with the borrowed car and seedy hotel room for the never-to-be-consummated passion (*GOHS*: 173-4). Like Laura Jesson, Harriet returns to a home where a husband offers a different kind of love; 'I like the idea of you as my wife and the authority, the position we have together', an attitude that endorses the idea of marriage articulated by Liz's husband Arthur in *A Wreath of Roses*, and the

²⁴ Arthur Seaton in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) proclaims 'whatever people say I am that's what I'm not, because they don't know a bloody thing about me' (144) and Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) laments; 'there aren't any good brave causes left' (84).

concession to having to settle for something other than passion (GOHS: 299). Accepting the impossibility of romantic fulfilment, Vesey and Alec each take the escape route abroad - although Vesey's is a pretext - that is needed to remove the temptation to transgress social and sexual mores.

In the finale, however, Taylor indulges the desire for some version of romantic resolution, if not the 'happily ever after' of the fairy tale then at least a coming together of the lovers. The last act of the game of hide and seek occurs *in extremis*. Harriet arrives to say goodbye to the gravely ill Vesey who laments that 'even her husband feels I am a poor challenge to him now' (GOHS: 304). Ironically, Taylor's ambiguous anti-romantic resolution is, in effect, more moving than that of the classic romance. Vesey is right, he is neither a threat to Charles nor can he rescue Harriet. The tragedy of their unfulfilled love is encapsulated in the final words of the novel; words that portend the end of Vesey's life: 'She put her bunch of flowers down on a chair and said his name and took him in her arms' (GOHS: 306).

In its refusal to 'solve the contradiction between love and quest' (Du Plessis: 4) the novel becomes anti-romantic exposing the ambivalence of women caught between the need for respectable security and the power of love. In a far-reaching narrative that spans the history of feminist struggle and the generational backlash, Taylor retains the centrality of the love story, albeit through an unresolvable romance inevitably ending in death. The corrupted deployment of both the fairy tale and the romance to a realist form supports Pearce and Stacey's suggestion that 'an engagement with the narratives of romance [...] facilitates the re-scripting of other areas of life' (Pearce and Stacey: 13). In this way, a feminist sensibility is attached to *A Game of Hide and Seek*.

The Sleeping Beauty

‘Under the spell of her alien beauty’ (SB:42)

The Sleeping Beauty is a vehicle for Elizabeth Taylor’s more focussed deployment of the fairy tale genre in a novel that is, as Alice Ferrebe suggests, ‘engaged in exposing the inherent flaws of a model of heterosexual romantic love that denies the possibility of female autonomy or activity’ (Ferrebe: 60). Taylor’s appropriation and corruption of the conventions of the genres of romance, fairy tale and Gothic add more force to the novel’s explicitly anti-romantic sentiments than was evident in *A Game of Hide and Seek*. Her prescient novel additionally interrogates female embodiment, the perception of beauty, natural or ‘man-made’, and the role of masculine power in undermining female agency. Located in an ostensibly realist domestic setting, the novel boldly transgresses Jameson’s concept of a social contract to create unsettling outcomes. In a way that is progressive for the time Taylor experiments with a form that challenges the unequal gendered power relations in the fairy tale romance and prefigures the work of Angela Carter. Like Carter, Taylor sets out ‘to extract latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories’ (Carter, 1979 [2006]: vii). Both writers situate the dominance of the hero in opposition to the submissive heroine ultimately to disrupt the traditional ending.

The identity of the ‘Sleeping Beauty’ of the title, founded largely on her beauty and sexuality, is lost in a motor accident - an event comparable to eating the poisoned apple - that condemns her to a dormant state. Emily Otway’s facial features, disfigured in the crash, are restored to an idealised image through a long process of surgical remodelling. This restoration is based on an interpretation of beauty returned to her, not through her own agency but, as if

by magic, by a surgeon who, in so doing, destabilises her identity. Following her long stay in hospital Emily returns to the care of her sister where she lapses into a dormant state constricted by Rose, a name evocative of the tangle of briars growing to encircle the Sleeping Beauty of the fairy tale. She is confined alongside Rose's mentally challenged daughter, Philly, a youthful 'madwoman in the attic'.²⁵ The three women, symbolic of whore, martyr and hysteric, are typical of the fairy tale's Gothic origins. Like the imprisoned fairy tale heroine, Emily is helpless against the enclosing power of the two females who represent the menacing forest enclosing the Sleeping Beauty, 'locked away in herself, but ignorant of her identity' (*SB*: 45).

Like most fairy tale sisters Rose and Emily have contrasting personalities. The elder sister Rose, the embodiment of the ugly sister figure, endures an unhappy marriage to a man who drank, engaged in affairs and is killed in the motor accident that disfigures Emily. Rose, herself afraid of sex, has long feared her sister's ease with it. Emily remembers, 'I liked holding hands with young men in taxis and the secret messages of entwined fingers. Rose always clasped her hands together fiercely inside her muff.' (*SB*: 46). Ironically, the attraction to Emily that ends in Rose's husband's death appears to have resolved the problem of the errant spouse and the promiscuous sister in one conclusive tragedy. All that remains to Rose from her unsatisfactory marriage is the Gothic guest house on a cliff top and the child Philly who, though not developed as a character in her own right, is a further instrument of Emily's

²⁵ Taylor also uses the same trope in *At Mrs Lippincote's*. The daughter of the house, Phyllis Lippincote, emerges suddenly and terrifyingly from the tower bedroom of the requisitioned house.

oppression.²⁶ While the car accident in effect signals the end of sex for the two sisters, Rose is happy nonetheless to have regained control over Emily who in turn proves biddable and willing to care for a child for whom Rose shows little more than a fearful responsibility. As the older woman of the fairy tale, Rose is beset by anxieties about Emily's sexual nature and must resist the 'prince's' attempts to free the 'maiden' and deprive her of control over her sister. She has established a safe mode of life that protects two vulnerable young women, content that 'the days are all alike', as 'she had always loved monotony'. With Emily and Philly cloistered and isolated she is 'now at peace' (*SB*: 43).

The maintenance of Rose's existence depends on her close surveillance of Emily who is relieved of all chores except for the care and supervision of Philly. Locked into the routines of the domestic sphere Emily has no other life. Such a regime of restrictions on the two young women resembles a domestic version of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, the system of 360-degree surveillance of prison inmates.²⁷ In Julia Kristeva's terms, Emily is in that 'space of abjection' to which women are outcast or marginalised, and where the unlikely hero, Vinny Tumulty, later becomes caught in 'a vortex of summon and repulsion [that] places the one haunted by it literally beside himself' (Kristeva. 1982: 2). The force of the rescuing male's unprecedented attraction is expressed in the language of the fairy tale. He sees Emily 'lying under the spell of her alien beauty and Rose's devotion enclosing her like a thicket of briars', a perception that arouses in him at first fear then the hero's desire to release her into his possession (*SB*: 42).

²⁶ This marginalisation of the defective child as 'other' seems from a twenty-first century perspective to be cruelly dismissive. It does, however, serve to emphasise the intersectional oppression of marginalised groups.

²⁷ The Panopticon, used for prison surveillance, is later considered by Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline and Punish* as an effective means of producing 'docile bodies' (Foucault: 1975).

Although Vinny's timely appearance on the scene is crucial to the fairy tale narrative, he is not the romantic stereotype of the rescuing prince and certainly not the sexual libertine destined to release Emily from her involuntary abstinence. A middle-aged wealthy man, he appears to be an eligible bachelor but one with a problem in consummating sexual relationships. This fact conceals the existence of a wife unwillingly acquired after what Vinny tellingly recalls as 'the most fleeting loosening of his control, that faintest experience of pleasure' (*SB*: 98). Feigning pregnancy Rita forced him into marriage and, although living separate lives, she retains an arm's length hold over him to oversee her business affairs. She invents an heroic, but conveniently dead, husband to gain maximum public sympathy. Vinny's specialism now is in consoling newly grieving widows, 'going in with the wreaths'. This he does well, while avoiding long-term emotional entanglement: 'He went with sympathy professional in its skill; yet adept, exquisite' (*SB*: 1). Never shy of the bereaved, he allows tears to flow, in this case those of Isabella, widow of the tragically drowned Member of Parliament, Harry. Taylor's description of Vinny is typical of the Gothic male 'whose very desires invite frustration; who loves twilight more than midday, the echo more than the voice, the moon more than the sun, and women more than men'. His is a character surrounded by myth and delusion for whom 'all the counterfeit and treachery he had worked or suffered, could not detract from its magic' (*SB*: 19-20). His romantic nature, though perfectly placed in a fairy tale, has not so far resulted in romantic love, but the addition of the ingredients of a Gothic situation push forward his quest to rescue a young woman from her long imprisonment.

Vinny's characteristics arouse justifiable suspicions in Isabella's son, Laurence who finds him 'like a psychiatrist' with a manner 'so artfully veiled'

(*SB*: 10-11). He is doubtful about the ease with which Vinny applies psychological insights to the minds of women. True to Laurence's misgivings, Vinny allows Isabella to believe in a future for the two of them but ruthlessly distances himself from her when his interest in Emily is aroused. Vinny's continued proximity to his own mother and to his many female friends suggests the possession of a skill that ensures he retains comfortable relationships with women, even in the puzzling aftermath of unconsummated relationships. Evalie's observation to her friend Isabella that he is 'that kind, effeminate sort of man who is so nice to women' (*SB*: 33) carries the suspicion of something more than fastidiousness or impotence. Interestingly Vinny is a character, like Vesey, to whom Taylor endows equivocal masculinity with the implicit suggestion of fear of women. The hint of sexual problems in Vinny's character reveals an inhibition that has prevented him going further than touching and kissing, preferably in the dark, that suggests a shrinking from the female body. Paradoxically, it is the ostensibly sexually impotent hero who experiences a perverse attraction to Emily's newly refigured face, transforming his revulsion at the sight of her scarred body into what appears to be love. In the manner of one enchanted in a fairy tale or gripped by a compelling horror, Vinny undergoes the sudden change that leads to an awakening even more dramatic than Emily's.

Vinny's reaction to the first encounter with the young woman introduces a tone that sets in motion the disrupted romance narrative. He bumps into her, quite literally, on a twilit beach under glowering cliffs where she is described in language characteristically Gothic, 'her face, which was white in the shadow of her hood and of a perfect, even beauty; mask-like and, in the gathering dusk, terrifying'. He is at that moment both enchanted and horrified by 'the strange quality of her beauty, its faultlessness and blank terror' (*SB*: 18-19). Emily's

image induces in Vinny a fear that, once overcome, initiates desire. Although his first reaction to seeing Emily is one of terror, it is not a sexual fear but an involuntary frisson at her demeanour. His enchantment is confirmed by a 'disturbing, erotic' dream in which she had not recoiled from him after their collision. This dream-intimacy initiates, 'by trickery of his unconscious mind', a disturbing compulsion to pursue an unwonted experience of desire (*SB*: 27-8).

The fascination grows into a 'desire to be under the same roof as Emily (a desire roused by both curiosity and compassion – two strong emotions in him)' (*SB*: 46). Vinny's curiosity and his need to be needed prove to be the positive forces for releasing Emily from the sway of her sister and Philly. He articulates Emily's situation to her in the language of imprisonment, of enclosure: 'You are shutting doors one after another which you will soon find are *finally* shut. Shut fast. You inside, the world outside' (*SB*: 88). However, his well-honed powers of persuasion at first fail. Employing his psychoanalytical technique he points out how Rose's needs override her own, telling her that: 'You give her more than ever she gave you – her peace, her security; you compensate her for all she lacks; you shield her from her own child' (*SB*: 88). Vinny's interpretations are indeed plausible, as Laurence observes, but he is thwarted by the difficulty in getting Emily to talk about herself, 'something he had not met before' in his therapeutic role with women in distress who were always grateful for his listening ear (*SB*: 89).

Rose's role, in line with the fairy tale analogy and wrapped in the guise of care, is to restrain Emily from a return to her sexualised past and furthermore to punish her for that transgression. As Vinny withdraws attention from Isabella it is clear he has more than a pitying interest in Emily and Rose's opposition grows fierce. Her displeasure is reiterated by Vinny's mother, Mrs Tumulty,

another 'bad queen' adversary alongside Rose. Emily's 'dead-white skin, her lack of expression, [...] annoyed and repelled her' but, unlike the bad queen in other stories she 'had no especial grudge against beauty as long as it did not detract from liveliness', although 'liveliness' could be her unspoken wish for Vinny to have a fully-fledged sex-life (SB: 48).

Vinny's ominous suspicion of Emily's adolescent sexual experience leads him to suspect that in her previous embodiment she had enjoyed 'carnality for its own sake' (SB: 130), a realisation that threatens the stability of his protective yet egotistical sensibilities.

When he kissed her, she betrayed more of her past life than she would ever have done in words, and he sensed what deprivation she had endured in these recent years: once avowedly amorous; perhaps promiscuous as well. His was the acceptable womanish role of romanticism, his passion a by-product of his passion for her. Desire, of itself had scarcely existed for him, obstructed, or obliterated, as it so often was, by his exaggerated sense of personality (SB:129).

Vinny's reaction is like that of Harriet's husband, Charles, in *A Game of Hide and Seek*. Here is another man surprised and shocked by female sexual passion. His habit of empathy gives Vinny an insight into Emily's past, even though in his own he 'could never contrive to *make* love and be in love at the same time' (original italics) (SB: 130). Her surprised inability to see the difference between the two states confirms his fears about Emily's nature.

It is not only Vinny who fears Emily's past, her sister's former sexual nature has also been a source of fear and dread for Rose who, finding no pleasure in sex herself, might have been perversely relieved when this unacceptable trait in Emily was obliterated by the accident. However, observing the developing relationship with Vinny, it occurs to her that she might have

misinterpreted the effects of Emily's transformative process and that, far from being content, Emily might be:

slipping back into her old ways, [she] remembered the reeling horror in which she, Rose, learned, when they were girls, that her sister was not chaste [...] Now Rose wondered if these peaceful virginal years since Emily's accident had been in truth most wretchedly against her nature. The apathy, the lack of laughter, the reserve, the stammer and hesitancy in her speech were surely the result of pain and long illness? Rose had believed that and had foreseen no end to their gentle days together; no reason why they should ever change (*SB*:132).

Vinny and Rose each have similar fears about Emily but with different motives. Vinny's intrusion allows Rose to see that Emily's psychological state is as dreadfully mangled as her physical appearance is dramatically remodelled. The sense of retribution for the sexual transgressions of both Emily and Rose's husband is now tempered by Rose's realisation of the psychic harm inflicted on her sister.

In a telling reference to the fairy tale trope of the mirror, Emily discloses to Vinny that 'the moment in my life when I felt really destroyed was the moment when everyone thought I was well again...In that looking-glass there was no vestige of me' (*SB*: 154). Hiding her own horror to protect the surgeon's male pride she knows she has lost her self-image, her subjectivity physically and psychologically deconstructed. The performance of the restorative work on Emily's passive body demonstrates the 'conflict about power and social relations' that Jack Zipes associates with the fairy tale (Zipes, 1983 [2012]: 3). However expertly benign in intent, the process of facial reconstruction strips Emily of her psychological identity even as it salvages her physical appearance. The complication of gratitude and resentment that this situation creates is

emblematic of the effects on women of male-generated definitions of beauty. The doctor's imposition of suspended animation for 'many months in a bed with no-one to see her; for she must not move or speak or cry' is facilitated by culturally ingrained feminine submissiveness up to the point where her new face is ready to be revealed (*SB*: 41).²⁸ True to this paradigm, the male surgeon anticipates a resumption of her former life armed with the qualities of the face he has designed for her. This arrogant certainty demonstrates how the dominant vision of what is desirable in women's appearance is also thought to be sought by women who desire the approval of men. This is endorsed by the expensive treatments to which women subject themselves in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to eliminate perceived physical imperfections.

The surgeon's project blurs the distinction between the real and the fake and provisions forms of postmodern culture, literature and art that challenge the nature of gender and female embodiment. Taylor's use of the device of facial rebuilding is remarkably prescient of twenty-first century preoccupations in art, medical science and cosmetic surgery, where the question of what constitutes freedom of choice for women occupies discourses of embodiment and gender that have perplexed feminist thought since Simone de Beauvoir provided the mid-century starting point for later and often controversial work on embodiment. Beauvoir and her successors suggest that escape from the dominance/submission trap might be secured through the freedom of a woman

²⁸ Emily's situation bears some resemblance to the plight of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899). Kate Chopin's fin de siècle novel was claimed in the 1970s as a fundamental feminist text.

to express herself sexually and in her appearance, something that inspires alarm at a man's loss of control.²⁹

There is a fascinating and revolutionary example in the twenty-first century of woman seizing back power over her embodiment. ORLAN, the French self-described 'body artist of sex and surgery', arranged the filming of herself during procedures under local anaesthetic, becoming 'both observer and observed'. This was not to make herself beautiful or sexually attractive but to be 'different, strong; to sculpt my own body to reinvent the self' - the opposite of Emily's experience in which another creates a reinvented self.³⁰ ORLAN rejects the dominant Western constructs of beauty, drawing inspiration from the Maya and Olmèques culture of body transformations by remaking the process as performance art. In a reversal of Julia Kristeva's concept of 'the abject', ORLAN places herself in the space of abjection for art's sake. The major difference for Emily of course, is that she does not choose to have the procedure nor does she select the new image which at the end of the process delivers a profound shock. The reinstatement of a beauty that will continue to satisfy patriarchal standards had called for her submission to an extreme state of inactivity for months as a precursor to her readmission into society. Emily had been set to be constrained for life in the aftermath of one man's design for surgical reconstruction, executed according to his knowledge and expertise but without

²⁹ These discourses began in 1949 with Simone de Beauvoir's thoughts on sexual difference and visible identity and developed through complex and contentious theories of embodiment in Anglo-American radical feminism and in psychoanalytic feminism that draws on Freud and Lacan. The influential work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) on performativity and the normalising of the female body to an ideal is perhaps the closest to the scenarios presented in this novel along with that of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. This would be a fertile line of further research into Taylor's fiction.

³⁰ ORLAN was speaking in an interview with Stewart Jeffries in *The Guardian*: 01/07/09.

the full and free participation of the subject. Ironically, her reintegration is only to be achieved by the intervention of the flawed romantic hero.

Emily's relationship with Vinny displays the gratitude of (female) patient to (male) therapist. He performs his magic in the manner of Pygmalion creating Galatea, moulding Emily's personality into his idealised image, just as the surgeon had delivered his approximate ideal. Emily's debt to Vinny for the creation of a new identity is profoundly felt as opposed to the misgivings she has about the surgeon's finished product. Vinny's role in her renewal is emphasised by Emily's use of what Jenijoy La Belle calls, 'the specular *I*' (La Belle, 1988: 171). 'Oh, *I* am nothing without you. *I* should not know what to be. *I* feel as if you had invented me. *I* watch you inventing me week after week' (*SB* :169, my emphasis). She acknowledges that the image she sees in the mirror is not identifiable as herself but as someone 'other', whom she watches being gradually re-invented. The distinction between what she sees in the mirror and her inner self again evokes Kristeva's idea of the abject, the one beside the other. As Kristeva contends, 'the abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*' (Kristeva, 1982: 3).

Vinny, the hero, or anti-hero, of the tale, is susceptible to two aspects of Emily's character; her beauty and a neediness ripe for exploitation. While he cannot resist the chance to mould the perfect wife to possess sexually and materially, he also fears he is responsible for bringing her 'old way' of behaving to the surface. The mischief-making wrought by Isabella's friend Evalie, who discovers Vinny's concealed wife, precipitates a dilemma for him. Since Rita will not contemplate the divorce that would undermine her fictitious lifestyle, Vinny is faced with a predicament reminiscent of that facing Rochester and Jane Eyre,

the act of bigamy.³¹ In Taylor's novel, however, Emily does not flee from the wrong when she discovers it. Instead, when she becomes aware of Vinny's possible imprisonment she seems childishly excited and prepares to write to him and send presents, likening the experience to being away at school. In a revelatory moment, Emily confesses to Vinny: 'It is wrong of me, but I begin to admire you more. I didn't know you had this in you. And I admire myself more; for bringing it out' (*SB*: 226). More than grateful loyalty or mistaken love there is a flicker of returning self-esteem that, dangerously for Vinny, signals a reawakening of Emily's old self.

True to the form of the fairy tale, he must claim her quickly before the old way is fully reinstated. Yet, as Lisa M. Fiander points out, 'Weddings in fairy tales are typically celebrated alongside the punishment of those who tried and failed to prevent them' (Fiander, 2004: 5). There are indeed losers in the story: Rose and Philly, Isabella and Evalie and perhaps Vinny's mother. In this novel, as Taylor plays fast and loose with the romance, fairy tale and Gothic genres, she imagines characters and situations to support or more likely to subvert the expected progress towards the 'happily ever after' outcome. The absence of the fairy tale happy ending is tempered with the faintest sign that it is not all over for Emily. The reader is left to speculate whether her future is to be in facing the consequences of a bigamous marriage or in her ultimate escape to a renewed autonomy. There is, too, a possible third outcome in which the new pairing of Emily and Vinny marks a direction typical of the Gothic genre that Taylor invokes in *A Wreath of Roses*, discussed in chapter two, in which the sexual hero represents 'inadvertently disclosed evil' (*WR*: 203). In a manner

³¹ Here is yet another intertextual link to the Brontës to be found in Elizabeth Taylor's writing. Perhaps the name Emily also fits in with her enthusiasms.

characteristic of Taylor, readers of *The Sleeping Beauty* are left to speculate about a possible future for Emily as much as for Camilla in *A Wreath of Roses* or for Harriet in *A Game of Hide and Seek*. The romantic or fairy tale ending is replaced by an anti-romantic uncertainty.

Taylor's engagement with the issues of sex, love and desire is another sign of her willingness to take up contentious themes. Although *In a Summer Season*, written in 1961 on the cusp of the sexual revolution (and discussed in chapter four), has been labelled by Susanna Clapp as Taylor's sexiest novel, *The Sleeping Beauty* approaches potentially taboo areas of sexuality under the guise of the Gothic fairy tale. Combining realism with less realistic genres Taylor dramatises the forces of sexual repression in the mid-twentieth century and demonstrates the negative roles of others in the repression of the individual woman.

A Game of Hide and Seek and *The Sleeping Beauty* exemplify features of the ideological project proposed by Alice Ferrebe that 'would permanently alter literary studies and the way in which cultures are understood, a project that, from the perspective of the end of the twentieth century, can be decisively marked as feminist' (Ferrebe: 60). The novels contribute to a feminist literature that exploits a subversive potential in a way that, according to Rosemary Jackson's analysis of fantasy, 'attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss' (Jackson, 1981: 3). In confronting the ambiguities that limit autonomy and inhibit women's freedom to express their desires, Elizabeth Taylor's anti-romance narratives may be said to lament, rather than challenge, the social repressiveness affecting women's lives in the 1950s.

Chapter Four

Sex, Marriage and Family Life: In and Out of the Domestic

To Bed with Grand Music. Marghanita Laski (1946)

In a Summer Season Elizabeth. Taylor (1961)

Daddy's Gone A-Hunting. Penelope Mortimer (1958)

Complications surrounding three core elements of the female condition, sex, marriage and family life, are represented in the novels examined in this chapter. Bookending the time parameters of this thesis, the first is a wartime narrative followed by two novels set in the late fifties that anticipate Betty Friedan's investigation of the predicament of the suburban wife in America. Marghanita Laski's portrayal of the wartime experiences of a young married woman released from the constraints of family life stands apart from the others in its frank exposure of female sexual behaviour at a moment of national crisis. *To Bed with Grand Music* offers the narrative of one young woman's response to her husband's wartime absence and the boredom of suburban motherhood as she grasps newly available sexual and material opportunities in the metropolis. Through an implicit challenge to gendered norms the transgressive and ostensibly self-centred behaviour of the 'anti-heroine', Deborah Robertson, prefigures the controversial model proposed by Helen Gurley Brown in her 1962 handbook *Sex and the Single Girl*. Elizabeth Taylor's *In a Summer Season* and Penelope Mortimer's *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* are set in the late fifties period of cultural conservatism and sexual repressiveness where, although cushioned by suburban affluence, they expose many of the issues

that were to give rise to unrest among women in the 1960s and 1970s. *In a Summer Season* explores the conflict between a grieving, middle-aged widow's reawakened sexual desire and the imperative to sustain conventional family life. The outcomes dramatise the practical and moral repercussions of deviation from the normative sexual state. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* demonstrates an early sensibility of what Betty Friedan famously described as 'a strange stirring' towards 'the problem that has no name' (Friedan: 5). The novel bravely and painfully exposes the multiple conflicts suffered by a comfortably middle-class woman caught in what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call 'the family plot', a phenomenon defined, appropriately for this novel, as a 'nuclear family dominated by a superegoistic father and sustained by a nurturing mother'. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* offers material to support Gilbert and Gubar's project to scrutinise fiction that represents 'the burial of what was thought to be a permanent or traditional family structure in the grave or "plot" of the past' (Gilbert and Gubar. 1994: xv). The novel's rendering of the disruption of this time-served template, where the family does not or cannot function as prescribed, challenges gendered roles and expectations and points to the risks to the individual woman of emotional and mental destabilisation when trapped in that oppressive structure.

*To Bed with Grand Music*¹

'The Lure of Pleasure'

Lara Feigel's description of the Second World War as 'an abnormal pocket of time' introduces 'another reality of reckless licentiousness and sexual

¹ The title is taken from 'On Dreams', Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682). 'Happy are they that go to bed with grand music, like Pythagoras, or have ways to compose the fantastical spirit, whose unruly wanderings take off inward sleepe'.

freedom', equivalent to a fantasy of happiness or its less reputable cousin, pleasure. Indeed, "It came to be rumoured", Bowen recalled, "that everybody in London was in love" (Feigel, 2013: 4). *To Bed with Grand Music* is set in the final three years of hostilities, after the worst of the Blitz, in a city now the centre of operations for the war and infused with the atmosphere of sexual licentiousness that Feigel highlights. Marghanita Laski's novel, significantly published three years before *The Heat of the Day*, offers what Juliet Gardiner describes as an 'ahead-of-the pack telling of an aspect of the civilian's war it was not yet acceptable to reveal' (*TBGM*: xv). The civilian's war, or as it came to be known, 'The People's War', reflects a time when those on the 'Home Front' were exhorted to 'keep smiling through' in a spirit of selfless togetherness and willing sacrifice.² The novel pushes against the grain to reveal something other than the spirit of courageous cheerfulness in a counter-narrative of the anti-heroine's pursuit of pleasure.

That the publication of *To Bed with Grand Music* at a still raw moment in the postwar was a bold act is suggested in the use of the pseudonym 'Sarah Russell'. This was not only because of its taboo subject matter but also, according to Laski's daughter, for fear of recognition of and by the woman whose story inspired it. These facts add an aura of authenticity to a novel whose vision offers a challenge to the preferred ideology of feminine conduct. While the uncomfortable truth that many women 'enjoyed' the war was revealed later by historians of the period, opportunistic pleasure-seeking or 'making the best of it' was known, if not openly condoned, at the time. Recognising the 'aphrodisiac effect' of war, John Costello, in *Love, Sex and War*, records the

² A line from Vera Lynn's famous wartime song 'We'll meet Again'.

testimony of women who 'conceded that the old dual standard of feminine fidelity was no longer acceptable to wives' (Costello, 1985: 28).

This reading interrogates the ambivalent portrayal of Deborah Robertson as exploiter or victim, as 'bad mother' or protofeminist, asking whether she presents as an agency-grabbing woman demonstrating a stubborn resistance to social prescriptions and proscriptions, or as an amoral hedonist. The analysis critically dissects the representation of Deborah's resistance to the expected narrative. There are hints of the author's opinions – remembering that this was written just after the war - in the creation of a character who firstly, refuses the obligations of the home front; secondly, is a negligent mother; and finally, is sexually transgressive. However, Laski's shifting viewpoints and insights into many of the characters' thought processes leave room for equivocation. While contemporary reviews were hostile, aware of the imperative to support the ideology of universal self-sacrifice - as Gardiner explains, 'the waters closed as the war ended'- a late-twentieth/early twenty-first century feminist lens can identify a challenge to the dominant ideology of feminine conduct (*TBGM*: xviii). Phyllis Lassner's assertion that 'the war on the home front exposed the relationship between the patriarchal ideologies which informed such novels and the sexual politics which conditioned women's lives' is a useful way in to this reading of *To Bed with Grand Music* (Lassner, 1990: 87).³

What first marks out Deborah for potential negative judgement is her status as the married mother of a young child; a domestic role that she finds unfulfilling once her husband is posted abroad. The novel explores Deborah's

³ Lassner's 1990 article, 'The Quiet Revolution: World War II and the English Domestic Novel' examines Elizabeth Jane Howard's *The Long View* (1956), Betty Miller's *On the Side of the Angels* (1945), Mollie Panter Downes' *One Fine Day*, (1945) and Elizabeth Taylor's *At Mrs Lippincote's* (1945).

exploitation of her sexual capital in unprecedented situations arising from the abnormalities of the time. Deborah's resistance to female conditioning is what leads Andrea Adolph to position her as the type of woman Sarah Ahmed has described as a 'feminist killjoy' (Ahmed, 2010: 65), that is, 'a female figure who is unhappy in her social and cultural femininity and who refuses a "happiness duty"' (Adolph, 2013: 397). In times of war a woman's 'happiness duty' expands from dutiful housewifery to communal responsibility on the home front, responsibilities that Deborah is disinclined to embrace. However, while the 'lure of pleasure', to use Rosalind Coward's term, pervades the narrative, the novel does not wholeheartedly invite the attribution of Deborah's actions to a hedonistic impulse alone (Coward, 1984: 13). There is more to her transgression than that. She faces a series of 'epiphanic moments', in a manner that recalls the female *bildungsroman* of Margaret Steggles in *Westwood*, when she must choose one path over another, prey to persuasion while ostensibly exercising her will. Deborah's path however, as observed by Juliet Gardner, is more akin to a 'female rake's progress in wartime Britain' than to a narrative of cultural and aesthetic development (Gardiner in *TBGM*: v).

The first sign of Deborah's destabilisation as wife and mother is on the eve of her husband's posting when he fails to promise 'physical' faithfulness; a term that separates sex from love in a stereotypically masculine way. Yet implicit in his position is a caveat that whatever physical needs must be fulfilled, for either of them, their relationship remains paramount. He is, in effect, offering her a similar freedom to his own. Although this view was implicit in many wartime marriages, to Deborah it is deeply disquieting and leads her to doubt the value of her promise of faithfulness if not reciprocated. Her ideal, however unrealistic, would be Graham's total denial of his sexual needs during his absence on the

principle of 'if I can do it, he can' (*TBGM*: 2). This is the first of the defining moments that undermine the constancy of the so-called happily married woman and becomes part of the justification for her later actions. Graham's pragmatic masculine attitude echoes wartime propaganda that the dangers of war heighten the sexual appetites of the fighting man, while women must chastely await the return of the soldier. Yet, while he appears to offer Deborah a similar liberty to his, so long as the marriage is not threatened, at this stage she would have opted for mutual self-denial rather than licence. This lack of convincing reassurance from Graham is the first defence of her deviation from the obligations of marriage and motherhood.

Deborah's attachment to her child is so closely implicated with the relationship to her husband that on Graham's imminent departure she feels constrained by Timmy: "But if I hadn't got him I'd move heaven and earth to get a job in Cairo to be with you" (*TBGM*: 3). More than this, Deborah's petulant outburst reveals a childish anger at the unfairness of a war that has disrupted the expected course of her marriage leaving her, as she sees it, with the worst of both worlds. Her strong physical desire for Graham, with whom she has enjoyed a passionate and, so far, exclusive relationship, albeit in a marriage made at an early age, is now threatened by an unwelcome hiatus.⁴ Left alone with her doubts Deborah becomes irritable with her baby son, a situation of great concern to the boy's grandmother who, in her anxiety to address this worry assesses her daughter's sexuality as part of a rationale for action. Mrs Betts sums up the relationship with Graham in the age-old binary of

⁴ The phenomenon of marital sexuality disrupted by war is also present, for example, in Noel Streatfeild's novel, *Saplings*. First published in 1945, it characterises a mother whose sexual desire for her husband is stronger than her maternal inclinations. The novel tells of her disintegration but goes into more detail about the effects on the children after their father's death in an air raid. Their relatives are not supportive in the way that Mrs Chalmers is of Timmy.

Madonna/Magdalene or virgin/whore that she calls the 'mother-type' and the 'wife type':

"I don't mean this for any disparagement of you, but I do think that there are fundamentally two types of women in the world, the mother type and the – the wife type." She hesitated over the last epithet, unable to say the word that was really in her mind. "And I don't think you are really the first sort. I'm quite sure that when Graham is at home, the baby is secondary to your life with him. Isn't that so?" (*TBGM*: 16).

Ironically, her mother's rationalisation justifies Deborah's return to a position where she is once more empowered to satisfy the desires of a single woman, and London at the height of the war is the ideal location despite its inherent dangers. Relieved of the responsibilities of wife and mother, Deborah profits from the war. Just as the black market offers scarce commodities at a price, she discovers the exchange value of her sex for commodities and entertainment. Prefiguring Luce Irigaray's ideas in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she engages in a masquerade by which she 'submit[s] to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain "on the market" in spite of everything'. Accessing the new economic value-system she becomes 'enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men' (Irigaray, 1985: 33-4).⁵ Deborah leaves behind the domestic and private sphere to service the male-dominated public realm.

Mrs Betts' description of Deborah as 'the – the wife type' as opposed to the 'mother-type' endorses the impression of her daughter's maternal shortcomings at the same time as it acknowledges her sexual needs. Cate Haste observes 'the widespread belief [...] that sex was something in which

⁵ Irigaray develops and expands the idea of 'masquerade' that Joan Rivière introduced in her psychological study, 'Womanliness as Masquerade' in 1929. Reference is also made to Rivière's work in chapter two.

men indulged but women tolerated, with little value put on women's sexual satisfaction' (Haste, 1992: 109). ⁶ Yet Mrs Betts' perceptive disquisition on female desire expresses a surprising understanding of her daughter's situation when deprived of sex, even though she herself had never experienced 'the incomprehensible urge that the girl must have inherited from her father', uncertain whether 'other women had these desires and managed to suppress them' or simply never felt them. Her reflections anticipate the Kinsey Reports' assertion that women's sexual needs were equivalent to those of men (*TBGM*: 92-93). ⁷ Laski's deployment of the developing sciences of sexology and child psychology through the mouthpiece of Mrs Betts and later of Deborah's neighbour, Betty Marsden, is indicative of the widespread appeal of such theories in the mid-twentieth century. ⁸ Motivated by concern at the consequences for the child of what is interpreted as Deborah's symptoms of sexual frustration, Mrs Betts and Mrs Chalmers plan to rescue Timmy by encouraging her to take a job as a diversion from her evident ennui. The plan falters as it becomes clear that Deborah is more attracted to helping the war effort in London than in Winchester, forcing the child's grandmother to weigh up her feelings about the relative harm implicit in the two possible courses now before her:

⁶ However, as Gardiner points out: 'A medical officer who served with the army in the middle East during the war reckoned that two years' separation was about as much as a marriage could stand: "after the third and subsequent years an increasing proportion of wives lapsed"' (*TBGM*: xii).

⁷ The Kinsey Reports on *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* were published in 1948 and 1953 respectively, inciting controversy among the public at the breaking of sexual taboos.

⁸ There are more references to popular child psychology in my discussion of *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* in chapter four of this thesis.

I can see quite clearly what will happen to her if she goes to live in London – but I can see equally well the irremediable harm she will do my baby if she stops here. The question is, which is more important to me, my daughter or my grandson? Do I mind more if my daughter goes to the bad or my grandson has his nerves upset and his character ruined? (*TBGM*: 19).

A response that may have been unduly precipitate, even ill-judged, frees the young woman to take a new direction towards the excitement of London absolved of maternal responsibility. Sacrificial maternity in the guise of duty induces in Deborah an ‘uncontrollable ecstasy of release’, (a mischievous analogy with sexual climax), as Mrs Betts and Mrs Chalmers relinquish control of Deborah to gain the ‘ultimate possession of Timmy’ (*TBGM*: 19-20). While Deborah is ‘now able to see everything the way she wished to see it’, an expression that supports a portrayal of her character as selfish and self-justifying, the urgency of Mrs Betts’ dispatch of her daughter disguises an emotion in Deborah that might have developed differently, given time for her unease to have worked its way through. As Rosalind Coward suggests: ‘Female dissatisfaction is constantly recast as desire, as desire for something more, as the perfect reworking of what had already gone before’ (Coward, 1984: 13).

This pivotal event is one of several in the narrative that position Deborah as lacking agency, prey to a covert persuasion that renders her the victim of a necessary sacrifice for Timmy’s wellbeing. Yet, there might have been another way of protecting the boy while supporting Deborah through the early stages of separation from Graham that was overlooked by the anxious, and possibly culpable, grandmother. Indeed, Deborah later considers ‘whether she had translated a normal sense of loss at Graham’s absence into a false desire for more than he had ever given her’ (*TBGM*: 114). This clear-sighted perception of the hurried relocation to London reflects Coward’s connection between female

dissatisfaction and desire. Deborah is subject to a manipulative and infantilising process that offers much of what one would really like if freed from constraint, the infamous 'soft sell'. Vindicated by contemporary psychological theories, Deborah experiences 'a glow of maternal renunciation' as she takes the train to London (*TBGM*: 20).⁹ Yet, at the same time as the ambivalent narrative voice casts Deborah as martyred, prepared to make the emotional sacrifice for Timmy's sake, the sardonic tone suggests self-delusion. Once the two older women condone the alteration of Deborah's vision, she is subordinated to their wishes, as she will be later to those of Madeleine and her men friends.

Having left behind her mother and entrusted the child to another carer, the connection with Madeleine, (the correspondence with Mary Magdalen is surely not accidental), brings Deborah into contact with a sequence of lovers, officers, diplomats and 'Yanks' in London, a city that hosts a new cohort of transient and resourceful young people attracted by the erotic possibilities of the capital. Without Graham, the appeal of London far outstrips Winchester, leading her into the arena of moral flux that characterises the time. The first of her sexual encounters in London positions Deborah for the second time as a potential victim. Intoxicated and wilfully forgetful of her train back to Timmy, she returns with a naval officer to a borrowed flat, where, feeling 'somehow absolved from all responsibility' she has sex with him (*TBGM*: 24-26). It is clear, however, that the absolution of responsibility is achieved by a slickly irresistible set of

⁹ Susan Isaacs and Cyril Burt were the UK pioneers of Child Guidance and offered advice on good parenting and progressive schooling from the 1920s. In 1941 Isaacs edited *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey: A Wartime Study in Social Welfare and Education* to assess the complex psychological effects of the war on pre-school and school age children. However, the position of the natural mother remained a vexed issue that would be escalated in 1953 by the publication of John Bowlby's *Child Care and the Growth of Love* that gave primacy to the natural mother.

masculine ploys and the influence of alcohol. While the novel delivers a mildly taboo-breaking account of the night's encounter, at the same time it issues a moral corrective in the form of Deborah's apparently genuine disgust and remorse. A 'morning-after' outburst reiterates her precondition of 'love before immorality' that harks back to Graham's caveat on his departure. She is disconcerted to find the tenet that she clings to in some form for most of the narrative 'mocked at, even held against her'. Peter's scornful clarification of his view on immorality and the assertion that she 'wanted it last night as much as I did' is a profound shock to Deborah (*TBGM*: 29). Passing the responsibility back to Deborah he gives no consideration to however intoxicated he knew her to be, nor to his part in making her so. While Peter articulates justification for his own sexual freedom by citing reciprocal female desire, nowhere in the confusion of drunkenness is the question of consensual intercourse clarified.¹⁰ The atmosphere of wartime license and the apparently willing acceptance of alcohol and charming company override the requirement for explicit consent.

Typical of similar situations where a woman takes on the blame and consequent guilt, Deborah does not tell anyone about it. Yet her silence suggests an acceptance of fault in what might otherwise be construed as victimhood. Deborah's ignorance of the effects of spirits and of the ease of giving way while intoxicated is genuine, but she now bears the burden of guilt alone. In the aftermath, the dubious option of telling Graham is dismissed on two grounds; firstly, that it might unlock the gates to his infidelity, and secondly that it was decidedly to be the first and only time. She works out both how it

¹⁰ Twenty-first century cases have been brought for rape in similar circumstances. Most recently a famous footballer received a jail sentence. However, the later quashing of his conviction shows a persisting ambiguity.

came to happen and what she must now do to prevent it happening again; an indication, perhaps, of a growing maturity.

In the subsequent period of atonement Deborah reapplies the mask of the Madonna. Feeling a 'longing for her unjudging, adoring baby' she experiences, however, an unpalatable rejection when Timmy's first delight at seeing her is followed by a show of distrust (*TBGM*: 33). Her neighbour, Betty Marsden, another figure rehearsing popular child psychology, explains; 'he's distrustful of you, of course, because you went away from him, and he doesn't like to entrust his security to you again'. The suggestion of maternal betrayal pushes Deborah to make the desperate promise that 'Mummy will stay with you always' (*TBGM*: 34). But her altered position as sole parent reveals a deficiency hitherto masked by the presence of more experienced carers who effectively undermine her role. Deborah's resolve lasts for several weeks in which Timmy is positioned in the role of adult suitor, giving attention and pleasure to Deborah, rather than receiving it; perhaps therapeutic for her, but not for the child. Deborah's need as a traumatised, immature woman is for the care and support of a 'maternal' figure possessing different qualities from those of her own mother. In this scenario, Timmy's adoration is beneficial to neither of them. Swayed briefly by the paradigm of motherhood that 'here in her home with her child was the only wholly satisfactory life', she nevertheless turns down another chance of a job in Winchester in favour of one in London, going against her own vow to be a 'good mother' (*TBGM*: 35). Before her return to London, the telling use of the child to evoke the inauthentic emotionalism attached to Christmas betrays Deborah's conflicted position between childhood and adult responsibility, unable to commit fully to childrearing and homemaking. Her ambivalence is revealed in a spontaneous thought shocking even to herself; 'at

least I can have Christmas with Timmy' in 'an orgy of sentimentality' (*TBGM*: 37 and 42).

Weekend visits home cause Deborah more suffering as Timmy begins to seem like a stranger. The narrative voice here suggests a manipulation of Timmy's reactions to her coming and going to justify her return to London, leaving him in the familiar setting and care of Mrs Chalmers. However, an alternative reading would position Deborah as a confused and indecisive young woman, rather than simply a capricious and selfish one. She misses Timmy's touch even while not understanding the urge to leave him, and her suspicions about Graham's sexual conduct feed her grudge and weaken her resolve to return to the role of motherhood without the support of the child's father.

The 'female rake's progress' begins in earnest as the devil over her shoulder makes Deborah 'wild with envy of the glamour every word of Madeleine's life brought before her' (*TBGM*: 46). It is the connection with her friend that brings the second lover, Joe, into Deborah's life. Joe provides the soothing balm that releases Deborah from her, albeit rapidly waning, atonement. With the skill of his profession (he is a lawyer) and an expansive charm he convinces Deborah of his devotion both to her and to his wife, using the same rationale for her continuing relationship with Graham. They conduct their affair in a reciprocally loving way, taking advantage of privileges available to 'Yanks' in London. At this stage, however, while Deborah is living two lives she is 'not wholly happy in either'. She enjoys flattery and reassurance from Joe but still sees the relationship as 'threatening, potentially dangerous' and, in her home setting, she cannot 'achieve a satisfactory synthesis of the situation' of her double life, failing to satisfy either of the two males, Timmy and Joe (*TBGM*: 70-71). When troubled by conflicted emotions the connection with

Graham re-emerges more strongly, emphasising that her dependence on her husband leaves her with no reliable mentor. The reassurance she seeks is impossible in Graham's absence.

The time for the relationship with Joe to end is another epiphanic moment in Deborah's progress. While the regret expressed before he leaves appears genuine, he knows he has indeed done her harm. It had been a virtuoso performance of coaxing that effectively persuaded her into a position of counterfeit love but Deborah is dismayed to hear the 'open assumption of persuasion [that] suggested intolerable weakness', expressed in the guise of Joe's advice to go home, away from Madeleine's influence. Coupled with her dependence on Graham this is an unpalatable truth. Deborah needs to hold onto her now destabilised view that any 'change of intention is due to uninfluenced new conviction', in other words, she wishes to believe she makes her own choices. Forced to confront a chastening prospect, 'a vision of herself passing from man to man, passing ever more shoddily from the wife of Graham and the mother of Timmy' she reaches another pivotal point in the novel (*TBGM*: 77-78). Faced with the choice between returning to convention or something else, she chooses the transgressive, but profitable, path towards a series of affairs of differing intensity and reducing emotional significance ignoring the waves of advice offered by her lovers and Madeleine:

"Deborah, why don't you go home? If all you've said to me is true, and I firmly believe it is, can't you see where it's going to lead you? [...] But you surely want to go back and live with your husband when the war's over and you've got a baby to keep you company while you wait for him. Just between you and me, you're damn lucky. Don't you think you'd be wiser to go home now rather than to risk spoiling it?" (*TBGM*: 82).

The seemingly sincere advice of a friend endorses the primacy of family life that Madeleine herself avoids. By now, however, all attempts at persuasion have a contrary effect. Deborah doubts the sincerity of the advice of a woman with whom she is determined to compete. For the first time, Deborah is clear what she wants and sets out to achieve it. She has gained sexual agency and will use it consciously to improve the skills of the 'good mistress' through a process she describes as 'training and education' (*TBGM*: 101). Expressed in this way it becomes a career choice that she approaches with due professionalism. Pierre, the archetypal Frenchman whom she has prised away from Madeleine, is to be the tutor she hopes will reveal 'the secret that Madeleine seemed so carelessly to hold' (*TBGM*: 102). He lays out the simple attributes that reflect, ironically, Deborah's mother's typology of the mother and the wife.

I think that being a good mistress is very much the same thing as being a good wife, only in one case the emphasis is perhaps more in the kitchen, in the other, in the bedroom (*TBGM*: 102).

Pierre's definitions of the 'good mistress' and the 'good wife' are emblematic of the double standard but he, too, adds another voice of reproach that questions whether she would find it hard to go back to being a 'good wife'. Deborah's refusal of her conventional role is repellent to Pierre, a man who hypocritically subscribes to the view that unbridled female sexuality is a threat to hegemonic masculinity, bearing out Sonya O. Rose's observation of the fear that "sexualised femininity" might jeopardise the "traditional" gender order' (Rose, 2003: 135). Pierre lives blithely by the masculine double standard, enjoying the benefits of 'unconventional morality' at the same time as advocating conventional morals as 'a very necessary framework for society' based,

however, on a strict code of feminine conduct. Deborah's rebellion against this duality, in effect, cuts her off from gendered codes of behaviour as she relinquishes the 'mother type' for the spoils of using her talents as the 'wife type' (*TBGM*: 106-107). While a surface reading of the novel might see it as endorsing society's fear of women's free sexual expression, Laski's vacillating accounts of Deborah's developing plight provide grounds for alternative interpretations that position Deborah, potentially, as victim.

Deborah's response is to overcome her resistance to being handed from man to man and to stake a claim to her place in a system of exchange, allowing Luis, a Brazilian friend of Pierre's, to take over her training. With a shift in tone Laski inserts the critical tipping point, mentioned earlier, at which Deborah pauses to consider 'whether she had translated a normal sense of loss at Graham's absence into a false desire for more than he had ever given her' (*TBGM*: 114). It is too late for the moral tide to turn as the need for justification becomes less urgent and Deborah acquires a level of personal agency that at another point in history would have been admirable. It is interesting that Andrea Adolphe suggests in her article, "At least I get my dinners free", that more than sex and clothing it is food that fulfils Deborah's desires (Adolphe: 395). Adolphe highlights moments in the novel at which Deborah experiences 'the heights of bliss' with attractive men in restaurants and at parties above 'the solitary pleasures', a euphemism for sex, that must follow (*TBGM*: 111). Whatever her prime motivation, Deborah uses sex to obtain scant resources at a time of extreme shortages.

The figure of a woman exploiting feminine attributes for gain is not, of course, new in literature. From Moll Flanders and Roxana to Becky Sharp there have been so-called anti-heroines with whom a female reader might identify,

even admire. The response involves the interplay between reader, text and historical context, mediated as much through the historical moment of the action as the date of publication.¹¹ A brief comparison between Laski's novel and Kathleen Winsor's romantic historical novel *Forever Amber* illustrates this phenomenon. Both novels were published in the 1940s and each reflects a time of conflict, the first in World War Two and the second during the Civil War and the Restoration. While, as Steven Dillon argues, *Forever Amber* 'could be read into a contemporary wartime setting', the response to each heroine is influenced by the historical context of the narrative (Dillon, 2015: 59). Consequently, judgements evoked by the two women's stories differ widely. While Amber's describes the disintegration of sexual morality four hundred years ago, Deborah's demonstrates a loosening of constraints altogether less acceptable in its uncomfortable proximity to present circumstances.

Although there is a commonality between the two women in their role as courtesan to a succession of suitors, for Amber a journey that begins as a romantic escapade soon becomes one of survival. Deborah's transgression, however, is more problematic since, at an historical moment closer to the reader, she is not seen to face the same hardships as Amber, nor are her actions as excusable. There is, too, a difference between the two women in the question of choice. Deborah sets about accumulating the scarce assets of shortage-stricken London for pleasure, using and consciously refining her sexual capital. Despite Amber's deviation from the conventional sexual paradigm, she has fewer options. In an article in *The Guardian* Elaine Showalter credits Amber, the 'adventurous, highly-sexed heroine', with raising the spirits of women in

¹¹ This is elaborated in the transactional reader-response theory of Louise M. Rosenblatt, 1995. *Literature as Exploration: Fifth Edition*.

wartime Britain who were also in a struggle to survive (Showalter, 2002).¹² The same cannot be said of Deborah, whose story comes too close to a betrayal not only of the spirit of sacrifice but also of the secret pleasures taken by some women to be as warmly embraced as Amber.¹³

Yet it was not just Amber's daring sexual amorality that thrilled readers (and viewers of the popular film adaptation)¹⁴ but her enduring, and ultimately doomed, love for the dashing cavalier, Lord Bruce Carlton, that stands in opposition to Deborah's promiscuity and faithlessness. Although Carlton abandons Amber, pregnant with his child, the reader's investment in the relationship is renewed at intervals in the novel, including their care for one another through the plague. Amber benefits from human kindness in Newgate prison where she is befriended, albeit with a view to a payback, by Mother Red Cap. She sees Amber through to her term and then passes the baby to 'a cleanly responsible cottager's wife ... who will care for the child...' (FA: 177). This 'cleanly responsible' woman is a near equivalent to Mrs Chalmers, the mother's help, who takes over Timmy's care when Deborah goes to London.¹⁵ As Showalter asserts, female readers were 'awed by Amber's courage, daring and strength' and, although this entails relinquishing her baby, sympathy is sustained for a woman trying to overcome adversity by 'a rebellion other women

¹² Showalter. 10/08/2002. *The Guardian*.

¹³ *Forever Amber* was initially banned in many American states and other countries. There is anecdotal evidence that young women passed the book around their friends who confess to having read it under the bedclothes.

¹⁴ *Forever Amber* dir. Otto Preminger 1947.

¹⁵ This was a common solution in the 17th century for pregnant women who had not the means to care for themselves, let alone a child. Women like Mother Red Cap would take on the welfare of the young woman, making money from the informal 'foster care', and from the subsequent services of the 'fallen women'. Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, for example, give accounts of these practices.

identified with' (Showalter, 2002). Amber's transgression is readily forgiven by contemporary readers at a safe historical distance and, importantly and differently from Deborah, even giving up her child to the competent care of another woman is perceived as an heroic maternal sacrifice rather than neglect of maternal responsibilities.

While Deborah's affairs have the quality of the exotic about them, often with men from another country in a relationship destined to be temporary and conditional, the affair with Anthony Naysmith, significantly an Englishman, plants ideas of permanency. She is set up by Madeleine and Anthony's mother to break up his marriage, something he is not prepared to do. Believing she might marry this lover, richer and in every way superior to Graham, Deborah is now the one deceived. Anthony had 'looked on Deborah as a member of a social class perfectly adequate for a mistress but in no way sufficient for a wife' (*TBGM*: 130). Deborah is here positioned as the victim of dominant values subordinated to a patriarchal class system underpinned by the sexual double standard and as such deserving of feminist sympathy. Her proactive response to this offence is to harden her resolve to make this her 'last dabble in emotion', reflecting ruefully that 'Joe was wrong and Graham was right' (*TBGM*: 138-141).

Her status from here on is finely distinguished from that of a prostitute by the way in which recompense is made in kind rather than cash through the scarce luxury items and access to superior food and company afforded her. Interestingly, she finally finds some consolation in female friendship, but of a kind in which 'each found the other immeasurably useful' (*TBGM*: 143).¹⁶ In a reversal of gender roles, Deborah, Sugar Harman and Madeleine together

¹⁶ The friendship between Margaret and Zita in *Westwood*, examined in chapter two was also, initially at least, a relationship of mutual gain.

become 'frankly predatory' as they enjoy the remainder of the war with a succession of 'gay and witty temporary soldiers and civil servants', including the Yanks famously 'oversexed, overpaid and over here' (*TBGM*: 191-192). As stated earlier the acceptance that in wartime, and indeed at other times, men must find outlets for their sexual needs does not yet have a morally accredited equivalent in relation to a woman's needs. All the same many women were to find, privately and discreetly, their own solutions both to sexual and material deprivation, a fact bitterly resented by professional prostitutes who lamented that "[t]here are too many gifted bloody amateurs here for a decent pro to get a living" (Ferris, Paul, 1993: 146). It is interesting, too, that there is no sign in the years of Deborah's sojourn in London of her having to confront pregnancy, suggesting that she was no 'bloody amateur' and that she and her sexual partners were at least competent at contraception.¹⁷

Changing sexual attitudes are apparent in the wartime period of release from restraint that is exemplified in Laski's novel. It is of interest to this feminist reading that Laski's fictional revelations anticipate by more than fifteen years Helen Gurley Brown's 1962 handbook to sexual pleasure *Sex and the Single Girl*. Like Brown's controversial book, the representation of Deborah's story challenges what Imelda Whelehan calls 'the normal economy of heterosexual

¹⁷ Wartime public information posters for servicemen that warned of the 'Triple Threat: Pickups, Drunkenness, Venereal Diseases'; a caution addressed to men based on rapid increases in the incidence of STIs in the British and US forces (Costello, John. 1985: 20-21). What is perhaps more interesting is the absence of statistics for the health of the female population in Costello's commentary on *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-1945*. Figures are given instead for births, divorces, marriages and illegitimate births which all increased toward the final stages of the war, demonstrating, perhaps, the diminishing patience and fortitude of women who 'had to wait' or those who became pregnant in similar circumstance to Deborah. The absence of any reference to contraception or pregnancy suggests that Deborah behaves as a woman of the 'sexual revolution', well-versed in contraceptive measures, later revolutionised by 'The Pill'.

relations at the time and foreground(s) women's right to pleasure, among other things' (Whelehan, 2005: 26-27). Once more a 'single girl', Deborah's unplanned but not unwilling path is comparable to that laid down in Brown's prototype self-help manual. Whelehan notes that the regimen detailed by Brown 'explodes the myth of natural effortless sex appeal, replacing it with the notion that femininity [...] is an asset hard won' (Whelehan: 27). Deborah's consciously undertaken 'training programme' demonstrates the amount of effort a woman is prepared to put into this profitable process. Susan Douglas suggests that, by the early sixties, in Brown's guide 'we see some startling stirrings of female liberation. And for her (Brown), liberation came through sex, by throwing the double standard out the window' (Douglas, cited in Whelehan: 29). Deborah's challenge to the double standard, however, makes far more profit in the material than the political arena. All the same, her claim to the 'right to pleasure' begins to prefigure a radically new sexual attitude.

The representation of Deborah's rebellion reflects a not too unusual circumstance in wartime and Laski's complex characterisation evokes both censure and understanding of a young woman's contradictory emotions. Written before the sexual license of the sixties, the novel falls short of a full endorsement of a woman's freedom to express her sexuality, but it takes exploratory steps towards that end. The motivation for Deborah's licentiousness is not uncomplicatedly selfish and she is beset at intervals by the guilt of a wife and mother. Her behaviour is in effect closer to an imitation of stereotypical male sexual behaviour. Yet there are moments, even when she has become habituated to her sybaritic lifestyle, when she feels the 'unexpected thrust' to return and 'find Graham beside her in the cottage, home and everything unchanged, Timmy an intimate acquaintance, a part of her mind and body'.

However, by now she knows 'there's no going back, no profit in examining motives, in totting up gain, nothing but going forward to gaiety and loss and loss' (*TBGM*: 185). Her conflict illustrates the abiding power of female cultural conditioning even during this 'abnormal pocket of time' (Feigel: 4).

Deborah's dissatisfaction with traditional feminine roles is a product of the extraordinary circumstances of war that offer the opportunity to re-programme her femininity to acquire what is out of reach to many other women. Initially a victim of 'soft sell' persuasion she proceeds to exploit the glittering opportunities of a carnivalesque world turned upside down, a situation to be reignited, in a different way, in the 1960s' sexual revolution. But for Deborah and her friends, once the celebrations of VE day are over, the sexual utopia dissolves as women await the return, or otherwise, of spouses rendered alien by time and experiences. Deborah's predicament is one faced by many women during the war and, although the insights into Deborah's motives are at times damning, Laski draws her character with some compassion, aware that there were significant numbers who behaved similarly – including her real-life model. As a British housewife later explained: "We were not really immoral, there was a war on" (Costello, 1985: 23). Judgements about morality were to be more fundamentally challenged, with excuses replaced by entitlements, as the impetus for feminist reform in the personal areas of women's lives grew more powerful.

The next novel, Elizabeth Taylor's *In a Summer Season* is set on the eve of the sixties with the sexual revolution knocking insistently on the door. Whereas Laski's anti-heroine is an immature woman, the protagonist in Taylor's novel is a hurriedly remarried widow, approaching middle-age, whose sexual

reawakening is viewed with quiet distaste by her family in a way that reflects society's censure of female sexual desire.

In a Summer Season

Death and Sexual Awakening

A decade and a half after Marghanita Laski's exposé of the sexual exploits of a 'lapsed' wife and mother in wartime London, Elizabeth Taylor conceived her novel of sexual desire during what has been called a "golden age" of family life but almost in sight of the 1960s' sexual revolution. *In a Summer Season* moves forward in time from the aphrodisiac stimulus of war to the relative calm of the middle-class commuter belt - a parallel location to that of Penelope Mortimer's novel *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* - now enjoying the fruits of Harold Macmillan's 'never had it so good' era.¹⁸ Taylor and Mortimer each highlight significant aspects of the 'middleness' of the period under review; caught between conservatism and progress. The novels were published towards the end of a period when women's unease was submerged beneath constrained middle-class exteriors. This context renders the sexual awakening of Taylor's protagonist almost as transgressive as the sexual antics of Laski's heroine.

In a Summer Season presents Kate Heron's widowhood and remarriage as the central events driving a narrative that confronts middle-aged sexuality at the same time as gesturing towards the social and sexual revolutions soon to emerge. The novel highlights the conflict between tradition and modernity in which the ideal of 'home and hearth' is disrupted by the unseemly intrusion of

¹⁸ The British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan famously declared in 1957: "Indeed let us be frank about it - most of our people have never had it so good".

sexual desire into the family configuration. As the masculine writing of the 'Angry Young Man' resounds around the time the novel was published, Taylor communicates a quieter unease. Far from the sexy misogyny of the angry grammar school boys she renders female desire in a manner at once sensitive to and disruptive of what Will May terms 'those old increasingly fragile-looking categories' that nonetheless are set to persist and inhibit (May, 2010: 239).

The turbulence in attitudes towards sexuality, marriage and motherhood in the mid-twentieth century is emblematised in the feminine types Taylor imagines in the novel. She makes evident both the pull of what Neil Reeve describes as 'iconoclastic modernising' and the resistance to it (Reeve, 2008: 60). The attempts of the women variously to preserve, negotiate, or challenge traditional conceptions of core feminine roles represent a structure of feeling attached to a period of history that looks back with nostalgia to an age of certainties while tentatively embracing the new. A narrative that characterises a middle-aged woman sexually attracted to a younger man, even before her widowhood, travels explicitly into the 'formerly taboo areas of female experience' identified by Elaine Showalter (Showalter, 1978: 35). While Kate Heron's awakening is initiated by loss, an attempt to reinvent herself after widowhood ultimately falls short of fulfilling the necessary healing despite its bold challenge to social and sexual norms.¹⁹

Kate's progress is complicated by grief at the death of her husband, Alan, and aggravated by the watchful adjudication of the members of her household. The haste with which Kate marries Dermot, a man ten years younger than her, and the newness of their marriage in the summer of the

¹⁹ The name and situation recall Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, published in 1899, that challenges traditional views on female sexuality and is a landmark work in early feminist writing.

narrative would on the face of it, support Neil Reeve's suggestion that Kate's powerful desire for Dermot is 'bound up with and motivated by her uncompleted mourning for Alan' (Reeve: 61). Such a view draws on Freud's theories on mourning further explored by Judith Butler who notes that Freud 'suggested that successful mourning meant being able to exchange one object for another'. By this measure, the exchange of Alan for Dermot would be a hopeful sign for the resolution of Kate's grief, 'as if the prospect of entering life anew made use of a kind of promiscuity of libidinal aim' (Butler, 2004: 20). The implication of 'promiscuity', although not used here in the more usual sexual sense of the term, suggests a lack of discrimination, almost a desperation to discover an alternative. If mourning involves, in Butler's words, '*submitting* to a transformation' the outcome is out of control and remains unknowable (Butler: 22, original emphasis). The strength of Kate's sexual desire for someone so definitely 'other' to Alan signifies a willingness to submit to the necessary transformation but she is constrained by family ties and their effect on any attempt to build a new life on the site of the former one. Her mourning is further complicated by recovery from the emotional strain of a period spent caring for her husband before his death. While this would negate any inclination to return to the time of Alan's illness, the appeal of a life that reconstructs what she had before his illness is ultimately placed before her, precipitated by a further loss and a renewed requirement for mourning.

The love between Kate and Dermot is articulated from differing viewpoints that express the conflicts embedded in the situation. The omniscient narrator's voice dwells on the powerful sexual attraction that Kate and Dermot enjoy, while the views of other protagonists unfold in the form of letters and in private conversations that impose judgements in line with traditional mores. An

authentic impression of the nature of the love is revealed, however, during a quarrel between the two that is revelatory of their respective feelings. Dermot's precarious self-respect puts him in fear of separation from Kate 'whom he so deeply loved', indeed, this love is 'his chief pride' (SS: 31). Access to these private scenes confirms that Kate's marriage to Dermot is based on more than raw desire. Her love is shown to be unconditional and she manifests no wish to mould him 'to a more amenable pattern' that would satisfy societal expectations. Although aware that people can change, 'she had married him as he was and would do so again now, she knew, and at any time in the future' (SS: 36). Rather than empty romanticism, or lust devoid of substance, their mutual love seems assured.

A measure of the potentially subversive effect of their love exists in the constant scrutiny by a jury of others who observe something unnervingly transgressive before them. The views and opinions emanating from mid-century, middle-class English women reveal the uneasy perceptions of female conduct in transition. In this view of the middle ground of twentieth century England Aunt Ethel represents the backward glance of the once campaigning spinster, the teenage Louisa holds on to the status quo, and the young model Araminta is the forward-looking emblem of a sexy modernity that threatens to undermine long-held certainties. Kate is a 'spanner in the works' who disrupts all their notions of seemly womanhood.

For the watchers in her household Kate's sexual awakening is jarringly out of step with her identity as wife, mother, and latterly, widow, even though the desire she feels is legitimate. However, after marrying Dermot Kate fails to establish a new position that would redefine her roles and subjectivities. Her blithe and blinkered canter over the moral hurdles of womanly conduct is

enough to place her beyond the pale in the eyes of the observers. Add to that the conspicuous fulfilment of sexual desire in the family home inhabited by her two children, Lou and Tom, himself only ten years younger than Dermot, along with Aunt Ethel and Mrs Meacock, the housekeeper, the response is a mixture of resentment, embarrassment, and, for the older women, an element of sardonic prurience. The spinsters Ethel and Gertrude, having read manuals on the 'technique of sex as they called it', consider that 'sex was something which must [...] wear itself out' (SS: 47).

Equally disturbing as the manifestation of Kate's sexual desire is the disruption of the 'breadwinner' binary in heterosexual relationships. In marrying Dermot, Kate exercises the subjective power traditionally held by the male. She has the money and the house, a muscular masculine power. Indeed, Aunt Ethel suggests she has 'bought' Dermot:

"I give this marriage five years at most," she had written to her friend Gertrude. "Without being too brutal, one must admit that she has bought him for herself with the money Alan left her, and one day he, Dermot, will begin to find that being her property is irksome. Then, when the physical side grows less important, she may think she hasn't got her money's worth" (SS: 47).²⁰

Yet rather than a temporary aberration, the impetus for Kate's actions may lie in the appeal of escape from convention realised in the new and exciting kind of love shared with Dermot after Alan's death. As Reeve suggests, Dermot 'offers Kate the exhilaration of the new, an erotic agitation whose deepest component may be the sense of release from all the customs and protocols on which she believed her happiness depended', prefiguring the

²⁰ The confusion of some older women about sexual desire recalls Mrs Betts in *To Bed with Grand Music*.

unfettered enjoyment that the sexual revolution would soon introduce (Reeve: 59). But that moment has not yet arrived and Kate is still subject to those customs and protocols that would punish women who seek to deviate from their expected roles. Taylor's excursion into the vexed site of middle-aged female sexual desire in an otherwise discreet and conservative milieu is simultaneously encouraging and frustrating. The rendering of the eroticism of lovemaking in her second marriage to Dermot and, realistically, the fatigue of its aftermath is audacious in its contemporary context but Kate's ultimate reversion to type in a third marriage that is a close replica of her first may disappoint a twenty-first century feminist reader. The outcome highlights the almost insuperable impediments to sustaining a deviant position during the so-called golden age of family life so vigorously sponsored in the transitional period from austerity to material consumerism.

The difficulties attached to a complex family configuration that fails to incorporate Dermot, the alien incomer with his faux Irish accent and charm, are illuminated through the metaphor of 'our view'. The 'castle where the Princesses lived' is seen through the telescope 'kept at the south window for looking at the view'. The scene symbolises a dominant English tradition that is being stretched to breaking point by the inauthentic interloper, a wilfully 'other' signifier of modernity. The 'solemn ritual' of observing the castle (presumably Windsor) belongs to a different family 'and Dermot not a part of it' (SS: 29). In his role as harbinger of the new, Dermot, like the Prince in the fairy tale of *Sleeping Beauty*,

had broken through imprisoning habits, not questioning who had begun them, or how they had gained their hold, and he had earned Tom's gratitude and been resented by Lou, who was not quite ready to be set free (SS: 29).

The sole character who is already in sympathy with Dermot's alignment with ruthless modernity is Araminta, the dazzling exemplar of a new style of womanhood and the daughter of Kate's closest friend, the late Dorothea. Minty has the cool indifference and lack of regard for social conventions that has the potential to shock other women and attract men. A woman sitting happily in the second half of the century, she is preoccupied with style and uses sex in the casual manner more typical of the young male. Her education is in the methods of best exposing clothes, make up and image through photographic modelling, an occupation that epitomises feminine aspects of the late 1950s' consumer driven culture. Yet the demise of both Araminta and Dermot in the second part of the narrative reveals a pessimistic prospect for those who attempt to leave behind the old ways.

The vexed issue of middle-aged women marrying or having affairs with younger men has been much explored in literature.²¹ It is almost always the case that the maintenance of her beauty is felt by the older woman to be integral to her desirability and the fear of failing in this threatens the stability of the relationship. Kate's stubborn resistance to joining in the womanly masquerade of youthful looks is only to be broken when the security of their love is undermined. Before the catalytic events of the second part of the novel, 'The Return of the Thorntons', the first part, significantly named 'At the Beginning of Summer', offers an intimate and optimistic disclosure of Kate and Dermot's love. At the outset, Kate seems well prepared for the foreseeable pitfalls and takes heed of her own warnings about 'the hazards of having married a husband so much younger than herself' (SS: 38).

²¹ Examples include, among many others; Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin*, Elizabeth von Arnim's *Mr Skeffington*, and *Love*, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, and Colette's *Cheri* sequence.

She had made up her mind when she married Dermot that having a husband ten years younger than herself set a great many booby traps before her – mutton dressed up like lamb being one of them. (SB: 17)

During a visit to the hairdresser early in the novel she is tempted into a rinse simply 'to give a more uniform colour'. It is only later in the narrative, as the relationship becomes unstable, that Kate asks Dermot, 'do you mind having a grey-haired wife? Shall I have it dyed?' (SS: 208). His air of unconcern makes her feel she is becoming unimportant to him and propels her to the hairdresser once more. The shocking outcome, after handing *carte blanche* to Elbaire, is tragically never to be seen by Dermot.

The insecurity of an ageing woman afraid of losing the ability to inspire her lover's desire is expressed poignantly in the novel but Taylor's explicit portrayal of the force of Kate's feelings and her susceptibility to Dermot is sexually charged. In the sultry heat of a summer's day in the garden Kate is disarmed as Dermot's touch drives her to the edge of abandonment.

He drew her shoulders back against him and slid his hands inside her thin shirt. At once, she dropped her sewing into her lap and closed her eyes, hit unexpectedly by vertigo, by desire. For a second, pressing her head back hard against him, she wildly thought that she must have him take her, there at that moment – with the house in view (SS: 152).

Dermot's approach from behind, catching Kate unawares, leaves her close to giving herself over to 'the will of the other'; a position common to the classic romance but in which, as Alison Light contends, 'erotic pleasure is always annihilating' (Light, 1991: 175). The novel demonstrates, albeit more prosaically than in a romance plot, how the sensuous scene in the garden will be dissolved, on this occasion by the fear of the imminent intrusion of Mrs Meacock picking mint or Aunt Ethel looking on from her window. The presence of the inhibiting observers

in Kate and Dermot's home frustrates this and other subsequent moments of spontaneous desire.

The foregrounding of Kate's awakened sexuality reveals an aspect already highlighted in *A Game of Hide and Seek* about the conflict of ideas and ideals between generations. The backward look of Ethel, another one-time suffragette, and Kate's newly expressed forward-looking sexuality signify the discrepancies not only between generations of women but also between types. Claims made by Marie Stopes in the 1920s were still contentious in the mid-century - witness the puzzled attitudes of Ethel, Gertrude and, in Laski's novel, Mrs Betts. Stopes did not subscribe to the popular belief that the normal man's sexual needs are stronger than the normal woman's and made this conviction the basis of her book *Married Love* in 1918 and in much of her subsequent work. Stopes contended that women should admit to and seek fulfilment of their sexual needs, much as most men would. Even as Kate enjoys her renewed sexual life the pressures of domestic life disrupt the construction of something new. Kate's attempt at a reworking of the idea of separate spheres is doomed from the moment she expresses relief that Dermot has a regular job in London; "I shall come down to meet you at the station and feel a real suburban wife again". Her last word was ill-chosen' (SS: 154). She fails to reconcile her previous role as a wife waiting at the station with her life with Dermot who, without employment, has been idle in the house (though making token gestures at money-making projects such as growing mushrooms). The moment her conservative instincts are revealed, however, Dermot's desire for a fast car, the symbol of technological consumerism, emerges as a veiled demand for recompense for her slip.

The question as to whether Kate and Dermot would have been better having an affair away from surveillance is one that might be posed, but this is not

presented as a dilemma in the novel. The fear of social opprobrium overrides any possible inclination Kate might have had to pursue her passion out of wedlock and it would have been the natural expression of her commitment to Dermot. Even so her marriage conflicts with the other roles, duties, and obligations that she is still expected to fulfil, roles that include: grieving widow, mother, manager of Alan's legacy and host to his Aunt, and intermediary between Dermot and his mother. From her betwixt and between position the weight of expectation attached to Kate's multiple roles would require her to perform as an exemplary woman, or, in modern terms, as a 'superwoman'. Taylor's hesitancy to challenge convention by imagining an enduringly radical outcome for her heroines is evidence of the difficulty in sustaining viable alternatives for women at this historical moment. That there is no satisfactory alternative resolution – apart from death - for Kate, nor any viable framework for her to depart from convention is an omission that leads her to the conservative default position. Taylor's feminist thrust is sensed in the pathos with which she expresses Kate's lack of female agency and the tragedy of the consequences.

Taylor's effective use of free indirect style in the novel - an indication of a tentative engagement with modernist forms in an essentially realist novel - is seen in her use of the viewpoints of several antagonists that reveal not only their interior thoughts and reactions but also supply impressions of the main characters using a voice other than that of the narrator.²² Aunt Ethel's letters to Gertrude, her oldest friend, add a comedic element that at the same time portrays disapprobation of taboo-breaking. Her melodramatic instruction to destroy the letters after reading signifies her position as a parasite with limited rights to opinions. Nonetheless

²² As already noted, Taylor's admiration for Virginia Woolf is apparent in much of her fiction through intertextual references contained in novels discussed in this thesis.

Ethel's letters present a description of Kate from the viewpoint of someone who has known her and Alan in their former conventional married life, a perspective otherwise denied the reader. Concerned about the unsuitability of the new situation, Ethel offers a rationale for Kate's apparent sexual deviation based on the premise that Kate is a

typically *English* woman, I should say – young for her age, rather inhibited (heretofore), too satirical, with one half of her mind held back always to observe and pass judgement. This temperate climate has its effect – ripeness comes slowly and all sorts of delicate issues find shelter to grow in and so confuse the picture (SS: 148).

After expounding extensively on the effect of a Mediterranean climate and diet – “vitamin E in olives has a *stimulating* effect on the sexual organs” – she declares that love, for Kate, “should begin in the mind first”, an assertion that recalls Deborah's insistence on ‘love before immorality’ in Laski's novel. Remembering Kate and Alan's courtship, enhanced by classical music, hikes and common tastes in books, Ethel highlights with undisguised disapproval the contrast between that and Kate's relationship with Dermot. It is her opinion that the end of the “marriage of two minds” between Kate and Alan “left a blank that no one (?) can fill”.²³ As an elderly spinster, she ventures also to claim some knowledge and understanding of the perils of ageing, suggesting that while a woman may feel restless and unwanted, she may still be young inside. All the same she declares that while Kate “smells April and May, as Shakespeare has it, I myself can only smell danger” (SS: 148 - 149). Ethel's radical phase has long ago regressed to a conservative morality and a belief in national stereotypes, a

²³ A slip that is perhaps indicative of the unreliability of her judgment, and a little snipe from Taylor at the pomposity of Ethel's stance. Shakespeare's Sonnet 16 speaks of ‘a marriage of *true* minds’.

regression observed by Juliet Mitchell who reports that, 'the suffragettes proved quite unable to move beyond their initial demands, and many of their leading figures later became extreme reactionaries' (Mitchell, 1984: 43). Thus, by Ethel's reckoning, no typically English woman would have unseemly desires stimulated by warmer climes or by Shakespeare, at least not for long and surely not happily ever after. The friendship between Ethel and Gertrude, forged in the turmoil of the suffrage movement that saw them in Holloway together, exemplifies the conflict between tradition and modernity. Survivors of a more radical age, they now occupy peripheral positions in society. From these vantage points they indulge in sharp critiques of the way the rest of the household is now set up, demonstrating the tendency for the fervour of youthful beliefs to subside over time.

Kate's adolescent daughter Louisa is the only one safe from their judgement, deserving of their sympathy in the irregular new family arrangement, a sympathy that gives focus to their critique. Playing cello music with her aunt, Lou re-enacts the drawing-room practices of an earlier age, little appreciated by the rest of the household but reminiscent of an older version of family life. In the curious way that affinity in families often skips a generation, the sixteen-year-old Lou, like her elderly aunt, is resistant to modernity.²⁴ She finds refuge in the old-time certainty of religion in the person of Father Blizzard, whom she loves and in whom she confides her problematic family situation. Taylor's narrative device allows Lou's conversations with the priest to offer the young woman's view of the process of 'courtship' and marriage that Kate and Dermot went through. She asserts that her mother and Dermot were in love before her father died.

²⁴ Harriet's mother Caroline and her friend Lilian had similar bonding experiences in prison in Taylor's *A Game of Hide and Seek* but later regress to more conservative attitudes. Her daughter Betsy is more in sympathy with the suffragette grandmother.

“She always seemed excited and laughed a lot when Dermot came to the house, which he didn’t very often as I’m sure my father disliked him, and who could blame him, if he did? Oh, there’s been trouble with mother for years – father’s illness when she looked so pinched up and miserable, and we couldn’t comfort her” (SS: 60).

The irritable assertion that ‘we couldn’t comfort her’ reveals an element of resentment felt by Lou and her brother at their inability to support their mother and perhaps divert her attention from Dermot with whom she and Tom could spot an emerging love. Lou’s personal analysis of her mother’s motives leaves no room for the erotic realities, perhaps understandably for a teenage daughter who would find such considerations unpalatable. She suggests a rationale that her mother was jealous of Tom’s growing independence, “and that’s why she married Dermot [...] who would be a bit like a son” (SS: 60). Her fear that the priest will talk about her mother’s sex life subsides with her blush ²⁵ as Father Blizzard makes the safer point about what is now known as ‘empty nest syndrome’, suggesting that Dermot may help her to get over the loneliness of having children no longer materially dependent (SS: 59). But Lou remains bitter: ‘Now I never stop thinking about Mother and wondering what she’s going to do next. It won’t be for my good whatever it is’ (SS: 59). The role reversal of daughter worrying about mother is another function of the disrupted pattern of family life brought about by seemingly inappropriate sexual passion. The voice of the aged spinster and that of the inexperienced young woman stop short of a true

²⁵ Taylor, like Jane Austen, makes much use of the female ‘blush’ in her writing as shorthand for the extreme feeling of understanding of something that would be better hidden. See, for example, ‘The Blush’, Taylor’s short story from the collection of the same name (1958).

comprehension of Kate's desire as, once again, Taylor shows three generations of womanhood out of sync with each other.²⁶

It is tempting to suggest that while Lou and Tom cannot help their mother, that function is taken on instead by Dermot who, as the antithesis of Alan not just in age but also in cultural and educational experience, is not up to the task. Yet a speculative look at the process of mourning that casts Kate as needing something different to replace what went before would place Dermot as a perfect fit. Judith Butler's thinking about the juxtaposition of ecstasy and grief is a useful way into gaining some understanding of Kate's position.

To be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself and thus can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief (Butler, 2004: 24, original emphasis).

Butler's perspective suggests that there are those who live beside themselves in sexual passion or grief or, like Kate, in both.²⁷ Her failure to reconcile the two overwhelming emotions is resolved for her through tragedy. The grief over Alan's death is at first mitigated by the introduction of new discordant attitudes displayed by Dermot and later complicated by Araminta, each of them representative of a newly embodied pleasure-seeking spirit. Significantly, the response of both Kate and Tom to the borderline delinquent characters of Dermot and Araminta is plainly sexual, ecstatic and ultimately disastrous.

In contrast to Kate and Dorothea's shared 'friendship as light and warming as the summer's air' (SS: 134), Dorothea's daughter Araminta materialises as the quintessence of shocking modern tastes and sexual attitudes. She represents the

²⁶ The phenomenon of lost and regained sympathy through skipped generations is also found in *A Game of Hide and Seek* discussed in chapters three and five of this thesis.

²⁷ Butler's theories about loss, while taking in a broader spectrum of social, political and aesthetic relations go further than a purely psychological or psychoanalytical discourse but are applicable to the paradox of a process of mourning which cannot be predicted or fully resolved.

prospect of a radically different future femininity. Newly graduated from childhood to womanhood, she has a disturbing effect on the members of the bereaved families. Tom, who has grown up with her as part of the closely linked family units, falls in love with her adult persona, and Dermot is also attracted to her. She is a prototype of modern womanhood who creates her own style with little attention to propriety. As she carelessly spills sherry on her silk dress Tom inwardly gasps, “My God, she’s got nothing on underneath” [...], and [feels] faint’ (SS: 124). Gertrude professes some sympathy for the over-stimulated contemporary young man: ‘You can’t pick up a newspaper without seeing some minx’s half-naked bust. The great mammary age I call it’ (SS: 109). In pinpointing the earlier onset of puberty as a modern phenomenon, Ethel and Gertrude are much perplexed at a vision of sexuality so out of keeping with their lives.

While aspects of a freer social and sexual environment are introduced in the first part of the novel, the second part, ‘The Return of the Thorntons’ reasserts the way things were before Kate’s bereavement. The ultimate “exhumation” of Gilbert and Gubar’s ‘grave or “plot” of the past’ that is the traditional family structure will return the middle-class woman to the default position (Gilbert and Gubar, 1994: xv). Charles is the symbol of a past life shared by the two families and his homecoming with Araminta accelerates a reversion to type for both Dermot and Kate as another more credible observer appears to scrutinise Kate’s life. The differences between Dermot and Charles Thornton, a school friend of Alan’s with similar cultural interests, become the source of protective embarrassment for Kate that drives in an already forming wedge between her and Dermot. In his paranoid interpretation of what he sees as a reference to his lack of literary knowledge – he misunderstands their reference to Mrs Gereth - Dermot believes that the two of them ‘had preferred to gloss over

his ignorance [...] implying that there was some awkwardness in not having read every novel that ever was written and having the names of the characters at one's fingertips (SS: 147). The petulant flinging of the book in question (Henry James' *The Spoils of Poynton*) across the room and his 'brooding on this [...] in the dreary pub, to punish her', supports an impression of Dermot as infantilised, undermined by the inversion of age and gendered power relations between him and his wife in which Kate holds control of a domestic economy to which he contributes little (SS: 147). While the representation of Dermot's situation in this way commands a certain amount of sympathy, at the same time it reflects the strength of cultural norms and the potentially dangerous consequences of any challenge to those norms.

It was not for literary conversations, however, that Kate had married Dermot but for the pleasure of love. All the same, Charles' homecoming acts as a haunting memorial of the life that he and Kate and their respective partners had shared that serves to destabilise Kate's new incarnation as joyful participant in a revived sexual life. What is more, her capacity for sexual desire now begins to impinge upon her relationship with Charles in the form of her 'ludicrous dream' in which, 'he had put his hands on her breast – Charles the familiar stranger [...] best friend's husband, no man more forbidden' (SS: 172). Her confusion at this changed character, a character she had wanted changed back, suggests a yearning for a combination of Dermot and Alan, for sex plus stability. That Kate had felt embarrassment on meeting Charles after the dream is another variant on the intermittent appearance in Taylor's writing of 'the blush'; a manifestation of an emotion closely related to the all too common female condition of guilt.²⁸

²⁸ 'Show me a woman who doesn't feel guilty and I'll show you a man'. Erica Jong in *Fear of Flying* 1973.

The companionable friendship and commonality of concerns between Kate and Charles as parents of children reaching maturity in an age of rapid modernisation, gains traction as implicit criticism of the new marriage and of Dermot himself arises. They share concern for the emotional effects in Tom's case, and sexual integrity in Araminta's, that emerge from Tom's one-sided infatuation with her. Excluded from shared parental anxiety, there is nothing left for Dermot except to align himself with the younger characters until, ironically, the modern woman is the catalyst for a final tragic event. The car accident that kills Araminta and Dermot and returns the characters of Kate and Charles to type, has the additional effect of wiping out those characters that transgress moral and cultural mores. The return to bourgeois marriage represents a resolution to conflicting desires that obeys the heteronormative imperative. A recurring tendency in Taylor's novels is the reluctance to propose a radical outcome, accepting instead a disappointing resolution that upholds the status quo. This is also the case for Julia in *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Harriet in *A Game of Hide and Seek*, and for Tory in *A View of the Harbour*, all of whom when faced with the choice between love/independence and security, are forced by unequal societal pressures to opt for the latter.

The shifting viewpoints in the narrative illustrate the entrenched attitudes and repressive power of the multi-layered forces of convention. During her marriage to Dermot, Kate had to assert herself courageously against Edwina, Dermot's mother, and quietly against Ethel, Lou and Mrs Meacock. As a wealthy widow, Kate occupies a place made safer by her economic independence reinforced for her by the depth of the love between her and Dermot but the closing scenes of the novel highlight the conflict between desire and the forces of convention. Dermot's mother's revelation of his pretence of a job in London

arouses in Kate not anger but an urgency to see Dermot, 'I must fly to him' and put an end to 'the absurd deception'. Rather than the righteous fury sought by Edwina, Kate holds onto the belief that it can be resolved: "Holding him tightly in my arms", she thought. "We can solve everything that way" (SS: 213-214). Tragically the outcome is very different.

The exact details of Minty and Dermot's relationship, (like that of Emily and Rose's husband in *The Sleeping Beauty*), are withheld, but the shock of their death together confounds both Kate and Tom. The elimination of Minty and Dermot is a consequence of their engagement with modern tastes – fast cars and casual sex. Those remaining are left to revert to type. Kate marries Charles in a facsimile of her first marriage that satisfies the female adjudicators, leaving Tom to recover his equilibrium. The process of mourning that Kate goes through to find something other is left unresolved by marriage to Dermot, but is renewed when a more viable substitute emerges. Kate is returned to her 'proper' roles as wife, mother and homemaker, perhaps never to regain the power of her sexual desire but rather to salvage a life more appropriate to her middle-class milieu.

In spite of its bold engagement with sexual taboos and changing mores, *In a Summer Season* suggests that the outcome of the pursuit of a relationship based on intense sexual desire for a younger man is destined to fail. Not only will it incur societal and familial disapproval but will be difficult to sustain against the irresistible march of time.

Daddy's Gone A-Hunting

The 'family plot' scenario in Penelope Mortimer's *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* portrays a different source of anguish for a woman caught in what Gayle Greene calls the 'closed circuit of female conditioning' (Greene, 1991: 57-58). Mortimer

portrays the emotional anguish of a woman trapped in the 'closed circuit' of a disintegrating marriage with family complications that contrive to disrupt her mental stability.

At the beginning of the novel Ruth Whiting is sinking inexorably into nervous collapse. Her two young sons have returned to boarding school, her teenage daughter is out of reach even when at home, her husband is relieved to return to his weekday flat in London, to his dental practice and to his love affairs. Ruth is left to wonder, 'What remains? What is left for tomorrow?' (*DGAH*: 7). She might be saying, as many of the American 'housewives' interviewed by Betty Friedan were to say, 'Is this all?'. She imagines Angela at home, hopefully lighting the fire, but instead 'the house would be empty', as empty as a life isolated from other women in a community that offers no stimulation (*DGAH*: 8). In a remarkably prescient novel that displays many of the signifiers of the unfulfilled housewife, Penelope Mortimer portrays Ruth, alone again once the summer rush of family responsibilities is over, returning to 'a world without discipline or purpose. This was why she did so much shopping' (*DGAH*: 6). Yet retail therapy then, as now, is not effective against the accumulated years of anguish Ruth has suffered.

Almost contemporaneous with the research that led to *The Feminine Mystique*, Mortimer's 1958 novel articulates explicitly a sharp critique of marriage and family life. It lays bare the oppressive values of social and sexual norms that impinge upon the lives of mid-century English middle-class women. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* is the second novel of a loose trilogy that includes *The Bright Prison* (1956) and the more famous *The Pumpkin Eater* (1962), later adapted for film, all of which portray manifestations of 'the problem that has no

name' (Friedan, 1963: 9).²⁹ As a multi-faceted, proto-feminist vehicle *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* offers an accurate representation of Gilbert and Gubar's 'family plot' complete with superegoistic father and a mother crushed under the burdens of her role. The attendant threats to the protagonist's mental health anticipate the cry for help from women that will translate into an impulse for change. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* can rightfully be included as one of a group of novels by women that, as Gayle Greene contends, 'speak something new into existence, naming not only the housewife's malaise, but also articulating areas of women's lives that were formerly taboo' (Greene, 1991: 60). The novel demonstrates that gaining control of her mental and physical wellbeing is part of woman's changing story and as such its place should be assured in the vanguard of a wider representation of the many issues troubling the lives of women that would ignite the second wave of feminism.³⁰

The difficulty of breaking what Greene calls the 'closed circuit of female conditioning' is addressed in each of Mortimer's three novels of the period. Greene includes *The Pumpkin Eater* in the group she calls 'mad housewife' novels that were published between 1962 and 1975 and were 'widely read and influential', but there is a case for the inclusion of the earlier *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* in that category (Greene: 57-58).³¹ The novel anticipates *The Feminine Mystique*, dramatising Betty Friedan's observations by exposing the

²⁹ The film adaptation of *The Pumpkin Eater* was made in 1964, with screenplay by Harold Pinter, directed by Jack Clayton and starring Anne Bancroft and Peter Finch.

³⁰ For example, the handbook *Our Bodies Ourselves* detailed aspects of women's physical and mental health that were formerly taboo, or at least not easily accessible. It appeared in the USA in 1970 as a stapled booklet and circulated by hand. It was published in the UK 1972, sold widely and is still in print

³¹ Mortimer's own *The Pumpkin Eater* (1962), Sue Kaufmann's *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1967), Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967) are among those classified by Gayle Greene as concerning 'mad housewives' (Greene 1991. *Changing the Story*).

mechanisms that lead to a debilitating lack of female agency. The narrative's evocation of the 'increasingly severe pathology, both physiological and emotional' (Friedan, in, Greene: 58) suffered by the female protagonist speaks to Friedan's 'problem that has no name' (Friedan: 9). The tragic irony of *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* is that the impetus for breaking the circuit derives from a mother's love for the daughter she had not wanted to bear. The maternal aspect of the story is examined in chapter five where the obstacle-course to obtaining an abortion in the late 1950s is exposed and the missing bond restored. In this section, however, the focus is on another conflicted area of female subjectivity; the potential for mental destabilisation in what is assumed to be the aspirational circumstances of middle-class, married life.

As the postwar social contract urged women to return to the domestic sphere, persuasive advertising exploited their yearning for comfort and security by projecting the idealised image of the happy housewife and the hard sell of household consumer goods. However, this did not satisfy women who pose the question 'is this all?' that Friedan reports hearing from many of those she interviews. Her observations, gathered in the late 1950s from college educated American women and published in 1963 in *The Feminine Mystique* are credited with being a catalyst for the second wave of feminism in America and Britain. There was also a British study by Hannah Gavron, based on interviews with white working class and middle class mothers in London, published posthumously in 1966 as *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers*.

³² While not considered as influential as Friedan, Gavron's interviews reveal

³² In an act that gives tragic power to the sentiments of her book, Hannah Gavron gassed herself at the age of 29, leaving two children and the unpublished PhD research. Her son, Jeremy has written an investigation/memoir about the circumstances around her death, *A Woman on the Edge of Time: A Son's Search for his Mother* (Scribe: 2016).

early expressions of the discontent that would fuel the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain.³³ Both sets of observations are anticipated in Mortimer's dramatisation of the lives of married Englishwomen. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* and later *The Pumpkin Eater* each have the power to stir feminist emotions through the authoritative representation of the plight of women in unhappy marriages, the dominance of male values, the lack of female agency in reproductive choice and mental breakdown.

Daddy's Gone A-Hunting provides candid projections of women's predicaments in what amounts to a prototype of the feminist confessional novel of the late 1960s and 70s.³⁴ Valerie Groves suggests that, '[T]hough she would not have labelled herself a feminist, Penelope Mortimer was voicing the kind of helpless dissatisfaction that was to animate the feminist rebellion' (*DGAH*: vi). If, as Mary Joannou observes, later feminist novels 'may now appear lacking in subtlety, formally conservative, and sometimes even hectoring in tone', Mortimer's late 1950s' model escapes these shortcomings (Joannou. 2000: 106). The novel uses innovative forms to foreground the problems of subjectivity experienced by Ruth and, to a lesser extent, by Angela. While sex is at the root of the crisis, the novel is not about the liberating effect of female sexuality so boldly expressed in the more explicit novels of the so-called sexual revolution. Instead, it demonstrates a pressing need for liberation in all areas of women's lives. Viewed through a feminist lens, it becomes clear that the novel's embedded polemic gives expression to something ahead of its time.

³³ The first Women's Liberation Movement conference in England took place in February 1970 at Ruskin College, attended by 600 women. There were nine more conferences up to 1978 when the movement fractured in disarray.

³⁴ Examples of the feminist confessional novel are Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973), Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks* (1976) and Marilyn French's *the Women's Room* (1977), all written by American women.

In common with others in the category of 'mad housewife' novels the major themes of *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* are entwined in a circular narrative form that imitates Friedan's 'vicious circle' of women's limitation in marriage and family life (Friedan: 146). Mortimer's free indirect style and shifting focalisations distinguish the novel from later first-person confessional narratives, yet it still allows access to the complexities that lie behind the thoughts and actions of the protagonists without their open articulation. The story is moved along by agonised interior monologues, punctuated by fractured and fractious dialogue between Ruth Whiting, her daughter, Angela and her husband, Rex. The novel illustrates how two women with an age difference of barely eighteen years are beset by new dangers during a period when they are supposed to be enjoying the fruits of the 'affluent society'.³⁵ While Ruth's long sentence of entrapment in Greene's 'closed circuit' of marriage and family life is destined to continue, it is Angela, emblematic of a new prospect for women, who gains the freedom to continue along her chosen path.

Mortimer's narrative imagines the figure of a woman confined in an unhappy marriage whose plight is exacerbated by a compulsion to secrecy about her inescapable pregnancy and rushed marriage that, after eighteen years, still carries with it a burden of shame. The inability to share her story highlights the accumulated oppression that positions Ruth as a 'mad housewife'. Her isolation and sustained mental anguish is not to be eased by the kind of chats around the kitchen table found, for instance, in the characterisation of women friends in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962). Instead she substitutes a non-judgemental fantasy figure for the absent trusted confidante,

³⁵ JK Galbraith coined the term in his book about postwar economic growth in the US private sector, *The Affluent Society* (1958).

conducting these conversations 'in the perfectly normal, cheerful voice of a woman talking to a friend' (*DGAH*: 15). The representation of women talking to other women about issues close to themselves in Lessing's novel powerfully evokes the concept of sisterhood that makes hers an early candidate for the label of a novel that 'changes lives'.³⁶ Lessing's fiction was to become as important to second wave feminism as Friedan's sociological work and models the practice of consciousness-raising that became an important element of those women's groups who felt the power of sisterhood in the 1970s.³⁷ Yet, ahead of this movement, Mortimer's rendering of the hazards of suppressing false shame rather than talking about it, contributes to a growing awareness of a problem that would soon have a name.

Located at this earlier moment on the timeline of feminist literary history, and before the onset of the women's movement, *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* reveals how women managed, or not, to hold themselves together without the benefits of sisterhood. Ruth attempts to do this with the help of no-one but the imaginary friend by devising an artificial identity and a superficial allegiance to the conventions of life in the commuter settlement of Ramsbridge Common. She has added two sons to her family (later sent to boarding school to limit her influence on their progress towards Rex's version of masculinity), and has become identified as half of a couple. Her attempt to behave like the other wives involves her engagement in the everyday communications generated in the domestic sphere about childrearing, shopping, socialising and gossip but still

³⁶ In her 1980 article 'This Novel Changes Lives', Rosalind Coward took issue with the term as applied to such popular bestselling novels as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973), Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977), Lisa Alter's *Kinflicks* (1976), although many women did, and still do make the claim that they radically altered their perceptions.

³⁷ As expressed in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, a 1970 anthology of radical feminist writings edited by Robin Morgan, a radical feminist poet.

leaves her unable to share her personal experiences with any of them. The inner life exposed in the narrative shows a woman alone, locked in a hopeless struggle to reconcile her abiding shame with a viable future. The potential therapeutic value of confession is unavailable to Ruth who, had she lived in the days of consciousness-raising groups might have been able to purge the false shame that blights her life. While her overwhelming purpose is to keep the secret hidden, her silence leads to an internally disordered state that belies outward impressions.

She was still young and her apparently commonplace life was deep with fantasy, full of hiding places, a maze of secrecy and deceit and hope tunnelled below the unvarying days (*DGAH*: 9).

Mortimer's portrayal of Ramsbridge Common, the close community in the novel, is emblematic of the middle classes in mid twentieth-century England. 'The Common' provides a context for the revelation of the potential for women's unease, if not openly articulated discontent. Gender binaries are laid out stereotypically with male achievers of professional and economic status acting out a conformist lifestyle in the commuter belt. The men take stock of each other's success in sustaining the accepted mode of living, engaging in similar activities during their brief weekend respite in the home. The women fulfil the roles allotted to them, supporting the men through housekeeping, child-rearing and entertaining. Caught in what Friedan describes as 'a trap', they experience a 'slow death of self' where much that is within the women remains hidden (Friedan in, Greene: 59). Mortimer encapsulates succinctly Friedan's conception of 'the problem that has no name'.

Like little icebergs, each keeps a bright and shining face above water; below the surface, submerged in fathoms of leisure, each keeps her own isolated personality. Some are happy, some poisoned with boredom; some drink too much and some, below the demarcation line, are slightly crazy: some love their husbands and some are dying for lack of love; a few have talent, as useless to them as a paralysed limb (*DGAH*: 33-34).

While conceding that some may be happy and love their husbands, Mortimer's characterisation of the women as stripped of autonomy, bored and 'slightly crazy' identifies the waste of talent, though only acknowledged in a few, that parallels the frustration of Friedan's wives in her study of college-educated women in 1950s America.

The situation that led to the mutually unsatisfactory marriage is portrayed with little sympathy for Rex, the stereotypical male figure who subjects Ruth to a level of emotional cruelty that aggravates her mental disintegration and necessitates her elaborate survival strategies: 'In all the years of her marriage, a long war in which attack, if not happening, was always imminent, she had learnt an expert cunning' (*DGAH*: 9). Not only does Rex blame her for becoming pregnant by him, he places the weight of parental responsibility for their daughter, now the same age as Ruth was when he made her pregnant, firmly on Ruth's shoulders. In a startling example of the double standard, completely disregarding his own role in what happened he feeds her fear by speculating on what Angela might be doing when out with her boyfriend, menacing Ruth with the possible consequences.

"You should know, he said. "And it's not going to happen to any daughter of mine. It's your responsibility. You're the woman. If anything happens to Angela, you'll be entirely to blame. And as far as I'm concerned, you can be sure of one thing. I'd turn her out" (*DGAH*: 28).

His crushing outburst epitomises the effect of masculine power and societal norms that apply differently to men and women. Abdicating all responsibility, Rex reminds Ruth of her past shame, dismisses her adequacy as a mother and menaces both her and Angela should any man do to Angela what he did to Ruth. His idea of good parenting involves placing the duty of care firmly on the mother. The views he expresses reveal a level of hypocrisy that disregards his personal responsibility for seducing a young, inexperienced woman and attempting to shirk the consequences, a pattern that recurs uncannily when Angela becomes pregnant by her boyfriend, Tony.

Mortimer's characterisation of Rex and Tony serve as blueprints for the 'male chauvinist pig' much derided by women's liberationists; the embodiment of self-interested patriarchal oppression. The representation of masculine types in the novel accentuates the absence of agency in the female characters. Mortimer renders Ruth's powerlessness in a mental flashback to the scene eighteen years ago in which she tells Rex she is pregnant. His response, 'What the hell am I supposed to do about it?' is modified only in the face of her father's threat to wreck his career. All decisions in the matter of this woman's pregnancy depend on masculine agency. Now, eighteen years later, Ruth's enduring anxiety is bearable only 'until she tries to move backwards or forwards, into the past or the future' (*DGAH*: 59). The description of being trapped in the present by an irreparable past, a symptom typical of clinical depression, introduces a tragic seam to a narrative infused with Mortimer's own experiences. The account of Ruth's loss of a sense of proportion is expressed with the authority of experience.³⁸

³⁸ The descriptions of mental disintegration reflect the author's personal experience, including the then experimental ECT treatment, expressed in her later fiction and autobiographical writing.

The first stage of the nightmare is losing the ability to believe in insignificance. Consciousness is sharpened to a point in which nothing is trivial but every moment, every detail, has the same unbearable quality of dread. In this condition of despair there are no crises. The merciful censor of memory has broken down and everything is recalled with equal horror (*DGAH*: 58).

Only when she is alone is Ruth free from the judgement of others and, although she may wish to see the neighbours who drop by, she is unable to open the door or answer the telephone. Her urge to tell someone how she feels stops short at Rex and his blaming unresponsiveness. Without the lifelong burden of shame, it might have been possible for Ruth to offload her plight to her neighbour, Jane Tanner, as an alternative to her imaginary friend, since it is Jane, laden with her own issues as a 'captive wife' alone with 'Baby', who responds with caring sympathy to Ruth's collapse. She is present, by chance, to witness Ruth's descent into tears after a frustrated attempt to talk to Rex on the phone. Mortimer's description of a woman on the verge of breakdown is eerily convincing. 'Her whole body was shaking, crushed together on a small chair. [...] She looked up, her eyes dilated with the pitiful alarm of someone falling' (*DGAH*: 64).

Instead of acting as a supportive spouse Rex's self-interested solicitousness leads him to engage a nurse, Miss de Beer, ostensibly to care for Ruth, but in reality to exert a kind of Victorian disciplinary control, another embodiment of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon.³⁹ His concern for Ruth does not

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) are among other more famously influential, fictionalized accounts by women of their personal struggles with depression and mental breakdown.

³⁹ Jeremy Bentham's abortive plan for a circular prison that would be supervised by fewer staff was never built, but others based on similar principles, were. Michel Foucault took up the idea in his work exploring the effects of power and surveillance over others (*Discipline and Punish: The*

extend to listening to her but to providing something more like the late nineteenth-century psychoanalytical remedy, the 'rest cure', a modified version of Dr Silas Weir Mitchell's treatment for neurasthenia that was used to treat, among other intelligent and troubled women, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the 1870s.⁴⁰ This was a pseudo-scientific practice that effectively reasserted gender ideologies by confining a woman displaying behaviour unacceptable in her milieu, often until she finally went mad. Ruth's disorder may be categorised as the 'rebellion against domesticity', described by Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady*, as a condition originating in the rejection of the 'repetition of domestic routines' that was a cause of 'hysterical sickness'. The passivity of the rest cure itself, with the patient often confined alone with a maid, became another source of tedium for 'people of a lively disposition' (Showalter, 1975 [2008]: 158). Freud's theories revised Weir Mitchell's practice and advocated a progressive psychoanalytical treatment regime that

seemed to lay the groundwork for a culturally aware therapy that took women's words and women's lives seriously, that respected the aspirations of New Women, and that allowed women a say in the management of hysterical symptoms (Showalter: 159).

Sadly, the 1950s' family doctor's treatment is neither progressive nor understanding, nor does it give Ruth a say in the management of her symptoms. The doctor supports the idea of a trip to Antibes that will 'cure all that. You'll be a new woman when you come back, I promise you'. Ironically, his reference to 'a new woman' – not the aspirational Victorian New Woman - illuminates the poor

Birth of the Prison 1975 [1977]). This analogy is also applied to Rose's supervision of Emily in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

⁴⁰ Weir Mitchell's practice became discredited following the resurgence of interest in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in the 1970s. The wife in Gilman's story is prescribed a strict rest cure during which she gradually becomes insane.

quality of diagnosis and care of women like Ruth when the domestic imperative overrides the needs of the individual. He exhorts her to make the effort to please him and do right by her children. 'You've got to think of those kids, you know. Angela, Julian, Mike [...]. They're worth making the effort for, aren't they?' (*DGAH*: 66-67). His exhortation reflects the imperative of a woman's duty to husband and family at whatever cost to her personal well-being. What is more it amounts to the very worst practice in the treatment of depressive illness so emphatically counselled against today; the command to 'pull yourself together' that would enable the housewife to resume her responsibilities. Instead of this moral pressure, Ruth needs support from the two male agents, Rex and the doctor, but this is not forthcoming. What she gets is Miss de Beer watching over her night and day. Nonetheless the source of Ruth's malaise, while aggravated by domestic routine and a boorish spouse, is yet more complex in that it derives initially from a pre-marital pregnancy followed by years of concealment while ostensibly living a 'normal' family life. It is telling that this same doctor will not support Ruth in 'making the effort' to help Angela obtain an abortion, yet succeeding on her own in that process does more for her mental health than his pills and rest cures would.⁴¹

While Ruth's mental state descends into collapse Angela, who is in the process of escaping the family for an independent life at Oxford, suffers her own version of ennui when home for the vacation. Away from the badly chosen boyfriend Tony, she too indulges in fantasy, creating love letters that she does not believe in but pretends matter to her. Her pretence at being in love is confused with the inchoate sexual awakening of a young woman that her mother

⁴¹ The issue of abortion is considered more fully in chapter five.

must have experienced at her age with the similarly disastrous consequences of ill-judged submission to masculine pressure. Tony's unsuitability and his uncanny resemblance to Rex is clear on his visit to the family home. Angela observes that 'Daddy obviously thinks he's wonderful', as does Tony himself. His military service has given him the arrogance and right-wing views that correspond to those held by Rex. Ruth's premonitory alarm is understated, simply asking her daughter for her own feelings about him. Angela's response, 'Oh, I don't know. He's alright', indicates a level of uncertainty echoing Ruth's frequent 'I don't know' responses to Rex's hectoring (there are eight instances between pages 26 and 29). Lacking agency, the two women suffer a similar kind of loneliness, intensified by the boorishness of their respective partners. Ruth's private assessment of Tony as 'a stupid, infuriating bore, a bully and a prig' endorses Angela's perception that '[H]e's exactly like Daddy. I suppose it's all very psychological or something', a comment that speaks to the popular awareness of psychological interpretations (*DGAH*: 53). The depressing pair of patriarchal archetypes is represented in detail in Ruth's incisive assessment of the man that she sees in Tony, based on close observation of Rex that, although never articulated, is altogether accurate.

He would be a success. [...] To love him would be to hold up a heavy mirror month after month, year after year, in which he would see his own manliness reflected; [...] He would drive his wife mad [...] He would never understand why his world thought highly of him and his wife hated him. He would never understand that he had lost his only attraction, the quality of offering pleasure, of which he was entirely ignorant. He would never understand anything, except that he ought to be loved (*DGAH*: 53-54).

This passage recalls Virginia Woolf's metaphor in *A Room of One's Own* in which she sees women compared to 'looking glasses possessing the magic

and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size' (Woolf, 1928. 41). Tony's character is drawn similarly to that of Rex, possessing the same masculine superegoistic qualities described by Gilbert and Gubar. Like Rex, Tony also resists taking responsibility, if not for the pregnancy then at least for the necessary remedial action. In the negotiations with Ruth and Angela about securing an abortion he is politely but selfishly obstructive, offering nothing more than the remote chance of a loan from a friend, showing no emotional engagement with the problem. Observing his 'cold, already ageless eyes' Ruth

recognised them as the eyes of a man who felt nothing. Posturing for other people, for the countless mirrors, he would assume attitudes of outrage, love, friendship even physical need. He would probably go through his entire life imagining that he was real; but not one person would owe him gratitude, remember his comfort (*DGAH*: 102).

Ruth's perception of Tony as a re-embodiment of Rex drives her to act in a way that challenges the impression of mental instability that the representation of her intolerable home life suggests. Yet Mortimer's annihilation of Rex is not merciless. Even as he lies next to Maxine, his mistress, there is the suggestion that he seeks love - though mostly sex - a kind of love that would bolster his ego. What he got was a woman who softened the truth. 'Oh, God, it's the lies one wants. She's a good liar' (*DGAH*: 114).

This chapter lays out some of the intractable problems for women in the areas of sexuality - within and without marriage - and the risks to a woman's psychic stability in the notionally 'safe' locus of married, family life. Marghanita Laski's narrative of wartime sexual transgression engages with and subverts traditional mores during abnormal times, posing questions and inviting judgements about women's sexual behaviour. The two novels of the late 1950s

and early 60s offer implicit and explicit criticism of those factors that militate against women's equal participation in life in and out of the family. *In a Summer Season*, published on the cusp of the sexual revolution demonstrates how the free expression of female sexual desire is inhibited by a range of factors in the middle-class, middle-aged, mid-century woman's life. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* addresses multiple issues that create conflict in women's lives, including the vexed issue of women's mental health. The quality of mercy, for Penelope Mortimer, through Ruth Browning, is indeed strained. Her damning indictment of patriarchal hegemony points to the critical tenet of feminism that women must help each other to help themselves, something that Ruth, so far, has been unable to ask for herself.

Chapter Five

The Mother-Daughter Plot: 'The Suffering of Ambivalence'

A View of the Harbour and *A Game of Hide and Seek*.

Elizabeth Taylor (1947 and 1951)

The World My Wilderness. Rose Macaulay (1949)

Daddy's Gone A-Hunting. Penelope Mortimer (1961)

[T]he cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement (Adrienne Rich, 1986 (1975): 225-226).

The novels considered in this chapter have been discussed under other themes but the central importance to a consideration of feminist sensibilities of the crucial dyad of the mother-daughter relationship demands a discrete analysis. The interaction between mother and daughter, unique in its power to generate conflicting emotions of anger, guilt, resentment, dependency and love, is heavily implicated in the four novels under review: Elizabeth Taylor's *A View of the Harbour* (1947) and *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951); Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness* (1949); and, most emphatically, Penelope Mortimer's *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* (1958).

This chapter is concerned with the connotations of the interaction between mothers and daughters represented at the mid-point of the twentieth century, twenty years in advance of the onset of extensive analysis by feminists in the wake of the Second Wave. A brief and selective survey of the field must start with Adrienne Rich's 1976 study, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* that is credited with initiating the discourse. Rich's highly charged expression for a mother's emotional response to her children as 'the suffering of ambivalence' permeates the discussion (Rich, 1976: `21). Feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s have broadened the scope to include psychoanalytical insights and feminist historical perspectives. Marianne Hirsch's comprehensive survey of the area in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* is concerned with 'the constructions of femininity in discourses of motherhood and daughterhood' and links the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship to questions of individuation and female identity (Hirsch, 1989: 8). Rosalind Coward's claim that 'feminism could be called the daughters' revolt, so central has been the issue of women defending themselves against the previous generation' resonates not only with what follows in this chapter but also with the tone of the whole thesis (Coward, 1992: 91-92).

In the mid nineteen-eighties Elaine Showalter located the origins of this 'daughters' revolt' to a historical period when stirrings of unease were becoming evident: 'Hating one's mother was the feminist enlightenment of the fifties and sixties' (Showalter, 1986 (1985): 135). The ambivalence of mothers towards daughters and, in Showalter's terms, hatred of mothers by daughters is a function of the phenomenon of 'matrophobia' identified by Rich as 'the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*' (original

emohasis) (Rich: 235). ¹ D. Lynne O'Brien Hallstein clarifies the term in her recent revisiting of Rich's writing, stating that matrophobia is at work when daughters begin to sense 'their own and their mother's restricted roles as a mother and potential mother' (O'Brien Hallstein, 2010: 23). Rich maintains that for the daughter to gain an independent identity she must split from the mother.

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery (Rich: 236).

The daughter's split with the mother is part of her desire to become free of the restrictive roles she perceives, although not always with a full understanding of the patriarchal forces at stake in their formation.

The concept of matrophobia developed out of the postwar and mid-century period of social change. The conflict is deeply resonant with a time when women's consciousness was in a state of flux and rationales for female discontent were beginning to create an impact in life and literature. In pinpointing this to a specific time, the 1950s and 1960s – a time that overlaps with the period of this thesis - Elaine Showalter delimits the period of greatest relevance, noting that '[f]emale literature of the 1970s goes beyond matrophobia to a courageously sustained quest for the mother' (Showalter, 1986: 135). The mother-daughter angst, then, would appear to be at its height in this mid-century moment.

¹ The term matrophobia was coined by the poet Lynn Sukenick, (1973) in her article, 'Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction', in *Contemporary Literature* 14(4): 515-35. A fuller description of the implications of the term is included in the analysis of *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* below.

Before the impulse for daughters to blame mothers for their discontent, the social disruption during and after World War Two had prepared the ground for a re-examination of maternal performance. The enforced separations of children from their mothers accelerated the development of a psychoanalytical approach to child care and the practice of mothering. This was initiated by psychotherapists like Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham who set up the Hampstead Nursery and Clinic in 1947. Other psychoanalysts extended this approach to child guidance, most notably D. W. Winnicott, who developed the concept of the 'good enough mother' and her obligations to her child.² The figures of John Bowlby and Benjamin Spock appropriated and popularised mothering guidance that, supported by psychoanalysts, paediatricians and popular manuals, had the effect of tying mothers into a restrictive set of roles and behaviours until the field of maternal scholarship expanding alongside the second wave of feminism actively challenged these roles.

Having deployed Adrienne Rich's explorations on 'compulsory heterosexuality' in the chapter on female friendships, my analysis turns now to her radical framework for interrogating maternal subjectivity. In *Of Woman Born* Rich extended and personalised the psychoanalytical discourse reopened in 1974 by Juliet Mitchell in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*. Writing both as a scholar and a mother Rich declares, 'I wanted to examine motherhood – my own included – in a social context, as embedded in a political institution: in feminist terms' (Rich: ix). This woman-centred position served as a corrective to the male-generated theories of Donald Winnicott, John

² See, D W Winnicott. 1957. *The Child, The Family and the Outside World*. London: Tavistock. The effects of these postwar theories on mothers is examined in more detail in the section of this chapter on *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*.

Bowlby and Benjamin Spock. Yet Rich's study proved divisive among second-wave feminists to the extent that it became part of a 'demonising discourse that positioned the text as "anti-motherhood"' (Rich: x). This was based in part on Rich's unusual style, an 'odd-fangled approach: personal testimony mingled with research, and theory which derived from both', that created antagonism among feminists (Rich: x). Her personal testimony fed into divisive issues within the women's movement between those engaged in heterosexual units and the more radical separatist opinion. Additionally, Rich's critical separation of the terms motherhood and mothering was mistakenly interpreted as anti-motherhood by the heterosexual tranche of the movement when in effect she was striving to demonstrate the empowering potential of mothering. The distinction is neatly summarised by O'Brien Hallstein who credits Rich with asserting that

motherhood is a patriarchal institution that oppresses women, and that mothering has the potential to be empowering to women if they are allowed to define and practice mothering for themselves (O'Brien Hallstein: 21).

While Rich's unusual viewpoint - a woman with three (male) children from a heterosexual partnership who later came out as a lesbian - did not protect her from the defensive impulse that led feminists to challenge her thesis, there is now no doubt about the value of her contribution to the ideas distilled in the rallying cry 'the personal is political'.

In addition to the chapter's co-option of her title, my analysis also draws upon Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot* that tracks the influence of feminist psychoanalysis on the interpretation of literature and identifies key ideas and contributing thinkers in the field.³ Nonetheless, it is Rich's original

³ Hirsch's survey begins with Freud and progresses through the twentieth century with the, often contested, contributions of Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, D.W. Winnicott, Juliet Mitchell, Nancy

woman-centred discourse on the relationship that is a recurring point of reference in this chapter since her boldly original thoughts were conceived in America during the period under interrogation in this thesis, reflecting also the experiences of women in the English middle-classes. The concept of matrophobia and the associated psychoanalytical idea of maternal splitting is deployed lightly throughout the chapter, though more fully in the section on *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*.

Unlike *At Mrs Lippincotes*, the two Elizabeth Taylor novels examined below, published in 1947 and 1951 respectively, pay little explicit attention to the war or postwar. They are moving forward to confront other challenges. In *A View of the Harbour* the maternal role is represented in opposition to the needs of a writer. Additionally, the relative maternal capabilities of mother and father are highlighted in a progressive narrative that is problematised by masculine sexual susceptibility. In *A Game of Hide and Seek* Taylor represents mother-daughter conflict by simultaneously looking back in history and anticipating the factors that inhibit change for subsequent generations of women. The daughter's development is complicated by a form of dual mothering and her mother's untimely death. In contrast *The World My Wilderness*, while almost contemporaneous with Taylor's, is infused with the complex and destructive aftermath of World War Two. By 1958, Penelope Mortimer's visionary novel *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* dramatises the entrenched sources of women's oppression and the influence of that oppression on mental stability (as discussed in chapter three). The analysis now examines the complex mother-

Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein and others, including the popular text by Nancy Friday, *My Mother, My Self* (1977), up to the work of Kristeva and Cixous and other European theorists in the 1980s and 1990s. From these there has emerged what Hirsch describes as 'a psychoanalytic feminism of enormous influence' (132).

daughter configuration based on the novel's articulation of the ambiguity surrounding 'a woman's right to choose' abortion or not, rehearsing arguments for the legalising of the procedure.

A View of the Harbour and A Game of Hide and Seek

The central presence of Elizabeth Taylor's work in this thesis is sustained in the first section of this chapter by the inclusion of two novels that each represent the mother-daughter relationship in the context of a broader idea of mothering. Although not as dramatically rendered as *The World My Wilderness* or *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*, *A View of the Harbour* and *A Game of Hide and Seek* offer a nuanced vision that also interrogates the contested maternal role of the father, the dilemma of mother as artist or activist, and the effect of inter-generational shifts. Against a muted background of the time, a period of recovery and transition, Taylor engages with the oppositional structures of age and youth and sets the expectations of motherhood against a woman's striving for individual identity and, in *A View of the Harbour*, against the potential of the father to better fulfil the role.

In *A View of the Harbour* the novelist Beth Cazabon is preoccupied with her work to the extent that, as a woman writer expected to perform multiple roles, she judges herself both a bad mother and a writer who is not as good as she could be. In *A Game of Hide and Seek* it is Harriet's mother, Lilian, who fails in her struggle to avoid showing disappointment in her daughter after her own youthful commitment to the Woman's Suffrage Movement. This failure highlights the potential conflict when the next generation fails to fulfil the hard-fought aspirations of their parents. The tension in the mother-daughter characterisation in the two novels is relaxed by Taylor's humorous and

mordantly observant rendering of younger girls, (Stevie in *A View of the Harbour* and Deirdre in *A Game of Hide and Seek*), who demonstrate a contrasting and more robust model of daughterhood.

A View of the Harbour

The foregrounding of Beth's performance of mothering in *A View of the Harbour* is bound up with the subject of female friendship explored in chapter two. Beth's lifelong friend and erstwhile confidante Tory Foyle characterises the qualities of the archetypal domestic goddess and good mother that give Beth cause for self-doubt as mother, housewife and, if she were aware, as lover. Beth's personality, unlike Tory's, is represented as cool, rational and less than motherly:

No warmth fell from her over her children. Even their ages, the fifteen years between Prudence and Stevie, suggested that they were haphazardly conceived, incidental to her, strange unexpected flowerings (*VOH*: 29).

Indeed, it is Beth's husband Robert, a general practitioner, who is equipped to cater not only for Prudence's fragile health but who also understands the emotional needs of his two daughters. In a deviation from the typical fatherly role he, not Beth, sees through the manipulations of five-year-old Stevie, reading her accurately while her mother either responds with logical counter argument or indulges her for the sake of peace. Robert deploys the nurturing skills expected of a mother as laid down by so-called experts such as *Doctor* Donald Winnicott and *Doctor* Benjamin Spock (my emphasis). While it is tempting to categorise Robert as representative of an inhibiting medicalisation of motherhood, he nevertheless demonstrates the kind of intuitive understanding of the good parent that is missing from Beth's responses. Stevie's rehearsals of the day's events at school, the repetition of teacherly euphemisms, the longing

to be allowed to take part in religious practices, meet only with Beth's rational and corrective response to the detail of Stevie's outpouring; not at all what the little girl craves. Stevie's confusion of adult female figures, addressing her mother as Miss Simpson, leads to a scene of comic misapprehension. The expression, 'Please Miss Simpson, may I be excused?' is taken literally by Beth, whose persistent cross-examination spoils poor Stevie's tale of Millicent, who, not getting there in time, 'wetted her knickers'. Stevie and Prudence's recognition of their mother's deficiencies appears in the sly smile that passes between them: 'Their mother seemed unreal to them' (VOH: 43-44). The daughters' expectations conform to a culturally constructed image of motherhood, the 'fantasy of the perfect mother' described by Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto. In failing to fulfil the fantasy Beth is subject to 'the cultural oppression of women in the interest of a child whose needs are also fantasised' (Chodorow and Contratto, 1989: 96). Although Beth's maternal performance is not as essential to her as her writing, she is nevertheless subject to the cultural pressures that surround the role. Her self-perceived failure as mother and housewife leads to self-blame and its related emotion, resentment.

On a rare occasion that she leaves Stevie in Tory's care when she goes to see her publisher, the conflict between Beth's identity as writer and her role as mother and wife is enhanced by Taylor's characteristic skill in the observation of children. Having negotiated her passage through the tearful separation from the five-year-old, she is filled with a level of guilt that prompts in her the determination that 'beginning with this evening, she would be a good mother' - a resolution as unlikely to be fulfilled as that of Deborah's promise to Timmy in *To Bed with Grand Music*. Wishing to share something that Beth herself would find artistically stimulating, she offers the girl her 'first experience of poetry, of

cruelty, of beauty', reading Stevie the story of "Snow White" (VOH: 210). Stevie's tearful recrimination is a double blow to Beth: 'A sensible mother wouldn't tell her children stories like that' (VOH: 212). The child's hysteria is soothed by Robert's 'nice, kind, calm doctor's voice', endorsed by the current wisdom of fellow doctors Bowlby, Winnicott and Spock. Her father's more effective understanding of the management of child behaviour is further admonishment to Beth. 'You really spoil Stevie, Beth. Of course she screams, it pays her to.... Next time she'll try it on still more' (VOH: 240). Beth's 'fantasy of the perfect mother' is left in shreds. It is interesting to note that, in the aftermath of second wave feminism and the counterculture of the 60s and 70s, sympathetic alternative ideas on mothering would emerge. In *Maternal Thinking*, for instance, Sara Ruddick's broad definition would extend to mothers, fathers and other caregivers (Ruddick, 1990: 29). While there is a partial exchange of roles between Robert and Beth, it still aggravates Beth's guilt at her failure to behave according to society's expectations of the good mother.

In place of the rewards of domesticity Beth gains satisfaction from imagining dramatic situations where she participates, through her writing, in a version of the 'heroic life', described by Mike Featherstone as 'the (masculine) sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk' as opposed to 'the sphere of women, reproduction and care' (Featherstone cited in Felski, 1999: 20). The telling of 'Snow White' within the safe confines of the home signifies the desire to court risk in her mothering, as much as in her writing, a wish that prompts a reaction in Stevie far from Beth's hope of sharing the first wonderful experience of poetry, cruelty and beauty with her daughter. While Beth's wish to introduce the heroes and villains of fable and fairy tale to Stevie backfires, in one of the novel's few references to the war, she regrets that 'now the horrors were real',

and ‘a child’s imagination must be soothed with innocent bread and milk’ (VOH: 212). These setbacks disrupt her best intentions and she resolves to try to conform to the ideals of home and hearth, convinced that she falls short of the image so insistently promoted in the postwar period. This sense of inadequacy is exacerbated while observing Stevie playing with her doll; ‘all interest and emotion centred there in the pram, an absorption Beth had so often noticed in other mothers, never felt in herself’ (VOH: 208). Behaviour such as Stevie’s fuels the complex debate about nature versus nurture in the interpretation of gendered behaviours. By no means imitative of her own mother, Stevie acts out the expectation of motherly care that has seeped into her consciousness through powerful and mysterious cultural mechanisms.

Although Beth is assailed by an individual mother’s guilt she experiences a wider resentment at the inequality of a position in which there is no sympathy for the female artist whose creative process demands as much energy and attention as children do. Inevitably the two become mutually frustrating. Beth rages against the emblematic male on the train to London in one of the frustrated feminist outbursts that Taylor periodically expresses through her heroines:

“So long has his kind lorded it that I (who, if only I could have been ruthless and single minded about my work as men are, could have been a good writer) feel slightly guilty at not being back at the kitchen sink” (VOH: 187).

Interestingly, although the stifling of male creativity by the much quoted ‘pram in the hall’ had been suggested only a decade earlier by Cyril Connolly in his apologia for unfulfilled potential, *Enemies of Promise*,⁴ it is safe to imagine the

⁴ Cyril Connolly’s *Enemies of Promise*, first published in 1938, contains the famous warning: ‘There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall’.

number of women who had been similarly stifled as exceeding the number of men. Beth, for one, is convinced that the inability to be as ruthless and single-minded as a man does not simply inhibit her output, it feeds her guilt in a way peculiar to mothers. Consistent with the ambivalence of mothers (and of writers) Beth admits, grudgingly, to feeling 'slightly guilty' as she resolves never to write another book (once she has finished this one) and 'devote myself to Stevie, get Prue married somehow, turn Robert's shirt cuffs'. The catalogue of domestic improvements, including the fantasy of having a 'proper maid' - which itself would only make space for writing 'a short story here and there' - is capped off with the unlikely vision of 'a freshly laundered overall twice a week, like Tory, and flowers in all the rooms' (*VOH*: 186). This overwhelming, although comically expressed, set of expectations surrounding the domestic sphere feeds the frustration and rage of individuals who are also mothers, women who, in striving to achieve the 'fantasy of the perfect mother', are served a mountain of guilt. Worst of all, Stevie's distress at her mother going to London without her renders Beth unable to go on with her chapter. Taylor's sardonic, self-reflexive insight appears again in Beth's regret that '[h]er spirits were too low to describe Allegra's death' (*VOH*: 187).

The anguish of separation from Stevie is repeated as the relationship with her older daughter deteriorates. Prudence's growing certainty of the affair between her father and Tory distances her further from her mother and now from her father. 'She was not prepared to pity her mother, whom she had always rather despised, nor to despise her father, whom she had loved' (*VOH*: 93). This reversal of emotional allegiance confirms the maternal function attached to Robert at the same time as it reinforces Prudence's disdain at Beth's failure to achieve the desired model of mothering. Paradoxically, the fate

of the daughter turns on separation not from the mother but from the father who laments her loss; 'she has come back safely... not ever to me again' (*VOH*: 256). The presence of the boyfriend as someone 'other' to the discredited maternal figure of her father forces the realisation that 'she had grown up. And she no longer loved him (her father)' (*VOH*: 192). Just as 'maternal splitting' is a liberating rite of passage, this 'paternal splitting' may be construed as a signal for Prudence's movement towards individuation. She realigns her affective ties following the shock of recognition when 'she felt oppressed by the sudden view of her parents as human beings... had taken for granted that her mother and father were sub-human creatures, from whom might be expected no emotions stronger than irritation or anxiety' (*VOH*: 93). Her closer attachment to her father transfers the imperative for maternal splitting from mother to father and places her in a newly adult relation to him; a position that would nonetheless require time to become fully reconciled.

The alternative rendering of the father-daughter relationship is an interesting sub-text in an equivocal version of the mother-daughter paradigm. Offering the father as the better proponent of 'mothering' is suggestive of a progressive impetus that would be embodied in the concept of the 'new man' in a late twentieth and early twenty-first century post-feminist society. Such a prefiguring disrupts the expectation of how mothering is performed given that fewer maternal skills are demonstrated in Beth the writer than in Robert the doctor. Taylor is concerned with the representation of women's struggles with the creative process elsewhere in her writing, but it is in Beth that she locates

the struggle in opposition to motherhood.⁵ Beth's guilt-ridden inadequacy as a mother is irreconcilable with her resentment at limitations imposed on her becoming a better writer. Ultimately the catalyst for Prudence's breaking a bond that has limited her independent identity is Robert's love affair with Tory, and her mother's ignorance of it. It is doubly ironic, however, that while Robert abandons Tory and Tory abandons Beth, the father-daughter relation suffers collateral damage. Nonetheless, Prudence may yet be a beneficiary of sacrificial parenting by making an overdue transition from childhood to maturity in the company of Geoffrey, the alternative mother sometimes found in a man, who eases her towards the prospect of autonomy and independence.

A Game of Hide and Seek

A Game of Hide and Seek uses different configurations of the mother-daughter relationship from those in *A View of the Harbour*. The narrative is spread roughly between two World Wars and advances what is, unusually for a writer who communicates predominantly with the contemporary moment, a longer view that enables the characterisation of the generational gulf in a mother's hopes and expectations for her daughter. It is ironic that the mother's participation in the Woman's Suffrage Movement is the source of inter-generational conflict that reproduces the aversion to becoming like one's mother - matrophobia. Instead of uniting them in the cause of women's freedom the legacy of her mother's youthful political action serves to enlarge the gulf between Harriet and her mother. The 'smudged photograph' of the arrest of the

⁵ Taylor's interest in artists is developed in Frances, the painter in *A Wreath of Roses*, the novelist Angel Deverell in *Angel* and the bohemian artist Liz in *The Soul of Kindness* who each struggle with their art but not with motherhood.

two suffragettes, Lilian and her closest friend Caroline, arouses emotions of shame and embarrassment in the young woman rather than pride: 'Harriet, not able to bear this picture nor to ignore it, heedless of former sacrifice, as history makes all of us, saw only that her mother had exposed herself to mockery and ridicule' (*GOHS*: 5). The intricacies of misapprehension and lack of appreciation that characterise inter-generational conflict are diminished in the skipping of a generation and so it will be Harriet's daughter Betsy who is stirred by the suffering of her foremothers and proud of their sacrifices. In this section, however, the focus falls on Harriet as the first-generation recalcitrant daughter.

The phenomenon of inter-generational conflict is explored by Betty Miller in her essay, 'Amazons and Afterwards', in the 1958 special edition, 'Women', of *The Twentieth Century* periodical. Miller observes 'the prevalent indifference of the young woman of today to the heroic feats of the suffragette', reasoning that it is a 'natural, and altogether to be expected swing of the pendulum' (Miller: 126). Her essay interrogates post-suffragette politics and seeks to understand and normalise the effects of action and reaction that are subsequently characterised as waves rather than as linear progression.⁶ The historical scope of *A Game of Hide and Seek* reflects how the achievements of first-wave feminism are devalued by the younger woman while at the same time highlighting the older women's disappointed expectations for the next generation. For Harriet, instead of building on the gains of the Suffrage Movement the pendulum's swing returns her to a conventional marriage and the yearning for an unfulfilled young love, (considered in chapter three). While considered 'natural' and 'expected', the perpetual swing points to the lack of

⁶ This phenomenon recurs between the generation of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s and the reactionary response of some of their daughters that initiated the post-feminist mood of the 1990s onwards.

knowledge of or respect for historical events displayed over time by different age groups. This generational mismatch underlies the mother-daughter conflict uncovered in Taylor's novel. Lilian's failure to understand Harriet's needs is matched by the young woman's lack of appreciation of sacrifices made for the benefit of all women. While not overtly blamed by her mother and Caroline, Harriet symbolises the disappointing failure of succeeding generations of women to build on hard-fought progress. The return swing of the pendulum however, finds the next generation ready to appreciate the achievements from a distance that allows an appreciation of past events.

Harriet is caught in the vacuum created in the aftermath of a fiercely fought campaign that, while having made political gains, still inhibits the expression of individual, and personal, sensibilities. To make matters worse she has not one, but two highly principled mother figures to contend with. The effect on Harriet of this dual mothering is made clear in her passive/aggressive opposition to their combined expectations. What they had sacrificed their freedom and dignity for is denied by Harriet's indifferent performance at school and her lack of aspiration.

Harriet herself fulfilled none of the ambitious desires of the older women [...] no inclination to become a doctor or lawyer, still less to storm some still masculine stronghold. "What brilliant career to choose for her", became "what to do with her at all" (*GOHS*: 6).

Understandably, Lilian and Caroline place a high value on women's equality and they expect an improved path of progression for their daughters. Her mother's efforts to hide her disappointment in Harriet's lack of success at school, 'her way of saying "It doesn't matter"', have the opposite effect to her kinder intentions. The psychic connection between the friends, Lilian and Caroline, stronger perhaps than the maternal bond, is damaging to the

unfortunate daughter: 'Harriet felt sometimes like a shuttle being passed from one to the other; felt, as she had often been made to feel that she was nothing very definite herself. She worried about her future, for she knew that she was only marking time' (*GOHS*: 7). Her conviction that "I have failed as a daughter, too" shows the first signs of a diminished agency that will blight a life in which, having resisted the hoped-for trajectory and then lost her mother, she 'settles' for marriage (*GOHS*: 25). She has no wish to continue the shared purpose of a friendship between two women forged in their commitment to a 'good, brave, cause', like those lamented by Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*.⁷ Like Porter she sees little in prospect for herself, apart from remaining in the domestic sphere as mother's help for Deirdre and Joseph, Caroline's children.

It would have been reasonable to have expected the mother-daughter bond to be stronger following the death of her father in Harriet's infancy, yet the strongest female bond portrayed in the novel is between Lilian and Caroline who jointly preside over Harriet's upbringing. Lilian, like Beth in *A View of the Harbour*, is another of Taylor's artistically or politically engaged women who present as flawed in the conventional role of mother. The conflict that these women endure as individuals attempting to follow their own path as well as functioning as 'good enough mothers' reflects the ambivalent experience of motherhood so eloquently exposed by Adrienne Rich. In this way, Lilian and Harriet 'lived uneasily together: they were more intimately placed than suited either'. Rather than offering a listening ear or maternal shoulder to cry on, Lilian's 'quick and casual manner, [...] thrust back Harriet's tears which would

⁷ John Osborne's character, Jimmy Porter, the prototype 'Angry Young Man' of the fifties' declares "I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. ...There aren't any good, brave causes left'. Interestingly, Porter makes no mention of the earlier cause of women's suffrage as he watches his wife doing the ironing (*Look Back in Anger*. 1956 (1968): 84).

have been much better shed (*GOHS*: 25). Since Lilian herself does not invite confidences, she knows little about her daughter's emotional turmoil but unlike many other mothers she does not seek that knowledge in private places.

Harriet's own diary, which had no lock and key, would have told her mother all she did not want to know; but a woman who has been to prison for her principles does not discard them so easily (*GOHS*: 26).

The disparity in expectation between mother and daughter does not, at this moment, initiate the process of maternal splitting proposed as necessary for a daughter to achieve independent selfhood. Any resistance or resentment from Harriet towards her mother is frustrated by Lilian's high-minded reasonableness. Her punctilious respect for Harriet's privacy inhibits the relationship with a daughter who exists largely on a level of sensibility and acts as a constraining rather than an enabling force. Lilian, who has at considerable personal cost made a brave challenge to patriarchal inequities, continues to act on her principles by maintaining a respectful distance between herself and a daughter who nonetheless disappoints her.

In her determination to be like neither of her 'mothers', Lilian or Caroline, Harriet exhibits a form of matrophobia, but lacks a definite vision for her future. Rather than continuing the tradition of actively challenging women's material conditions she disdains the progressive aspects of her upbringing, the liberal restraint in child-rearing practices and, even more shockingly and egged on by Vesey, the principled vegetarianism of Caroline's family. Instead, she subscribes to what Alice Ferrebe has called 'Harriet's creed of the precious nature of individuality' (Ferrebe, 2010: 54). The fact that Lilian and Caroline had courageously fought patriarchy in campaigning for votes for women inspires no sympathy in Harriet, whose locus of resistance is relatively small scale and

personal.⁸ But resistant it is and, given time, this reactionary version of matrophobia whereby the image of mothers standing up to oppression perversely inspires an oppositional impulse in the daughter, might eventually have led to an enabling maternal split had the mother's untimely death not disrupted progress towards that outcome.

An understanding of the inhibitions at work in the formation of Harriet's character is suggested in a scene revealing the family's demands for propriety and discretion to which she has been accustomed. In her role as both mother and surrogate mother, Caroline is reluctant to enter into any discussion with her younger children about fascinating topics such as ghosts, flayings, burials-alive and above all about sex. Taylor relates with characteristic humour, Caroline's dismissal of these subjects as silly not 'sensible', a favoured adjective. Her daughter Deirdre, who at ten is a more robust specimen than Harriet at eighteen, wonders how she had come into the world, suspecting that it was because of 'silliness'.

Deirdre could not regard the sexual act, with which she was at this time rather taken up, as sensible. As she had observed it in animals, it seemed at best ridiculous, at worst daunting and frantic (*GOHS*: 9).

She thinks it odd that Caroline's two occasions of being 'utterly and frivolously and fantastically silly' had produced what she loved best, her two children. Taylor's authorial interjection that 'when she grew up she had many a happy surprise', however, removes any suspicion of harm done to Deirdre's young mind (*GOHS*: 9). Harriet, however, is differently constituted, halfway between

⁸ This recalls the 'small personal voice' that Doris Lessing invokes before the resurgence of the collective, political voice of the second wave of feminism when the personal became the political. In Lessing's case she was writing of the novelist speaking 'as an individual to individuals'. In her *Children of Violence* series of novels she explores the 'individual conscience in its relations with the collective' (Lessing. 1957: 22).

childhood and adulthood and carrying the burden of a reserved propriety. She sustains throughout her life a youthful, secret and unconsummated love for Vesey, the thin, pale, youth of whom nobody approves.

Lilian's sudden death is an 'unmothering' that adds to Harriet's continuing heartache in the absence of Vesey. She finds herself slipping into a marriage based on gratitude for and dependence on the support and care proffered by her older admirer, Charles Jephcott, the potential male mother figure that, Adrienne Rich suggests, may be sought by an unmothered daughter (Rich: 242). The abrupt and literal splitting suffered by Harriet upon her mother's death offers none of the benefits of the emotional separation and consequent individuation expected of that process. The effective truncation of the maturation process is psychologically disruptive to the unmothered daughter who remains in a kind of suspended immaturity, seeking stability elsewhere.

Harriet does manage one defiant gesture of independence, after school and just before her mother's death, by taking up a different occupation from any of those her mother and Caroline would have wished for her. Becoming an assistant in a gown shop brings her into contact with alternative mother-figures, women from a different social class, with attitudes that, while unfamiliar, reinforce her sense of individualism and demonstrate a subversive resistance quite different from the high moral stance of her two erstwhile mothers. She is, above all, awed by the sexual explicitness amongst the shop women where she encounters a level of frankness hitherto unknown. The range of talk about their exploits with men is the opposite of the repressed proscriptions of her home life but it provides an unexpected balm for grief when her mother dies. Unlike her mother, they are not afraid to offer copious and conflicting advice to a young and inexperienced woman. Her naivety is treasured and her virginity 'marvelled over

a great deal', enquired about 'as if it were a sick relative' (*GOHS*: 73). They are agreed that it must not be bestowed lightly despite their own easy-going practice. Only Miss Brimpton, who despises men, says not at all. The undemanding cordiality of their interest pleases Harriet and is a substitute for all that her two mothers never supplied. Significantly, the parallel society that Harriet inhabits in the shop, so totally different from her life with the principled suffragettes, represents a microcosm of feminine resistance in which some freedoms are grasped and male domination is challenged, but on an individual level with no wider political application. This small grouping of women against men, while functioning simply at a local level, previsions a time when women would once again use their solidarity to organise on broader issues. Interestingly, too, there may be a glimmer of the consciousness-raising gatherings of the sixties and seventies where criticism was voiced not only about men but also about mothers.

The affective ties that bind Taylor's mothers and daughters are shown in the two novels to display multiple conflicts. *A View of the Harbour* portrays a woman's ambivalence between her role as mother and her career as a writer. Although she is convinced she could be a better writer without the impediments of domesticity, her intermittent eruptions of guilt do not deflect her from obeying the compulsion to write. The placement of the father as a better proponent of the maternal role is ahead of its time except that his sexual attraction to Beth's friend Tory is the complicating factor that destroys his relationship with Prudence and the intimacy between Beth and Tory. In approaching the resolution of a novel that is in many ways tragic, Taylor represents a daughter's disappointment in both parents that may yet enable her to break the restrictive family bonds. *A Game of Hide and Seek* reveals differently intractable problems associated with the mother-daughter plot. Like *A View of the Harbour* it hints at the alternative

parenting possibilities of dual-parenting, alternative mothers in the workplace and seeking the lost mother in a man. The phenomenon of inter-generational dissonance is exemplified in Harriet's distaste at her two mothers' arrest and imprisonment during the suffrage struggles. Without a mother and without 'a cause' Harriet follows an indistinct path that leads her to a convenient marriage and a lifelong romantic hankering. Taylor's representations of the mother-daughter plot illuminate the potential for fallibility and ambivalence in the role of mother and to the frustration of the needs and desires of both mother and daughter as individual women.

The World My Wilderness

The scope of Rose Macaulay's novel *The World my Wilderness* (1950) extends beyond the effects of the daughter's ejection from home that is discussed specifically in chapter one. In this section, the focus shifts specifically towards the representation of the relationship between Helen Michel and her daughter Barbary Deniston before and after a disruptive event. The novel and its characters are configured at a moment when World War Two introduces the unique circumstances in which the experience of trauma has a destabilising effect on the mother-daughter relationship. An abrupt disconnection, animated by the effects of death and near-death, undermines Barbary's psychological security and propels her into a literal and metaphorical wilderness. The narrative is set in two contrasting locations and underpinned by the close bonding, separation and re-connection of mother and daughter. In common with Harriet's loss of her mother, Barbary's separation from Helen is neither wished for nor foreseen and there is little developmental advantage gained in either scenario. The nature of these splits unsettles Adrienne Rich's contention that a

separation of daughter from mother is essential to complete the transition from childhood to maturity. Helen and Barbary's separation is activated not by the daughter but by the mother and is complicated by the intrusion of the violent death of a figure who, while ostensibly paternal, is also a rival for the mother's love.

The narrative follows Barbary's removal from the 'wilderness' of the Maquis to the 'wilderness' of London. Here the disruption of Barbary's rational self may only be resolved by a successful quest for a lost 'maternal plenitude', whose loss threatens Barbary's psychological well-being. Anna Watz defines this as 'fantasy':

The fantasy of maternal plenitude, of an intimacy and unity before any separation or loss, in this way implies a complete loss of the self, the total erasure of the boundaries of subjectivity, which is simultaneously desired and deathly for the subject (Anna Watz, cited in Andermahr S. and L. Philips, 2012: 124).

The extraordinary circumstances that sever the mother-daughter relationship initiate the young woman's quest. The violent death of Helen's husband Maurice Michel, in which Barbary is suspected of complicity, is the cause of the emotional and physical break from her mother. Barbary's search for a substitute home (considered in chapter one) is driven by maternal rejection. Travelling through experiences of the Freudian *unheimlich*, her search for a home situates her mother as the essential component for the ultimate resettling. The implications of the psychological estrangement of mother and daughter are examined using the novel's disclosure of the earlier loving relationship that stands in stark contrast to the alteration following the intrusion of the stepfather and his murder. This section presents an analysis of the novel's representation of the stripping-down and reassembling of the mother-daughter relationship in

circumstances that demand a reconsideration of the requirements for redemption.

The functioning of the mother-daughter dyad is complicated by the war and Helen's determined pursuit of her own desires in France. Barbary has already been separated, not unhappily, from her putative natural father who remains in London with a new wife. Helen's desertion of Barbary's father, Sir Gulliver Deniston, and remarriage to Maurice Michel forms a new paternal configuration. This diverts her attention away from Barbary and introduces a situation in which, according to Janice Doane and Devon Hodges' interpretation of Lacan, 'the child finds its exclusive desire for the mother prohibited by a third term, the father (or paternal metaphor), who is encountered in the mother's desire for something that is outside her relation to the child'. Barbary's overdue and forced splitting from the maternal object falls short of providing safe passage to the symbolic order and consequent maturity. She is susceptible instead to the 'psychic and linguistic difficulties' revealed in the narrative when taking leave of her mother to return to England (Doane and Hodges, 1992: 55).

While it is tempting to implicate Barbary's unconscious in the elimination of the paternal metaphor, there is only the slightest suggestion of impotent half-knowledge and possibly culpable inaction. Although Maurice's death removes a rival for her mother's love it has the catastrophic effect of destroying the mother-daughter relationship. Helen is unable to discount the likelihood of Barbary and Raoul, Maurice's son, having prior knowledge of his elimination by the Maquis. Paradoxically, it is Helen's ostensibly careless dispensation of licence to roam and the blind eye she and Maurice turn to the young people's association with the Resistance that leads to the central conflict of the novel and the breaking, albeit temporarily and conditionally, of the mother-daughter bond. In the

aftermath of another crisis, in which Barbary's life is at risk, Helen and Barbary find that the path to closure and a form of forgiveness is contingent upon a degree of compromise and the re-alignment of desires by both parties; a compromise with no long-term guarantee. Ironically, in keeping with the complexity of the novel, it is Helen's disclosure of the identity of Barbary's natural father that achieves her revived objective of reclaiming Barbary from Sir Gulliver, the original paternal metaphor.

The changes to Barbary's domestic base throughout her childhood have always been mitigated by Helen's continued proximity. Even when her security is undermined by her mother's remarriage she accepts the material uncertainty of life in wartime France, cushioned by her mother's presence and by a loving attachment to Roland, her mother and Maurice's baby son. In spite, or perhaps because of, these complicating factors she and Raoul engage in risky activities on the margins of the Resistance. There is little that Barbary misses about her family home in London, where she had also led a wild, 'tomboy' way of life. Her life as a fringe activist with the Maquis flows easily from her earlier proclivities, accommodated by the *laissez-faire* attitude that Helen later regrets as 'too lazy and selfish and contented to bother', leaving Barbary susceptible to the attraction of the Resistance (WW: 247). In the face of a transformed mode of life in an alien location, Barbary's security is maintained by the simple presence of her mother, albeit a less attentive presence.

While Helen and Barbary represent radically different versions of femininity, what unites them is their deviation from traditional structures. Helen, with careless disregard for the opinions of others, follows her sensual inclinations, while Barbary's adventurousness is of a more physically hazardous kind. Her androgynous appearance gives away nothing of the incipient

womanliness a girl of seventeen might present in normal circumstances. She exemplifies what Karen Horney described in her 1926 article as 'The Flight from Womanhood' seen in Barbary's tomboy activities and the adoption of a masculine persona with the Maquis.⁹ Mother and daughter each 'do their own thing', in a manner that, while a feature of upper class, Bohemian environments, also prefigures the 'hippie' counterculture of self-expression, risk-taking and 'free love' of the 60s and 70s. Helen's brand of relaxed, loving freedom anticipates, at the same time as it challenges, the liberal view of child-rearing later to be promoted by figures such as Dr Benjamin Spock.¹⁰ However, in Helen's upper class environment the practical side of mothering would have been performed by servants, nurses, mother's help and others or, in the case of her older son, Richie by the ethos of the public school. Helen, driven by a blend of amoral individualism and confidence nourished by her beauty and class, would pay no heed to prescriptions on good mothering. The essential requirement of motherhood, the giving and receiving of love, is a strong component of Helen's nature. Her charismatic ministrations inspire a needful reciprocal love, not only in her children but also in the men and servants in her compass.

Although the Resistance has kept Barbary in her element, it is the source of cataclysmic reprisals in the fevered conditions of post-liberation France. Helen's suspicions about Barbary and Raoul's knowledge of, or involvement in, Maurice's death remain unspoken but are evident in her sudden indifference to her daughter and stepson whom she peremptorily dispatches to London. This

⁹ Karen Horney's article, 'The Flight from Womanhood' in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 1926 vol. 7 explores the development of the girl as a complex and conflicted journey. She expanded on her ideas in 1966 in *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*.

¹⁰ The paediatrician, Dr. Benjamin Spock published the bestselling manual, *Baby and Child Care*, in the USA 1946. He advocated a more flexible approach, though still mother-centred.

dramatic change in Helen's bearing towards the young people is emphasised when Maurice's mother visits to settle her grandson's future schooling. Raoul's grandmother holds the Anglophobic views common to many French people after the war and she extends this disdain to Helen's relaxed maternal regime. Yet the old woman's unexpressed thoughts and articulated opinions provide an impression of an earlier mother-daughter relationship, now suspended. Madame Michel notices the change from the scene in a photograph in which she sees, 'Barbary... against her mother, holding tightly onto the large hand ... looking up with a confident grin... had the air of being her mother's darling' (*WW*: 16-17). Now the older woman judges that; "' [S]he does not love the young girl [...] She only loves the little one, who so resembles Maurice'" (*WW*: 16). While Madame Michel's unsympathetic but shrewd mind blames Barbary for leading her grandson 'into much mischief', her almost-concerned question, 'You will miss your daughter, Madame?' draws the bland, un-motherly reply. 'No, not really. No'. The older woman sees clearly the change in Helen, signalled by the 'thoughtful, withdrawn, disengaged look that rested on the girl', but she puts it down to the temporary breakdown in communications that mars adolescence (*WW*: 13).

Richie, who is to accompany the young people to London, also confirms the extent of the reversal of Helen's position as he recalls the loving freedom Barbary had enjoyed both in London and, latterly, in France. He reminds Barbary how, when she had hidden on a Thames barge until nearly out to sea, his parents had considered whether to 'discard their humanitarian principles and do you physical violence. Father thought yes and mother no; but as neither could wield the rod, I believe nothing came of it' (*WW*: 32). Faithful to this parental dichotomy, Helen's indulgence subverts the punishment regime.

Contrary to the behaviourist imperative not to reward bad behaviour, they go to see 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', a play appropriately loaded with fantasy and pleasure-seeking through love. Ironically, the play is a benign version of unreality the opposite of the 'unreal city' imagined by T.S. Eliot that Barbary would experience on her motherless return to London from France. Paying no heed to Barbary's father's disapproval, Helen, as always, does what she likes.

The freedom Helen permits herself is readily transferred to Barbary. Richie disapproves, believing it is only to be expected the girl should be wayward given Helen's lax regime, so different from his public-school discipline. He follows the dominant patriarchal role model of his father reinforced by school, university and wartime army service so that Helen's style of mothering, although grounded in love, provokes negative opinion even from her son. A notable feature in the mother/daughter relationship is that, while Barbary's mother does not offer a role model, each possesses a singular personality. Helen's insouciant libertinism allows Barbary freedom to roam without the pressure to conform to conventional expectations, unaffected by social class or gendered norms, and locates them at opposite ends of a continuum of feminine behaviour. The absence of maternal intervention, either planned or negligent, offers Barbary the chance to develop differently from Helen. Barbary's response, however, is to be a satellite around the bright star of her mother, needing her yet not imitating her. Their resistance to stereotyping contributes to the jarring impression of a lack of progress towards maturity when her father sees Barbary after seven years' absence. 'He saw before him the same little tramp; probably she still hid on barges and rode on the bumpers of cars, seldom read a book and never pushed a needle', rather than the preferred 'neat, comely young creature of seventeen, who wore her clothes well and waved her

hair' (WW: 39). Formerly, and acceptably for a younger child, she had been 'the pet of both parents, a harlequin, a vagrant imp'. But now her father realises the extent to which Barbary has been under 'Helen's tremendous spell', a spell from which nobody, including himself, escapes and which he suspects has arrested the normal development of a young Englishwoman (WW: 39-40). Labelling the power of Helen's attraction as a 'spell' positions it as more than maternal. To many it proves, in effect, irresistible.

Nonetheless, being under Helen's spell does not inspire in Barbary a desire to be like her or, indeed, as in the manifestation of matrophobia, unlike her. Rather, it perpetuates a need for proximity, security, and love. Instead, Barbary displays those characteristics of strong attachment to her mother defined by John Bowlby as that 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' commonly found in relation to the maternal caregiver and the infant child (Bowlby, 1969:194). A scene from Barbary's early childhood supports the idea of strong maternal attachment when she was

all nerves, waking in terror, screaming at shadows, then, when her mother arrived, hiding her face in her breast, and clutching her with both arms her mother her tower of refuge (WW: 19).

The imitation of a baby's suckling position, 'hiding her face in her breast', echoes Melanie Klein's emphasis on the maternal object, the breast, that suggests Barbary's infantilised dependency on her mother for nourishment and security. The persistence of this dependency into adolescence would impede her progress to independent selfhood.¹¹ Helen's behaviour towards Barbary in

¹¹ The breast is a key element of the child's pre-verbal phase of attachment to the mother. Klein and later Winnicott, focus on the first year of mother-child interactions based on object relations theory. See, Melanie Klein, (1975), *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921 -1945*;

early childhood stands in stark contrast to the cold indifference that now unsettles Barbary's equilibrium after the violent intrusion of Maurice's death shuts down her developmental progress.

While Helen's spell enchants Barbary and the infant Roland it is, as already suggested, not only a maternal spell. Behaving in a way that is neither typically English nor respectable in the eyes of the bourgeois French grandmother, Helen is 'other' in both cultures, possessing the allure of the exotic for men and the censure of women. Although now in her forties Helen is personified as a goddess of love, both sexual and maternal. She is unconcerned about or wilfully unaware of Barbary's imminent sexual maturity, something that at the age of seventeen might have been anticipated, just as she disregards Barbary's involvement with the Maquis. While Helen does not credit her daughter with the characteristics she herself possesses she allows Barbary the freedom to follow her individual desires that ensures Barbary's inclinations are uninhibited by convention or censure.

Portraying Helen in this way, Macaulay releases the mother-daughter relationship from the constraints of a position built on the middle-class family plot, as represented in the other novels discussed in this chapter. Helen is portrayed as an individual, mother and other, who attracts devotion while dispensing a vital love. While Barbary shows no sign of the wish to avoid the characteristics of her mother that constitutes matrophobia, the need to maintain the connection with Helen overrides the requirement to make the split from the mother that is essential to forming a woman's independent selfhood. Barbary's

Phyllis Grosskurth, (1986), *Melanie Klein: Her World and Her Work*; and D W Winnicott (1957) [1976] *The Child, The Family and the Outside World*.

dependence on Helen, 'her tower of refuge', remains childlike and visceral (*WW*: 19).

During her time in France Barbary distributes her love between Helen and Roland who, rather than being a source of sibling jealousy, attracts mother's love towards them both. The scene on Barbary's departure, however, has resonances of loss and grief beyond the separation of mother from daughter, containing explicit and implicit correspondences with death that disrupt her psychological security. Barbary's clinging to Roland is the physical expression of loss, 'to put him from her was like dying', echoing the 'putting away' of the baby's father, somehow condoned by Barbary and Raoul. So, when turning to Helen, Barbary is only 'held lightly in that cool embrace' by Helen who 'gently detach[es] herself from the clinging child'. The detachment is no less devastating for being gentle as Helen returns Barbary to the original paternal figure, less beloved than Maurice, with the unlikely assurance: 'You'll be happy with your father'. From her abject position, Barbary's attempted penitence is in vain. In a manifestation of what Kristeva has called *asymbolia*, that is 'the inability to use language to compensate for the lost object' (Kristeva, cited in Doane and Hodges: 55) language fails Barbary: "Oh, mummy, I'm sorry", the choked whisper was less speech than a muted breath, shivering on the lemon-scented air; it did not reach Helen' (*WW*: 34). Kristeva asserts that the failure to break with the mother, or, as she puts it, to commit *matricide*, results in depression and *melancholia*. This would suggest that the consequence of abrupt and premature separation from her mother is the *melancholia* that Barbary's period in the wilderness discloses. The tragic conflation of the two separations, one temporary, one eternal, is symbolised by Roland, who proclaims his need for Barbary, just as Helen does hers for

Maurice. As Roland's cries, "Want Barby" are soothed by mother's "Barby coming soon", her own grief remains unabated. "Want Maurice. Maurice is coming never"; and turned from the sea that had swallowed Maurice up' (*WW*: 34-36). At this point forgiveness and reconciliation seem a distant prospect.

Nevertheless, while Helen's dispatch of Barbary to her father and his new wife is prompted by grief, it is ostensibly well-intentioned. Barbary would continue her education at the Slade, reintegrated into her second family, as 'a nearly grown-up young woman', with the expectation of her becoming a fully grown-up woman of the approved model (*WW*: 41). If there were, however, any prospect of Sir Gulliver's second wife acting as Barbary's second mother, she could not be further from Barbary's maternal ideal. Her brief description is characteristic of the upper-middle-class Englishwoman: '[A] handsome young woman of thirty, clear-skinned, brown-haired, athletically built, she looked at once Amazonian and full of good sense' (*WW*: 41). In stark contrast to Pamela's 'good sense' Helen's classical looks and cultural and intellectual inclinations, invite comparison to the Milo Venus tempered by the suggestion of self-indulgence. 'A large, handsome, dissipated, detached and idle woman, more interested in classical literature and the pleasures of the gaming table than painting' (*WW*: 8)

The portrayal of the two mother-figures contrasts the English upper-middle class training of women for their 'proper' role with Helen's special qualities, other than the maternal, that inspire devotion and dependency not only in her children but in all who know her. Through the characters of Pamela and Helen, Macaulay animates a conflict played out at the end of the war in parallel with the collapse of empire and the erosion of class distinctions. While Helen's character is drawn as unusually individualistic, Pamela's is shown as

conforming to a patriarchal version of Englishness. The different styles of wife and mother outlined are emblematic of a historical narrative of change that demands a re-visioning of the issue of a woman's entitlement to a personal interpretation of her identity.

Aside from the complete lack of sympathy between Pamela and Barbary, the vast difference between the two mother-figures would alone prevent the transfer of Barbary's affections. In contrast to Pamela's preoccupation with the orderly conduct of her household duties, Helen's effortless ability is not always focussed and her behaviour is suggestive of laziness. She is an unfulfilled scholar and artist whose success instead hinges on the stereotypical traits of beauty, charm, 'sex appeal'. Furthermore, she is deemed extraordinary, as Lucien Michel observes, in enjoying sex 'as a man'. It might appear that her talents position her as a kind of 'Renaissance Woman' but one who, unlike the masculine equivalent, is destined to achieve nothing in a wider field apart from unfocussed dabbling in art and literature. It would be too much of a stretch to call her a New Woman since she demonstrates none of their progressive impulses. Rather, Helen's lost direction and her gender-inflected failure to utilise her considerable talents is to be lamented; a wastage that represents the fate of many women.

Barbary's sudden repatriation delivers a 'problem child' to her father; a child hardly changed from her indulged, rambling infancy.¹² Her father's aspirations for Barbary are frustrated by her habit of resistance. She disdains Richie's promise to take her sightseeing in London to enjoy 'pictures and music,

¹² The term 'problem child' came into usage following the effects of trauma suffered by children during the Second World War, attributable to separation from mother and/or loss of the authoritarian father figure. The term appears in popular culture of the fifties and sixties, later becoming the 'juvenile delinquent'.

and ballet and buildings and plays'; an offer in ironic opposition to the London in ruins that Barbary was to adopt as home. Refusing Pamela's surrogacy, she rejects, too, the infant David as a substitute for Roland. She sees David as the symbol of her father's tie to another family that denies her mother her rightful place. 'He's got no business here; nor has she. If they weren't here mother could come back'. Richie fails to make her understand her mother's effective abandonment of her father and his subsequent remarriage to a woman who 'manages things very well for him', in contrast to Helen's careless neglect of social duties (*WW*: 44). The outbreak of war had provided a good excuse for Helen's failure to return from France, though Richie suspects she could have managed it had there been the will.

The daughter's rejection of the male figures in her family leaves a lacuna that is not to be filled by Pamela. A more promising maternal figure for Barbary is Coxy; 'Mrs Cox, the cook, who had been her friend seven years ago, who had fed her with tit-bits from the kitchen, whom she had loved', and who in turn had loved Helen, 'your Ma' (*WW*: 47). The fellow feeling between Barbary and Coxy soothes them both; 'each had a warm sense of having found an ally against Others' (*WW*: 49). Nothing about Pamela compares with Helen, even though she 'made a lot of work, people coming about the house so much' but, importantly for the servants, 'she let us be; never one to be in and out of the kitchen, [...] she kept to her part of the house and we kept to ours. Unlike some' (*WW*: 48). Helen's graciousness merits the esteem of the servant class.¹³ Despite Coxy's indiscreet sharing of grievances with Barbary, however, she

¹³ Reference is made in the chapter one to Derrida's essay, 'On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness' (2001) which sets out the paradox, or *aporia*, of gracious and unconditional forgiveness.

remains in the traditional servant position that, while warmed by mutual love and respect, is no substitute for the maternal object.

Ultimately Helen's return to Barbary, following her life-threatening fall in the ruins, leads to the reunion of mother with daughter but not immediately to a full reconciliation. That was to depend upon allaying Helen's suspicion that Barbary and Raoul had some prior knowledge of what happened to Maurice. Helen's self-imposed silence on this demonstrates a reluctance to lower her maternal protective shield by articulating a potentially destructive truth.¹⁴ Although popular psychology might now recommend 'talking it through', sometimes saying nothing is best, until the moment of greatest benefit is recognised. Helen's defences are breached *in extremis* as the accident that puts Barbary close to death brings her mother to her bedside; a return that carries with it the reconnection Barbary seeks. The silence about Maurice's death must now be tentatively broken as the daughter recovers, feeling 'at peace, happy, restored to affection'. Now 'with Maurice so grimly between them' Barbary must speak of it to Helen, saying simply that Raoul and she were not there. But 'not there' does not mean to Helen, 'did not know'. Helen's suffering is evident as she finally lays out her position to Barbary:

I know that your friends drowned Maurice: I've always known it. And that you and Raoul knew something about it. I don't want to know exactly how much you knew, or whether you could have stopped it or saved him by warning him. I know you didn't want to give your friends away. But perhaps you hoped to save him somehow, and failed. Perhaps you left it till too late – I don't know what happened. I would rather not know more. It mattered between us once but I don't mean it to matter any more [...]. And now we won't ever talk of it again (*WW*: 230-231).

¹⁴ The mother's defensive silence is shared with Ruth Whiting in *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*, discussed later in the chapter.

Helen's doubts must now be left without closure if she is to receive Barbary back into her maternal fold. She demonstrates a duality that can allow her motherly forgiveness to appear sincere, in a way that the bereaved wife cannot. Restating her maternal commitment, she assures Barbary she is not to grow up without a mother, that she is as important to her as Roland, who will nonetheless grow up without a father, and that they will return to France together. But for the reconciliation to work they have each to manage an accommodation of the needs of the other; Barbary's jealousy of Maurice acknowledged and dispensed with, and the new lover's presence embraced: 'I don't care as long as she lets me be with her, too. Maman must always have a man' (*WW*: 237). The close bond between mother and daughter is sealed more tightly. Helen vows that 'whatever other relationships I may have she will come first. [...] She'll be mine for always' (*WW*: 247). Helen rediscovers her mother's love as, in an act of willed forgetfulness activated by the threat of Barbary's death, she puts aside the young persons' complicity, and Barbary, for her part, concedes her mother's need for a man.

Although Helen's forgiveness has the appearance of having resolved Derrida's paradox of forgiving the unforgiveable, at the time of Barbary's dismissal from the maternal realm genuine forgiveness had seemed impossible.¹⁵ After Barbary's near fatal fall in the ruins, however, Helen's frozen sensibilities thaw and her maternal feelings override the deep sorrow at Maurice's death. Helen's forgiveness, however, is gracious rather than unconditional, so still falls short of Derrida's definition. She dispenses a form of forgiveness that might only flow from a mother. They may be reconciled, but only by putting aside the detail

¹⁵ Derrida's aporias of forgiveness and hospitality as they apply to *The World my Wilderness* are also cited chapter one.

of Maurice's murder. The maturity that Barbary shows, however, is rooted in childlike self-interest as a compromise to regain the lost maternal plenitude. The prospects for its longer-term survival are, therefore, uncertain. She rationalises the position to Raoul; a rationale that nevertheless depends on the success of the reconciliation process and a belief in forgiveness. 'Now it is over and forgiven, and one must not cry any more'. The narrative poses more questions to add to a complex and irretrievable paradox: 'Had he (Maurice) loved Raoul more, had Barbary felt no jealous resentment, Raoul no bitterness [...] would they have broken with their Resistance friends, if necessary betrayed them, and saved the collaborator?' (WW: 237). Helen's forgiveness is far from unconditional, being contingent upon the unique bond between mother and daughter that is renegotiated in the face of the imminent risk of its loss.

The power of *The World my Wilderness*, like that of other novels considered in the thesis, derives from the abnormal circumstances of wartime that makes the mother-daughter story more dramatic. The immediacy of war drives the mother-daughter break-up at the same time as it highlights the unorthodoxy of the relationship between a mother and daughter with vastly differing personalities but a deeply binding love. The novel questions the mother-daughter paradigm suggested by early psychoanalytical work, offering a flawed version of Winnicott's 'good enough mother' that is no less damaging when withdrawn from the daughter.¹⁶ The idea of matrophobia, too, is challenged when the mature separation of mother from daughter is left unresolved. It is Helen not Barbary who holds the key to the positive completion of the essential process of maternal splitting. There is hope, though not

¹⁶ The term "good enough" mother is used by DW Winnicott in *The Child and the Family* (1957) to describe a mother who recognises and fulfils an infant's desires.

certainty, in the prospect of Barbary's continuing education in France and her acceptance of Helen's separate emotional needs.

Daddy's Gone A-Hunting

Almost twenty years in advance of Rich's extensive consideration of motherhood, Penelope Mortimer's *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* portrays situations that contribute to an evolving discourse on the mother-daughter relationship. As I stated in chapter four, Penelope Mortimer's 1958 novel, written within sight of the sixties' sexual revolution, is deserving of the epithet 'visionary' for its prescient engagement with a range of issues troubling women's existence in a fast-changing landscape. The 1950s saw alterations to the psychic geography of women's lives when, as patriarchal expectations were still blithely enforced by mothers themselves, younger women began to resent and blame them. An impulse to resist the traditional ambition of marriage and motherhood was sensed in what Adrienne Rich calls the 'alienation from and rejection of the mother that daughters have learned under patriarchy' (Rich: 135).¹⁷ This second look at the novel confirms the importance of attention to female experience in Mortimer's work, already seen in chapter four in relation to marriage, the family and mental illness, that exposes issues around female embodiment, specifically abortion, and the impact on the mother-daughter relationship.

The troubled mother-daughter relationship imagined in *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*, is driven by events and circumstances that stand outside of the primary

¹⁷ Margaret Steggles in Stella Gibbons' novel *Westwood*, considered in chapter two is an example of a resistant daughter, with ambitions to leave behind the wishes of her mother and seek her own separate and culturally elevated future.

maternal bond. The reclamation of a daughter by her mother drives a narrative that prefigures imminent alterations in the condition of women. The novel imagines two mother-daughter dyads: the central one of Ruth and Angela Whiting, and a sub-plot involving Jane Tanner and 'Baby', each offering scenarios to illustrate contemporary pressures acting upon the mother-daughter relationship. The predicament facing Angela is aggravated by her ignorance of Ruth's identical plight - becoming pregnant at eighteen. This situation brings into play the concept of matrophobia alongside the vexed question of abortion as the elective refusal of motherhood. The daughter's wish to terminate her pregnancy, even as she remains ignorant of the circumstances of her own conception, initiates the novel's engagement with a discourse on the nature of motherhood and a woman's freedom to choose or reject it. The novel also contains a sub-plot that reveals new pressures at stake in the field of mothering, good, bad or "good enough", for Jane Tanner, who is at an earlier stage in the relationship with her daughter, still known as 'Baby'. The central thrust of the novel, however, derives from Ruth's painstaking suppression of the truth about her daughter's conception. The remarkable maintenance of secrecy for eighteen years testifies to the repression at work in the conventional middle-class family of the time.

As an adolescent girl, Ruth had been subject to the domination-submission models of power exercised by her father and upheld by the husband-to-be, Rex, when deciding what to do about her pregnancy. The shame heaped upon her by her parents and Rex has distorted the relationship with her daughter so that for Ruth to make good her unfinished relationship with Angela, she needs to confess her perceived transgression, a need that is acted out with an imaginary friend. These confiding chats underline her youthful unpreparedness for

motherhood or marriage, being little more than a child herself when she became pregnant: 'It was nineteen years ago. I had long hair, you know. But really, in pigtails' (*DGAH*: 15). Held back by shame and fear from sharing the secret with a real friend, she resorts to unburdening herself to the empty chair at the kitchen table.¹⁸

Angela was born six months after we were married. She doesn't know, of course. I didn't want to get married. I didn't want Angela. We had to get married. There was nothing else to do (*DGAH*: 15).

The short, staccato sentences lead Ruth to that blank statement, 'I didn't want Angela', exposing a haunting conflation of the unborn baby of that time with the real daughter – and later to Angela's aborted foetus. Her submissive, 'nothing else to do' is symptomatic of the disempowering censure expressed through the bullying and hypocrisy of her father and Rex. Patriarchal mores deny Ruth the alternative option of abortion and more powerfully, the unthinkable condition of single parenthood.

Characteristic of an earlier generation, Ruth's mother had made no provision for imparting sexual and physiological information to her daughter, the lack of which must have contributed to Ruth's untimely pregnancy. The abandonment of her daughter at a time when a mother's support is most urgently needed highlights the power of social and religious mores. Her parents' rush to retirement in Ireland might have provided a refuge for Ruth, but instead the move has a prohibition attached: 'of course you won't be able to come over here with a young baby'. In pointing out her disappointment at losing the chance

¹⁸ The trope of a frustrated housewife who talks to an inanimate object, in this case the wall, also appears in *Shirley Valentine*, Willy Russell's 1986 play. The implications to the woman's mental health are discussed in the chapter four with a focus on the phenomenon of the 'mad housewife'.

of a white wedding, settling for 'a simple print dress under the circumstances' and exhorting her to 'pray for forgiveness', her mother compounds Ruth's guilt (*DGAH*: 59). In this case Rich's prescription of a healthy split from the mother to facilitate the daughter's self-discovery is not effective since the daughter's agency is absent. The enforced splitting from her mother, although to the reader greatly to be desired, is more detrimental than liberating. She is subsequently trapped in an ill-considered marriage followed by the heightened state of anxiety that pervades her life.

Ruth and Angela's unprecedented joint project to seek a termination is made more difficult by an incomplete relationship that blocks effective communication. The irony of mistaken impressions is revealed in Angela's outburst, which at the same time attests to the success of Ruth's campaign of secrecy:

"I mean, quite honestly, it's all very well for you living here day after day, after all, it's your home and you've got the boys and Daddy coming down every weekend and – well it's your life isn't it? But you don't seem to realise it's different for me. I'm so lonely sometimes, I could die" (*DGAH*: 18).

Angela's accusatory tone demonstrates the absence of daughter to mother empathy. Completely unaware of her mother's status as victim, she takes for granted an illusory contentment even as she mirrors Ruth's feelings of isolation and self-silencing: "I shouldn't think you've ever had a day's loneliness in your life. [...] you don't know the stupid things you do when you're lonely, and there's no-one to talk to and nobody cares" (*DGAH*: 18). The tension of miscommunication between two women who, ironically, share the same emotions, stunts the much-needed expression of their individual anxieties. Angela's half-concerned reference to Ruth's oddness in talking to herself and

the casual recommendation to see a doctor, barely conceals a preoccupation with her newly instituted sexual life. In contrast to Ruth, Angela is at least aware of her ignorance but her search for reliable information about contraception is not directly addressed to her mother. It turns on obtuse questioning about the authenticity of an advertisement in the *New Statesman* for the 'brilliant discoveries of Professor Hermann Knaus and Dr Kyasaku Ogino' whose 'little Swiss precision calculator' predicts a woman's fertile days each month and could therefore be used to increase the chances or avoidance of pregnancy, a method of contraception popularly known as the 'Rhythm Method' (DGAH: 23).

¹⁹ Ruth's mother might well have known about this, but is unlikely to have passed on such information to her daughter before marriage. Ruth's own reticence in discussing such things perhaps springs from this maternal example.

Mortimer's introduction of this topical issue is another aspect of the novel that locates it in the vanguard of change. It reflects the concerns of young women at the time who are taking tentative steps towards sexual freedom, but without support from their mothers or other trustworthy sources. It is telling that given Angela's educational and class background she refers to a progressive publication like the *New Statesman* (a journal that, significantly, her father has commanded be cancelled) for information that her mother is unable or unwilling to provide. Nor is there an extended family or close female friend to furnish intimate information. ²⁰ Just as Ruth was left in ignorance by her mother, so

¹⁹ The unreliable 'Rhythm Method' was promoted by the Catholic Church for several decades from the 1930s as the only acceptable method of 'natural family planning'. The relatively high failure rate (estimated at around 25%), led to unwanted pregnancies and hence to the demand for abortion, illegal until 1967.

²⁰ Young women who must cope alone with unforeseen pregnancies are portrayed in fiction of the late 50s and early 60s. See, Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey* (1958), Lynne Reid Banks' *The L-shaped Room* (1960). Interestingly in working-class narratives such as Nell

Angela lacks safe and easily accessible sources of information. The difference is that Angela is aware of her ignorance and looks at ways to discover more. Ruth's failure to answer her daughter's coded appeal for maternal reassurance intensifies the dissonance between them. Embarrassed by Angela's thinly-veiled request for clarification and inhibited by the persisting taboo relating to all things sexual, she becomes 'wilfully stupid', putting an end to further discussion by castigating the publication, "I think it's frightful to have advertisements like that – for children to read. I'll wash, you dry" (*DGAH*: 24). She repositions Angela as a child, albeit a child of the same age as she was when engaging in her first sexual activity, and denies her daughter the knowledge she would have benefitted from at the same age. This unwillingness to provide information related to sex leads to a negation of the mother by the daughter that, in turn, requires a 'matrophobic purging and splitting' (O'Brien Hallstein: 32).

The avoidance of sexual and emotional issues is not only disempowering to women, it also demonstrates a discontinuity at this moment in feminist history. Alongside the Women's Suffrage movement and the rise of sexology and psychoanalysis in the early decades of the century, there were campaigns to increase women's access to sexual and gynaecological knowledge led by important figures such as Marie Stopes and Stella Browne. The most radical among them, Stella Browne, was a progressive, practical feminist who, according to Lesley Hall, 'is probably best known for her work to free women from unwanted pregnancy and to make motherhood "intelligent and voluntary" through the provision of adequate facilities for birth control' (Lesley A. Hall, 1997: 159). Sadly, this pioneering work has little impact on the fate of Ruth and

Dunn's *Up the Junction* (1963), and the male-authored *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, by Alan Sillitoe (1958), the 'home remedies' of gin and hot baths and back-street abortionists are supported by friends, whereas others remain isolated in their plight.

Angela and of many other women. The adequate provision for birth control and indeed for abortion - a right that Browne supported but Stopes did not - would be unavailable until the late 1960s and onwards. Ignorance about their own bodies, even in mature women who have borne children, is still a disempowering feature in the mid-twentieth century. Recognised as a feminist issue, it was addressed in 1971 by the Boston Women's Health Collective in the publication of the first comprehensive guide to women's sexual and gynaecological health, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.²¹ However, at this 1950s moment mothers did not easily talk to their daughters about these issues, only preparing them for 'the curse', the patriarchal construction of women as deserving punishment for their sexual transgression in the Garden of Eden. Any consideration of daughters' sexual activities was more likely to be in the form of monitoring and control, in other words, the prevention of sex before marriage. If, as Frigga Haug contends, 'young women first of all have to appropriate their bodies, in order to live with them', then they need comprehensive knowledge to supersede their mother's proprietorship and to seize control for themselves. This is knowledge that both Ruth and Angela lack in the regressive current of the 1950s (Haug, 1992: 18).

It is only when apprised of the risky situation facing her daughter that Ruth is forced to overcome her reticence and reveal Angela's pregnancy to Jane Tanner in the hope of enlisting her help in finding a doctor amenable to arranging an abortion. The mother-daughter relationship is re-charged the moment Ruth is required to assist Angela to terminate her pregnancy, stirring the painful memory of her own pregnancy with Angela and its very different

²¹ The handbook was conceived as an authoritative source of information and guidance on women's health and sexuality, including sexual health, sexual orientation, gender identity, birth control, abortion, pregnancy, childbirth, violence and abuse and menopause. It is still in print after many revisions.

outcome. She discovers the necessary resources, both inner and material, to overcome the obstacles to safe abortion denied to so many women at the time. In a satisfying irony, Ruth funds the procedure with the money Rex has given her for the 'rest cure'.²² She dismisses Angela's provocative suggestion of the back-street abortionist on the Cowley Road and Angela stubbornly rules out marriage, much to her mother's relief.²³ Ruth's instinctive and falsely confident, first port of call is her GP, under whose care she is already placed for her depression. His reaction, however, betrays the prevailing opinion both of his profession and his gender. "You would really advise her to do this thing? Your own daughter? Good God Ruth, I'm sorry. You make me sick" (*DGAH*: 85). Not only does he deny her appeal on legal and professional grounds, he makes a moral judgement of Ruth's maternal responsibility at the same time as he abandons her needs as his patient. His response strikes a blow to Ruth on another level, albeit unknown to him, as she is about to undertake a course of action about which she is distinctly ambivalent and that she herself was denied the chance to consider when pregnant with Angela. She experiences the moral discomfort of emotionally doubting something at the same time as seeing a practical need for it. The novel represents effectively the ambivalence of many women towards abortion at a point when the woman-centred need to relax its proscription was being increasingly acknowledged.

Ruth's maternal obligation now is to discover a practical route to abortion, the illegality of which her middle-class daughter dismisses as irrelevant, like fiddling your taxes, but viable if you have the financial means. Faced with a

²² A more detailed account of the causes and effects of Ruth's mental breakdown is given in chapter four.

²³ A far cry from Nell Dunn's character, Rube in *Up the Junction* (1963), who was encouraged by friends to use Winny, 'who might do it for five quid' (*UJ*: 61). Class and economic status had a significant impact on how safely a woman could terminate a pregnancy before legalisation.

failure of support from the boyfriend and with no real idea of what to do next, Ruth feels herself 'stumbling forward and finding responsibility thrust into her arms, finding herself committed without knowing how it had happened'. She blindly reassures her daughter, "'I'll do what I can. We'll fix it somehow'". However, the acceptance of this joint endeavour does not yet bring a reconciliation since even at this moment of mother-daughter communion a barrier looms to halt an expression of gratitude that Ruth has no wish to hear: "'For heaven's sake, don't thank me'" (*DGAH*: 89). Parallels to Angela's current predicament complicate Ruth's attitude given that the retrospective possibility of Angela being similarly disposed of remains with her even as she proceeds to salvage her daughter's future. After a reluctant betrayal of her secret to Jane, Ruth gains the number of a doctor willing to steer them through. The concealment of this slip of paper inside the musical box that plays 'Bye, Baby Bunting' is a potent signifier both of her maternal yearning and of the emotional abandonment by the 'Daddy', gone 'a-hunting' for sex and money, at the same time symbolising her maternal protectiveness.

While Jane Tanner plays an important role in the progress of the main plot, her own sub-plot highlights the conflicting pressures upon women who strain to live inside the ironic 'family plot', with its connotations of the graveyard.²⁴ The context of the professional middle-class commuter village forms the backdrop to the grim vignette of a housewife at home alone with a young child and a husband at work in London. As a former career woman, Jane does not initially fit into life on the Common until pregnancy and the birth of 'Baby' change her beyond recognition into an obsessive, neurotic mother. The mystery of the

²⁴ In chapter four Deborah, in *To Bed with Grand Music*, finds it impossible to sustain a life inside the 'family plot' without the component of the husband as sexual partner.

change that comes over some mothers on giving birth is expressed with a black humour that points to the unfathomable illusions of motherhood:

What happened to her during the six hours of labour nobody ever knew. Something snapped or something fell into place, or her brain, under pressure, tossed about like coloured pieces in a kaleidoscope, settling in an entirely different pattern. Whatever it was, when she came out of the nursing home she was fat, cosy, middle-aged and had already formed the habit of breaking, in the middle of a sentence, into an irrelevant chant, as though possessed by some voodoo (*DGAH*: 37).

The idea of fulfilment through the very act of giving birth, maternity, is one that Rich challenges and Jane tests. Nurturing 'Baby' (a monstrous presence with a capital 'B' and an unused forename) in the excessive manner she is led to believe is required becomes incompatible with a marital relationship. Jane is emblematic of mothers at that time who, subject to advice and warnings about the right and wrong way to bring up baby, are seldom at peace. These mothers exist in the liminal regions between motherhood and mothering that Rich describes as at once oppressive and potentially creative and joyful. The advice Jane follows stems from the theories developed by John Bowlby in the 1930s and 1940s in relation to wartime separations of children from their mother but now co-opted by the middle-classes. He had observed that deprived of the primary attachment, predominantly the mother, a child would develop emotional problems and become socially disruptive.²⁵ However, Bowlby's theories have implications for postwar mothers in their advocacy of constant maternal attention.

²⁵ John Bowlby, influenced by the work of Konrad Lorenz, developed his theory of attachment following time spent running a Child Guidance clinic in London in the 1930s and his state-sponsored studies of evacuees as 'problem children'.

Just as a baby needs to feel that he belongs to his mother, a mother needs to feel that she belongs to her child, and it is only when she has the satisfaction of this feeling that it is easy for her to devote herself to him (Bowlby, 1953 :77).

The ‘dimly remembered psychological grounds’ (*DGAH*: 37) that guide Jane’s behaviour would refer to the theories of Bowlby and of D W Winnicott whose publications during the 1940s and 1950s place the responsibility firmly on the mother to create the right environment for the child’s development by being a “good enough” mother.²⁶ Winnicott is credited with shaping the American parenting guide by Dr Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care*.²⁷ The presence of advice manuals on Jane’s bookshelves testifies to her reliance on their guidance for the performance of her mothering role. For Jane and others like her, the slavish adherence to the popularised principles of child care binds her into a relationship with ‘Baby’ that delivers resentment and exhaustion rather than empowerment. Mortimer paints a depressing picture of a mother’s life under the sway of these ideologies in her sardonic account of Jane’s predicament. Refusing to have a nurse, the management of ‘Baby’ is hers alone. Although she could have afforded the help her Victorian antecedents had relied upon, psychological advice, new and urgent to the middle-class mother, inhibits her from sharing maternal duties. Jane now lives

in a state of perpetual danger, frantic with the knowledge that it was possible for a child to drown in two inches of water, that cats habitually suffocated babies [...], that nightdresses meant certain death and every other man was a sexual maniac (*DGAH*: 36).

²⁶ Winnicott and Bowlby were both members of the ‘Independent Group’ of British Psychotherapists who split between followers of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein as successors to Sigmund Freud after World War Two. Winnicott pioneered the importance of play in developing a child’s sense of self.

²⁷ This was first published in 1946 and remained a bestseller for more than fifty years.

Understandably susceptible to Jane's stress, the baby is difficult to manage in those areas that might offer a mother some peace; eating and sleeping. Mortimer portrays Jane's efforts to get Baby off to sleep in her pram with both humour and pathos describing how she wheels the baby round and round the mulberry tree, until, 'the child, dizzy with speed, was blacking out' (*DGAH*: 36). The reference to a nursery rhyme, 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush', in addition to the one in the novel's title, symbolises the tyranny of Baby over a mother coping alone in the absence of the father, 'Gone A-Hunting', at the same time as it represents the flow of infantilising platitudes to mothers. Regardless of Dr Spock's famous assurances to mothers that they know more than they think they do, it is only Jane's last-ditch and desperate administration of 'drugs' that allows some temporary respite. As she experiences what Rich has called a mother's 'suffering of ambivalence' Jane seems destined to have the 'bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves' without the 'blissful gratification and tenderness' that, at times, breaks through (Rich: 21). Jane is the victim of patriarchal 'guidance' that perpetuates mothers' oppression in its advocacy of pseudo-psychological premises that deny them the agency that Rich would have them possess to define and practice mothering for themselves.

As the popularity of male-originated theories of child care grew, the response of feminists cautioned against the wholesale uptake of ideas that effectively inhibit mothers from a self-definition of mothering. Margaret Mead had warned in 1954:

There is at present a growing insistence that child and biological mother must never be separated [...] this is a new and subtle form of anti-feminism in which men, under the guise of exalting the importance of maternity, are tying

women ever more tightly to their children
(Mead, 1954: 473).

Yet each mother's experience is her own and Ruth has a distinctly different understanding of the mother-daughter paradigm from Jane, who is embroiled in the early childhood mystique. The pace of change in attitudes is highlighted in Jane's determination to persist in her progressive mothering methods until her daughter reaches the age when she will require information of the kind neither Ruth nor Angela had been allowed to access. Jane speaks against Rex's hypocritical assertion that girls should remain virgins until they are married and vows to see that hers will know everything "when she's a reasonable age", or at least "before she goes to University, naturally" (*DGAH*: 43-45). Jane's daughter, only sixteen years behind Angela, is set to benefit from access to the knowledge that Ruth has denied her daughter and that she herself was denied. Jane is one step further along in the evolution of modernised mothering, poised to equip her daughter for the 'sexual revolution' of the sixties and seventies.

In this moment of crisis, Angela, who does not yet know the truth about her conception nor of Ruth's long-served shame, blames her mother for the intractable problems she faces, extending her distance from Ruth. Indeed, the fractious exchanges between mother and daughter during the search for a termination display evidence of incipient matrophobia in their relationship. The daughter, difficult and oppositional and pitilessly misjudging her mother, displays no desire to become like her. On the contrary:

All emotions, regret, fear, loneliness, seemed to have resolved themselves in bad temper. She was angry with everyone and didn't know why. With her mother most of all. If I were married, she thought bitterly, she'd be knitting. She didn't want to be married, or to have a child to knit for. It was just, obscurely, the principle of the thing (*DGAH*: 162-3).

Paradoxically, she is beginning the process of splitting from her mother at the same time as Ruth grows closer to reclaiming her. The imagined scene of grandmother and expectant mother making ready as 'two women on either side of the fire, yawning and talking, waiting for the months to crawl by' (*DGAH*: 164) is disrupted in a terrifyingly incoherent nightmare in which Ruth sees the 'embryo, blind, its seaweed limbs not even moving' that, she must remind herself, is not hers (*DGAH*: 173). Angela's wishes are clear, her concern is simply with the complications around achieving them.

Ruth's pathway to securing the abortion is obscured not only by psychological barriers but also by practical hurdles. Paradoxically, none of these obstacles can be breached without masculine agency but those men closest to the situation are of no use. Rex would throw Angela out of the house and Tony, unable to borrow the money to pay for the procedure nor to ask his parents to help, is also redundant. Forced back onto her own resources, with information supplied by Jane, Ruth addresses the task with no idea of what lies ahead. Rebuffed by her own GP she exploits a chance encounter with a doctor (a man) she meets at a party – with whom, ironically, Rex assumes she is having an affair - who furnishes the necessary examination and documentation to access a psychiatric assessment. Angela's youth and single-mindedness allow her to glide through this encounter as she works to convince the psychiatrist that she is 'balmy enough' (sic). While giving rise to conflicted emotions in Ruth the visit to the psychiatrist, who to Angela was 'a scruffy little man, but bliss to talk to' (a foretaste of the rise of 'talking therapy') ushers them through to the next male gatekeeper who will perform the procedure (*DGAH*: 205).

The final component in the process, Doctor Fickstein, whose flight from a prosperous practice in pre-war Vienna locates him on the uncomfortable

margins of legitimacy in London, is a masculine characterisation quite different from the men so far portrayed. His professionalism and experience do not override his status as 'other' in the clinic where he now operates, significantly, at night. Yet as a formerly much-respected gynaecologist in Vienna he now appears to be driven not simply by financial gain but by 'a genuine pity for women'. The unsettling account of his motives, however, suggests an approach equally inimical to women's freedom to choose as the old woman's on Cowley Road. His 'tender attitude' towards women conceals a different kind of power that, rather than maintaining an appropriate professional distance, suggests a benevolent patriarchal position: 'Women were his pets, to be protected against the ravages of childbirth and all ugliness'. The contrast between the backstreet abortionist and the exclusive clinic in Vienna, decked with 'bushes of thornless roses for the sad, soft, pretty creatures who had been disfigured by men', represents two positions similarly driven by motives removed from the woman herself (*DGAH*: 181). The denial of agency in these situations is symptomatic of a dangerous prohibition that would only begin to be eased ten years later following the Abortion Act in 1967.²⁸

Mortimer's positioning of Angela's abortion next to the celebration of Christmas heightens the novel's dramatic effect, placing joy at the birth of one baby in stark contrast to relief at the termination of another. Sally Minogue and Andrew Palmer explore the literary representation of abortion through a juxtaposition of Bakhtin's 'carnavalesque' with Julia Kristeva's notion of 'the abject'. They examine accounts of abortion in novels by Aldous Huxley and Jean Rhys in the 1930s and by Alan Sillitoe and Nell Dunn in the 1950s and

²⁸ The Abortion Act was introduced by David Steele as a private member's Bill in 1967. It was enacted in 1968.

60s.²⁹ Minogue and Palmer contend that Rhys in 1934 and Huxley in 1936 broke the taboo around the representation of abortion giving Sillitoe and Dunn, in the fifties and sixties respectively, license to explore 'areas of human experience hitherto deemed unsuitable for artistic and imaginative transformation' (Minogue and Palmer, 2006: 2).³⁰ In *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* Mortimer also explores this taboo area, but in a manner more psychological than physical. While Minogue and Palmer use Kristeva's term 'the abject' in relation to visceral representations of 'dead babies', the confrontation with the foetus that takes place solely in Ruth's imagination has an equally grotesque effect. Another important distinction between the work of Sillitoe and Dunn and that of Mortimer lies in the class context of the narratives. The working class setting of the former delivers a strong physical impression of backstreet abortion, with descriptions of fetuses carelessly disposed of in dangerous conditions. However, although the procedure takes place extra-narratively, and safely, in *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*, Ruth's psychological disturbance is brought vividly to attention. Her mental perception of the foetus is as something with the potential for life, closely aligned with the child she bore unwillingly eighteen years ago. Regardless of class privilege, the traumatic effect of the termination is more profound on Ruth than on Angela who feels relief and elation when the procedure is completed. It is remarkable that the generational differences in attitudes to this dilemma and other matters of sexual behaviour occurred in a

²⁹ The novels cited in the article are Huxley's, *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Alan Sillitoe's, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), Nell Dunn's, *Up the Junction* (1963). I would add Paddy Kitchen's novel, *Lying-In* (1965) to a group of novels that describes graphically the scene of an abortion.

³⁰ Lesley Hall has compiled an extensive web page list of literary and autobiographical references to abortion from Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Women* (1798) up to the present.

period of less than twenty years of postwar cultural changes marked, among many other issues, by the disruption of the mother-daughter relationship that is the focus of this chapter.

Ruth's maternal protectiveness and relief after the abortion induces her to break the silence and reveal the truth of Angela's conception and her rushed marriage to Rex. The revelation, left implicit in the text, allows the final stage in the resolution of the estrangement of mother and daughter. They share thinly veiled criticism of Rex, with whom Angela is glad she will no longer have to live, 'Or with Tony, thank God. I feel – gosh, I feel absolutely wonderful' (*DGAH*: 229). Their relationship has undergone a change and Ruth 'had gone back to the beginning, and Angela was hers. At last I love her, and she trusts me, and I'm justified' (*DGAH*: 237). She feels that Angela has 'only just begun to be a child', happily busy in and out of the house, making new friends, whereas she herself has started to exist, to be grown up. They have attained their mature, and separate, status as mother and daughter, the psychologically essential splitting of daughter from mother. But as Angela leaves home to pursue an independent life, Ruth realises that, '[T]here was nowhere to put a belated love, a small painfully achieved humanity. ... What remained?' (*DGAH*: 239). She has given up her secret in exchange for her daughter's freedom and a newly forged maternal bond at the necessary cost of relinquishing the contested foetus and Angela's presence at home.

Although Angela's pregnancy re-opens the raw wound of Ruth's similar experience, it initiates a transformation in their relationship as the splitting of mother and daughter resolves their lifelong mutual reticence. The self-empowerment that drives Ruth to arrange an abortion for Angela reconfigures the mother-daughter connection at the same time as it frees her daughter to

gain autonomous status, even as Ruth remains locked in an unhappy marriage. Emblematic of the improving prospects for young women, Angela is on an elite trajectory of educational progression at Oxford, set to participate freely in the social, sexual and cultural revolutions of the sixties. Tragically there is no easy escape for Ruth, another unfortunate victim of patriarchal mores.

Mortimer's visionary early novels ³¹, reach a peak with this one and *The Pumpkin Eater* (1962) in which she portrays scenarios that are symptomatic of a range of female experiences at mid-century. Rachel Cooke, revisiting *The Pumpkin Eater* in *The Guardian* in 2015, endorses Mortimer's importance, stating that 'Mortimer's style, spare and singular, cuts through the decade like a scalpel'. ³² The combination of art and life in her work not only anticipates the later confessional novel, but holds an important place amongst novels that pave the way to new avenues of expression of women's malaise that would be more fully explored in later novels by women writers. Mortimer's female characters epitomise situations that oppress women within the seemingly safe bounds of middle-class matrimony and motherhood. While Jane Tanner suffers under the patriarchal appropriation of child-rearing practices that encourage sacrificial mothering in the early years, there is a ray of hope for benefits over time. Ruth's daughter (and the grown-up 'Baby') are sure to benefit from expanding equalities for women: 'You're getting confused with Angela again. It's Angela who's free. She doesn't owe anything' (*DGAH*: 240). The outcome for Ruth, however, is that of Friedan's housewives with no prospect of release: 'The house will be empty. It will be winter. You will be older' (*DGAH*:204). Yet her self-judgement that 'she had no nobility and little courage. Inadequate,

³¹ The trilogy of female malaise already mentioned include: *The Bright Prison* (1956), *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* (1958) and *The Pumpkin Eater* (1962).

³² *The Guardian*. 28th June 2015. Accessed online 27/06/2017

commonplace, no longer young, the burden of consequence [...] too heavy', is harsh (*DGAH*: 240). She has performed what Rich calls 'courageous mothering' in steering Angela through the trials of seeking abortion, and nobility in finding the strength to unlock her secretive heart to her daughter (Rich: 246).

The novel is courageous in its foregrounding of abortion ten years ahead of the Abortion Act. Mortimer's testimony, however, is not quite a polemic in favour of the cause of abortion on demand. She articulates the doubts and fears inherent in the decision to terminate a pregnancy as strongly as the emotional ambivalence in going forward to motherhood. *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* is of both feminist and literary interest today, both in terms of its style of expression and in the present context of resurgent assaults on a woman's right to choose.

The complex and diverse mother-daughter relationships represented in the four novels discussed in this chapter illuminate Adrienne Rich's evocative term 'the suffering of ambivalence'. *The World my Wilderness* and *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* endorse the protective nature of motherhood that leads to exceptional maternal action, while *A View of the Harbour* introduces a progressive discourse on the way in which the mothering role may be carried out and by whom. The novel's foregrounding of the tension between Beth's maternal role and her identity as a writer exposes an area of conflict for the woman artist. The proposition of an alternative maternal model in a father who appears to perform the role more effectively than the mother (leaving aside his implied adultery) demonstrates Taylor's progressive vision. She returns to the question of surrogate maternal figures in *A Game of Hide and Seek* where Harriet's 'unmothering' through sudden death is complicated by her hasty submission to a conventional marriage to a male alternative mother figure. The idea of maternal splitting, of Rich's 'painful estrangement' is however, more

emphatically embedded in the novels of Macaulay and Mortimer. In *The World my Wilderness* the lingering presence of the war in France and in London influences the circumstances that lead to a premature mother-daughter split. Ten years later than Macaulay, Mortimer's novel interacts with multiple discourses that impact on the lives of those women who appear to have 'never had it so good' in a time of conservative retrenchment, specifically on the relationship between a mother and her daughter.

An appreciation of the fundamental differences between the representation of the maternal bond in the last two novels is perhaps best gained by reading beyond the ending to imagine the prospects for the daughters. While Barbary recovers a lost maternal plenitude, the reconciliation nonetheless leaves her short on agency. She will follow her mother's wishes and pursue her hitherto neglected artistic education: 'in Paris a good deal [...] as she wants me to go on with painting' (*WW*: 237). For Angela, the path to selfhood is cleared when Ruth ruptures the psychic barrier between them by acting against her misgivings to facilitate the abortion and to open the way towards a re-constituted maternal connection. Rather than prescribing her daughter's future, Ruth releases Angela from the constraints they have lived within since her daughter's birth, thus enabling the young woman to move towards an independent, self-defined future. Mortimer, in effect, transitions the daughter from one historical period to the next, whereas Macaulay returns Barbary to a state temporarily lost to her; a state of arrested development or perpetual childhood. The prospects for the two daughters are quite different. Angela is empowered to attain independent selfhood in a renewed relation to her mother while, inscribed in the narrative, there is a fear for Barbary's future that retains the threat of impermanence and potential psychic harm. She

regresses to an infantilised position dependent on her mother that, although loving, lacks the certainty of a purifying separation. The repercussions of Barbary's vulnerability, her lost and found status, look set to shape her future life. By contrast, in *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* the progressive impetus is ultimately located with the daughter who, once released from the constraints of a patriarchal household, and an unwanted child, is free to select her future direction in an atmosphere of greater permissiveness.

In their different representations of the mother-daughter plot each of the selected novels exhibits the inherent energy that releases the potential for 'the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement' between mother and daughter that may, if not satisfactorily negotiated, impede the psychic stability of them both. The novels make a significant contribution, collectively and distinctly, to the inscription of Adrienne Rich's 'great unwritten story' and gesture towards an ideology that declares 'the personal is political' (Rich 1985 [1976]: 225).

Conclusion

This thesis stakes a claim for a group of female-authored novels to a place in women's literary history and the history of feminism through a challenge to the 'Sleeping Beauty' myth of dormant feminist sensibilities. The short period under discussion, running from the end of World War Two to the verge of what Elaine Showalter calls the 'new and dynamic phase' of women's writing of the 1960s and onwards, is buffered and to some extent obscured by dramatic historical events (Showalter, 1997: vii). Falling between the strident monoliths of the two waves of feminism, overshadowed by war and pushed 'backstage' by the 'Angry Young Man' phenomenon, this period of 'middleness' is an unexpectedly fruitful period in which to seek the green shoots of a new feminism in fiction by women.

Essentially a work of feminist literary interpretation and criticism, the thesis is underpinned by a tradition of women's studies and the historiography of the time. The novels discussed under the five thematic headings demonstrate in diverse ways how Alison Light's evocative term 'the forward march of women's consciousness' (Light: 22) begins to be realigned towards more personal concerns during the postwar 1940s and the recovering 1950s that were dominated by the complicating myth of the 'golden age of family life'. A unifying feature of the seven women writers, aside from the shared 'privilege' of being English, white and middle or upper-middle class, lies in their practice of gathering energy from personal and observed female experience at the contemporary moment of writing. The fulfilment of this essential criterion for inclusion in the study enables a woman-centred perspective on the atmosphere

of the time and gestures towards a new manifestation of feminism that, distinct from the issue-based agitation of the Woman's Suffrage Movement or the 1930s' Peace Movement, begins to attend to the personal and soon-to-be political concerns of women.¹ This 'middleness', both in relation to the first and second waves and the location between the large literary movements of modernism and postmodernism, contributes to the impression of the diminished value of this period to the creation of a feminist literary canon, an impression that this thesis challenges.

The selection of novels, based on the stated criteria, provides the raw material for a thesis that offers evidence of an inchoate tendency to subvert traditional narratives. The medium for communicating a disquieting unease in each novel is the female voice in tandem with a plot that uncovers consequences, at times disappointing at others more hopeful, but always indicative of the limitations of woman's condition. The heroines - I have used that term in preference to protagonists - of each novel are women facing varying degrees of challenge at different ages and stages of life and for the most part negotiating seriously disrupted times. Although only one of the novels, *Excellent Women*, uses a first-person narration, in the others the plot is carried along by a narrative voice that closely reflects that of the heroine. It is significant, too, that male characters are not as well-developed, functioning mainly as signifiers of what men think of women and of how they believe women should feel and behave. The novels present women who are short on agency, subject to individual men and victims of dominant patriarchy but who show their strengths

¹ The complicated divisions between 'old feminism' and 'new feminism' as expounded by Winifred Holtby in her 1926 article in *Time and Tide*, while not directly equivalent to the onset of the so-called 'second wave' of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, anticipate the organisational difficulties in agreeing aims and objectives for feminism. See, Lisa Regan's introduction to her 2012 monograph *Winifred Holtby's Social vision: "Members One of Another"*.

in the face of inhibitions and limitations and, in some cases, make startling changes to their sense of self. Perhaps the most impressive transformation is seen in Miss Ranskill, a character eminently deserving of the title of heroine, whose perspective is altered in a remarkable way through an association with a lower-class man - admittedly made possible only by bizarre circumstances - and a determination to redeem lives damaged by war and loss. Barbara Euphan Todd's only novel for adults is the one out of the thirteen that displays a sensibility not only feminist but progressively post-feminist for the way in which it complicates a simple attribution of the feminist label through its swingeing critique of women and an endorsement of the qualities shown in its male characters.

The principal feature that validates the central position of Elizabeth Taylor's novels in the thesis is the way in which, for each of the five themes, her female protagonists are equipped with a range of characteristics that empower them to navigate distinct situations. In *At Mrs Lippincote's* Julia Davenant is haunted by the past in another woman's family home, an experience that destabilises her identity and accelerates her awareness of a failing marriage, highlighting a wife's lack of agency in this position. The stories of the pairs of friends, Tory and Beth and Liz and Camilla, are narrated from the dominant point of view of one of them; Tory in *A View of the Harbour* and Camilla in *A Wreath of Roses*. In contrast to the married but isolated Julia it is the depth of feeling for each other that is the cause of pain for the close friends. In *A Game of Hide and Seek* Harriet is figured as both frustrated lover and disappointing daughter. Kate in *In a Summer Season* suffers as an ostensibly transgressing woman first outside then back inside convention. The one novel in which the foreground is shared however, *The Sleeping Beauty*, gives space to the self-

deluding male character of Vinny, the rescuing 'prince' before the awakening to a more active position of the transformed 'princess', Emily. She faces an ambiguous future but a future that may turn out better for her than for Vinny. This glimmer of hope for agency regained signifies the underlying promise, not yet fully articulated, of something more for women that will move forward in the next wave of feminism.

The sense of isolation in each of Taylor's women is a factor that unites their plight and positions them, to a greater or lesser degree, as outsiders. It is outsiders or deviant women who are to be the animators firstly of a sense of shared womanly experience and then to the impulse to resist. This sense of isolation is, in fact, present in all the heroines of the novels under scrutiny here, but Taylor's overwhelming emphasis on the female predicament in its many forms, is further justification of her continuous presence in this study. Clare Hanson rightly credits Taylor with 'making the *feminine* the norm, making the feminine representative of "the human", of the human condition', an endorsement not just of Taylor's feminist credentials but also of her acute perception of humanity (Hanson: 93). She lays out the inhibitions to female freedom through a woman-centred sensibility in each of the novels but falls short of open rebellion, expressing a kind of resignation that conceals her radical tendencies.

All the novels make 'the feminine the norm' to a greater or lesser extent through the centrality of female characters. Each of them accentuates women's isolation at the same time as they foreground women who exhibit strong personality traits or who experience situations that cause them to change in some significant manner. In *The World my Wilderness*, Barbary Deniston is the principal character but her mother, Helen, is the source of her animation. The

physical loss of home and the emotional loss of her mother, although treated separately in two chapters, are necessarily interconnected. Macaulay's drawing of the mother-daughter duo as two distinct female types, placed in opposition to Pamela's stereotype, fuels discourses on femininity, complicated by the maternal relationship and Barbary's androgynous behaviour. The triad of female friends in *Westwood*, Margaret, Hilda and Zita, once again exhibits distinct feminine types. The quest of the heroine, Margaret, juxtaposed with the opposing visions of her old and new friends, Hilda and Zita, is both aided and inhibited by each of them before she clarifies her future vision, assisted by the figure of the wise older woman, Lady Challis. Although the heroine's path to an aesthetically fulfilled life is initially dominated by men - the boyfriend and the playwright - it is only with the intercession, or interference, of the women friends that she becomes able to grasp a measure of autonomy sufficient to pursue her desires.

Of all the novelists discussed, Barbara Pym has so far received the most scholarly attention, much of it focussing on her female characters' frustrated desires and potential alternative ways of living. In common with the other writers discussed here, Pym's female characters are better developed than the male in such a way that offers significant insights into the female mind. Although on the surface her plots demonstrate conservative impulses, the feasible alternatives uncovered for women present as progressive and even radical. The mood communicated in *Jane and Prudence* and *Excellent Women* is on the one hand quiet resignation but on the other an atmosphere of subversion can be detected. Disappointment in the outcomes, however, is a salient feature of Pym's narratives, often circular in shape, with no ultimate break-out from the

female traps. Indeed, in addition to isolation, disappointment is an emotion evoked in most of the novels examined in this thesis.

The chronology of the project, although rearranged in some cases, runs from the war to the cusp of the 1960s and is bookended by two powerful novels that explore vexed areas of women's lives. *To Bed with Grand Music* (1946) and *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* (1958) represent the most contentious issues of all the novels so far mentioned and are, therefore, susceptible to a more nuanced interpretation. These two novels go to the heart of the demands of second wave feminism: motherhood, sex and a woman's control of her body. It is significant that *To Bed with Grand Music* was published just after the war when the limits of sexuality, both male and female, had been stretched and morality turned on its head. The novel is problematic within its context for subject matter that tests assumptions not only about female sexuality but also about what constitutes a 'good mother'. The tone established by Laski, on the surface negative towards Deborah, leaves room for ambivalence around the core issue of sex that is perceived differently for men than for women in the abnormal conditions of war. It is true, however, that some women were also experiencing the erotic charge of wartime, secretly acting out an unprecedented level of sexual activity.

By the end of the 1950s *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* made similarly bold interventions in the contentious area of abortion, once more complicated by the mother-daughter relationship and, as an additional contemporary concern, the issue of a woman's mental health. The phenomenon of the unhappy (or 'mad') housewife, proposed by Betty Friedan in 1963, is prefigured in the character of Ruth. In a remarkable way, Mortimer's novel foreshadows the outpouring of shared female experience that was uncorked after Friedan's study. The two

women in the novel, mother and daughter Ruth and Angela Whiting, represent the hopelessness of one generation of women as opposed to the hope for the future of the next that was so loudly demanded in the lexicon of women's liberation. These two novels also foreground the growing popularity among the middle classes of the application of theories of child-rearing and child psychology that contribute to the ambivalence about how to be a 'good enough' mother.

One of the purposes of reflecting upon the leading female characters in each novel is to highlight their position on a continuum of feminist consciousness. At one end, where the majority lie, there is the laying out of the problem but with little sight of a satisfactory resolution. At the other end of the scale the Laski and Mortimer novels deliver a form of limited resolution while retaining negative impacts. Deborah gains much in material terms but loses in emotional areas. It is Ruth's daughter Angela, representative of the next generation, who is to make the most tangible progress towards a freer life having been saved from a similar catastrophe to her mother. Ruth herself, while restoring the mother-daughter relationship, is still in the marital trap, asking herself the now famous question expressed by Friedan's women, 'is this all?' (Friedan: 5). It appears - and in this I once more push my own preferences to the fore - that Miss Ranskill is the one amongst them who gains the most, who rides over prejudices and physical difficulties to reach a position of relative fulfilment and offer a quasi-religious hope for postwar regeneration. It is interesting, however, that Todd chooses to depart from realism into fantasy to envisage the means for a woman to achieve change. The rest of the novels are left teetering on the brink of a new consciousness. Nobody ever said that feminism would be easy.

There is a growing appreciation from both critics and the 'common reader' of the female authors of the period under review. In 2003 Jane Dowson endorses the 'rich texture of women's writing in the postwar period' (Dowson: 13), yet in 1977 Elaine Showalter had seen the territory of the English woman's novel as 'desert bounded by mountains on four sides: the Austen Peaks, the Bronte cliffs, the Eliot range, and the Woolf hills' (Showalter. 1997: vii). Her description of the space between - the 1940s and 1950s - as an area of uncultivated ground suggests a downturn in the quality of women's literary production. She appears to dismiss this period as representing 'a passive rather than an active continuity' and hastens on to the 'new and dynamic phase' of the 1960s (Showalter: 34). It is perhaps understandable that, from the vantage point of the late 1970s, the 1960s should appear to be more exciting than earlier decades given not only the so-called sexual revolution but also the explosion of women's movements in Britain, America and Europe accompanied by cultural and social change. My analysis demonstrates that there was in fact a great deal of imaginative stimulation arising from the exceptionality of lived experience during World War Two and the attendant unsettlement of its aftermath. All of this is reflected in the varied narratives of the novels by English women considered in this study.

The impulse to record women's continuing predicaments persists beyond the 1950s into the 1960s, the period from which I derived the inspiration to look back into the preceding decade and to identify signs of unity and continuity. I have argued that the green shoots of resistance are visible in this substantial body of women's writing. There is more to be investigated as overlooked novels and short stories continue to be seen for their feminist value, offering scope for an extension of this interrogation.

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