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Philippa Martindale

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**'The Ceasing From the Sorrow of Divided Life': May Sinclair's  
Women, Texts and Contexts (1910-1923)**

**Philippa Martindale**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

March 2003

Department of English Studies

University of Durham

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## Abstract

This thesis explores May Sinclair's female protagonists in her Modernist texts, 1910-1923. I look at how Sinclair's work bears witness to her scene of writing and offer an analysis that places Sinclair, most centrally, in a dialogue with contemporary literary, psychoanalytical, and cultural influences.

I draw upon a wealth of unpublished material, medical archives and journals, newspapers, propaganda, novels of fellow female writers, and other artefacts of the day. By appraising these works together, the critical distinction between Modernism and the topical issues of early twentieth century Britain is seen to dissolve, and Sinclair's writing emerges as an important oeuvre for reading the life of the modern woman.

Women's fiction of the period typically searches for autonomy and agency. However, as I show, the desire for radical social change is problematic and often in conflict with the prescribed code of an idealised, fixed female identity. Through an exploration and development of her own concept of sublimation, Sinclair confronts these complex ideological structures in her engagement with the position of women in her fiction. She places her women in a variety of situations—from the tightly knit, domestic home to the unfettered, open terrain of wild landscapes—and analyses the forces that hold women back or set them free. In my study of Sinclair's Modernist texts, I argue that Sinclair urges for psychic freedom for women from their cramped, repressive conditions; this is achieved through sublimation.

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## **Declaration**

This thesis, and all material contained within, has not been previously submitted for a degree in this or in any other university.

The content of the thesis is based on individual research without the contribution of any other.

The thesis conforms with the word limit set out in the Rules for the Submission of Work for Higher Degrees.

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## Acknowledgements

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The Dean's Fund, University of Durham, for contributing towards travel costs during my research visit to the May Sinclair Papers, Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA (April-May 2000).

My gratitude to the following curators and archivists: Nancy Shawcross and her colleagues at the aforementioned May Sinclair archive centre for their friendly and generous support during my visit, and for permission to reproduce unpublished material and illustrations; Wayne Furman, the Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, for permission to use letters from Sinclair to Charlotte Mew, Ella Hepworth Dixon and Ford Madox Ford; Oliver House, Department of Special Collections, Bodleian Library, Oxford, for permission to use letters from Sinclair to Evelyn Sharp and Gilbert Murray; Lucinda Pringle, the Museum of London, for permission to reproduce the photographic material on pages 40 and 41; Ken Robinson, the British Psychoanalytic Society, for permission to use the hitherto unpublished letters between Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones; and Lesley Hall, the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, for drawing my attention to material based on the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology.

My greatest thanks must go to my two supervisors: Dr Diana Collecott for introducing me to May Sinclair and setting me on my way; and, in particular, to Dr Pamela Knights, who saw me through the completion of this thesis with much dedication, encouragement and enthusiasm.

Finally, this is for a place, The Garden House in the Welsh Borders, which captures the essence of May Sinclair's separate, mystical landscapes. Here I found everything.

## Abbreviations and Method of Citation

### Archives

BL	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BPS	British Psychoanalytic Society
NYPL	Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
UP	May Sinclair Papers, Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

### Texts by May Sinclair

The following abbreviations are used within the body of the thesis when citing May Sinclair's major works under consideration. First editions are used where possible. Full publication details for the edition used are given in a footnote on the first occasion of citation. Essays, reviews, unpublished material, and other work by Sinclair are referred to in footnotes. All other sources of references are cited in the footnotes throughout.

C	<u>The Creators: A Comedy</u>
DI	<u>A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions</u>
F	<u>Feminism</u>
HF	<u>The Life and Death of Harriett Fream</u>
I	<u>The Intercessor and Other Stories</u>
MO	<u>Mary Olivier: A Life</u>
TB	<u>The Three Brontës</u>

TH	<u>The Tree of Heaven</u>
TS	<u>The Three Sisters</u>
US	<u>Uncanny Stories</u>

## Introduction

At the present moment there is a reaction against all hushing up and stamping down. The younger generation is in revolt against even such a comparatively mild form of repression as Victorian Puritanism. And the New Psychology is with it. And the psycho-analysts, Freud and Jung and their followers, have been abused like pickpockets, as if they offered us no alternative but license or repression; as if the indestructible libido must either ramp outrageously in the open or burrow beneath us and undermine our sanity; as if Sublimation, the solution that they do offer, were not staring us in the face.<sup>1</sup>

May Sinclair's two Clinical Lectures, published in 1916, consider an array of psychoanalysts. After variously referring to Freud, Jung, Adler, Abraham, and Janet, she puts forward her demand for an 'ultimate psycho-synthesis': 'All religion, all art, all literature, all science are sublimations in various stages of perfection. Civilisation is one vast system of sublimation . . . Sublimation itself is the striving of the Libido towards manifestation in higher and higher forms.'<sup>2</sup> Sinclair emphasises her definition of the use of libido: 'I use this word (so repulsive to the idealist) in Jung's sense of creative energy, in which it is equivalent to the "will to live" of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, the "need" or "want" of Samuel Butler, the "life-force" or "*élan vital*" of Bergson, and, even to the Puritan, void of all offence.'<sup>3</sup> The term she herself most frequently employs, in both her fiction and non-fiction, is 'Life-Force'. In the extract

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<sup>1</sup> May Sinclair, 'Clinical Lecture: Symbolism and Sublimation I,' Medical Press and Circular 153 (9 Aug. 1916): 118-22. 120. It is apparent from an appraisal of Sinclair's lecture that she is translating directly from the original (i.e. untranslated) psychoanalytic texts.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 122 n.5.

above, the key elements to my reading of Sinclair's texts (1910-1923) are found: she is looking for the alternative spaces in which her female protagonists may find psychic freedom, opposed to the repression of their creative energies that 'burrow beneath us'.

Elsewhere, in a rough jotting, she muses upon the various definitions of sublimation:

Sublimate = v. to lift up on high, to raise.

(1) To bring a solid substance by heat into a state, vapour, wh. on cooling returns again to a solid state

(2) To extract by or as by subn.

Sublimation = anything produced by subn. or refining

S. adj. elevated, purified

Subn. = a lifting up, deliverance

= 1 act, heightening, refining, purifying or freeing from baser qualities.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, for Sinclair, to sublimate oneself constitutes an act of transcendence; a movement towards a higher, 'purer' realm in which the self may be freed from 'baser qualities.' In my reading of Sinclair's texts, I observe how Sinclair follows a synthesised form of psychoanalysis informed by her background in Philosophical Idealism<sup>5</sup>: she stresses the importance of self-development in the personal growth of her female characters, while simultaneously reflecting upon the need for self-sacrifice. Sublimation, as understood by Sinclair, is in the Jungian terms of sacrifice and rebirth: 'only through the mystery of

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<sup>4</sup> Sinclair, workbook 43, box 41, UP. From a close analysis of other material in the same workbook it is possible to date this to early 1923.

<sup>5</sup> It is not my intention in this study to trace the influence of Philosophical Idealism in Sinclair's work. Early examinations of Sinclair consider this aspect. See, for example, Theophilus E. M. Boll, Miss May Sinclair: Novelist: A Biographical and Critical Introduction (Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1973); Rebecca Kinnamon, 'May Sinclair's Fiction of the Supernatural,' Ph.D. thesis, Duke U, 1974; and Hrisey D. Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne English Author Ser. 192 (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

self-sacrifice is it possible to be born again.’<sup>6</sup> Implicit in this, then, is the hierarchy of values suggested both in the extract from her Clinical Lecture and in her notes on sublimation given above. For Sinclair, the psychoanalysts’ emphasis upon individual self-realisation was attractive. She dwells upon the ‘conception of the Individual as a being of immense importance, seeing that just those forces within and without him which arrest and retard his individuality are backward forces.’<sup>7</sup>

During her thirty-year literary career May Sinclair was more than a novelist. She was variously involved with: the suffrage movement (1908-c.1912); the founding of the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London (1913-1922); and the Society for Psychological Research (1914-1943). She was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (1916-1941) and became the first female member of the Aristotelian Society (1917-1943). She was a fervent promoter of the Imagist movement, championing her friends H.D., Ezra Pound, and F. S. Flint; and a close observer of Modernist literary techniques, writing commentaries on, for example, Dorothy Richardson, Violet Hunt, and T. S. Eliot. At the age of fifty-one, with the outbreak of the First World War, she departed for the frontline of Belgium. Here her worlds collided: she packed a fat, scarlet copy of Freud’s The Psychopathology of Everyday Life into her Gladstone bag, along with a tobacco tin and a biscuit box.<sup>8</sup>

In the autumn of 1913 Sinclair had embarked on her new adventure: she became a founder member of the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London, one of the very first psychotherapeutic clinics in Britain. It is likely that she met its director, the suffragist

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<sup>6</sup> Sinclair, ‘Clinical Lectures on Symbolism and Sublimation II,’ Medical Press and Circular 153 (16 Aug. 1916): 142-45. 142.

<sup>7</sup> Sinclair, A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions (London: Hutchinson, 1917) 9

<sup>8</sup> See Sinclair, ‘The War of Liberation, “From a Journal (II),” ’ English Review (June 1915): 303-14. 310.

doctor Jessie Margaret Murray, through her feminist affiliations. Although the Clinic was closed under acrimonious circumstances in 1922,<sup>9</sup> I believe that its legacy was inherited by many of the women who came to dominate the field of psychoanalysis in Britain after the First World War. Susan Isaacs (formerly Brierley), Joan Riviere, Ella Freeman Sharpe, Mary Chadwick, Marjorie Brierley, Barbara Low, Sylvia Payne, Nina Searl, and Elizabeth Meakin Herford all received their initial training at the Clinic before becoming members of the Tavistock Square Clinic and the British Psychoanalytical Society (founded by Ernest Jones in 1919). Here they developed their interest in child psychoanalysis and childhood educational development, and the training of other analysts. Moreover, these women were the contemporaries and colleagues of Karen Horney, Anna Freud, and Melanie Klein, all of whom had a powerful impact on the development of British psychoanalysis in the late 1920s and 1930s. Horney challenged the basic tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis; she turned away from its androcentrism and stressed sociocultural influences on female psychology.<sup>10</sup> Klein paid critical attention to the mother-child relationship, emphasising the importance of the pre-Oedipal phase.<sup>11</sup>

Sinclair, too, I argue, was part of this early movement that was to have an impact on the British psychoanalytic scene. Amongst her workbooks and copies of miscellaneous articles published in medical journals are her jottings and highlighted references to the development of sexuality in the adolescent girl. She translates, also, from the German edition of Three Essays on Sexuality, specifically looking at Freud's

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<sup>9</sup> For an account of the dissolution of the Medico-Psychological Clinic following Murray's death, see Theophilus E. M. Boll, 'May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London,' Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 106 (Aug. 1962): 310-26. 319-22; and Suzanne Raitt, May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 138-9.

<sup>10</sup> See Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980, (London: Virago, 1987) 201; and Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, eds., Freud's Women (London: Penguin, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> See my discussion in Chapter 4.

ideas of the early sexual instincts. Sinclair's close friendship with Jessie Murray may have been strengthened by their collaboration on a glossary of the technical terms in the German editions of Freud's works.<sup>12</sup> Although, for Sinclair, the sex drive was only one aspect of the libido, she acknowledges the importance of expressing this desire. As her writing shows, she looks to the ways in which the female may give voice to *all* creative drives since repression and neglect of the life-force leads to neurosis. Furthermore, Sinclair's interest in psychoanalytical material, I argue, can be dated to 1909/1910 when, from a collection of articles in The Alienist and Neurologist, she highlights certain passages that deal specifically with sexuality and the adolescent. Together with her formal treatise on sublimation and psychoanalysis in 'The Way of Sublimation' (1915) and her Clinical Lectures 'Symbolism and Sublimation' (1916), Sinclair's work is, arguably, an early precursor to that of the women analysts referred to above.<sup>13</sup>

As I claim in this study, Sinclair was an early reader of psychoanalysis, but rather than embracing its theories wholeheartedly and unquestioningly, she appropriates and synthesises those that appeal to her own psychology of womanhood. Part of my procedure in reading Sinclair's texts involves an examination of certain psychoanalytic paradigms—characters, concepts, techniques, narratives as well as theories—in order to both highlight her aesthetics, and reveal her similarities and her differences. However, I neither read Sinclair's work in terms of orthodox psychoanalytic codes nor evaluate her

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<sup>12</sup> See Laura Price, letter to Theophilus Boll, 16 Sept. 1962, fo. 530, box 48, UP.

<sup>13</sup> Dean Rapp has examined the publication history of Freud's work and argues that the popularised reception of psychoanalysis by the British lay press began in 1912. However, his theories had already been discussed in the medical journals. It may be possible that Sinclair was aware of these early discussions. In 1898 she was already scouring the medical papers for innovative ideas. The novelist Gwendoline Keats ('Zack') writes to Sinclair: 'Your book [Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson (1898)] is going to be to the point if you have been studying up the medical papers.' Keats, letter to Sinclair, 17 July 1898, fo. 50, box 1, UP. However, at a later date, Sinclair pinpoints 1913/1914 as when she had begun to properly study psychoanalysis. See Sinclair, letter to Reinald Hoops, 1932. Qtd. in Hrisey D. Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne English Author Ser. 192 (Boston: Twayne, 1976) 58. Rapp also explains that 1913 heralded the first English translation of Freud's works with The Interpretation of Dreams (by A. A. Brill), although his other works in the German editions had been available by 1905. See Dean Rapp, 'The Early Discovery of Freud by the British General Educated Public, 1912-1919,' Social History of Medicine 3 (1990): 217-43.

work from the way that such codes may be read. Instead, my approach typically focuses on the eclectic psychoanalytic interpretations Sinclair offers which, I argue, mirror the eclectic and potentially feminist endeavours of the pioneer enterprise of the Medico-Psychological Clinic that Sinclair was actively with during my period of examination.

I turn to the work of early female psychoanalysts, particularly Ella Freeman Sharpe and Melanie Klein, in my treatment of Sinclair's women. An application of their work does not offer so much a revisionist as a contemporaneous account of Sinclair's. These women were influenced by the same cultural milieu as Sinclair due to their direct or indirect association with the Medico-Psychological Clinic. Indeed, as I argue in places (see, in particular, Chapters 4 and 5), Sinclair anticipated a lot of the work that these women undertook particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s, thus suggesting another network of associations not yet studied.

My examination of Sinclair's Modernist works in this thesis is centred on the idea of contextuality. It is not my intention to reappropriate Sinclair's work through a specific revisionist, feminist, or psychoanalytic reading, but to offer an analysis that places her, most centrally, in a dialogue with contemporary literary, psychoanalytical, and cultural influences. Indeed, I frequently turn to Sinclair's own works of non-fiction to provide theoretical frameworks for my study of her novels.

Theophilus Boll was the first to revive interest in Sinclair's work. After establishing the major archive centre for Sinclair's artefacts at the University of Pennsylvania, he published his biography on her in 1973. However, scholarship on May Sinclair over the last thirty years has closely followed trends in feminist and psychoanalytic literary theory. The new feminine realism of writers such as Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Charlotte Mew, and Sinclair has begun to be explored and celebrated. This

has given rise to an expansion of the traditional canon of Modernism. Up to this point, women writers who did not fit the traditional version of high Modernism—whether because of their political concerns, subject matter, or literary inconsistencies—had been forgotten, marginalized as minor writers or, even, unclassified. Sinclair was one of these writers.

In the 1970s, the initial scholarly approach to Sinclair was in the form of revisionary readings. Both Janet Sydney Kaplan and Hrisey Zegger not only offer a consideration of Sinclair's female protagonists from the viewpoint of women's essential difference, but they give material shape to, and revalue her culture and writing.<sup>14</sup> Although both Kaplan and Zegger present early analyses of Sinclair's aesthetic Modernism, it remains within an apolitical enclosure, and the consciousness of Sinclair's female characters is read as a literary strategy.

During the second half of the seventies, feminist critics elaborated a poetics of gender difference; this became known as gynocriticism. For example, Ellen Moers's Literary Women and Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, both published in 1977, faced the issue of women's exclusion from the academy and, by bringing to critical attention undervalued women writers, offer them a history. Gynocriticism gave shape to a tradition of women's literature which led to the discovery of neglected women writers. As a result, the works of many of these hitherto forgotten writers came back into print. For example, Sinclair's Mary Olivier: A Life, The Life and Death of Harriett Frean, and The Three Sisters were reprinted by Virago in the early 1980s.

In the 1980s, criticism on Sinclair looked at her engagement with the material and psychological controls over women; her female protagonists' inner lives and separate culture; and the anxieties surrounding gender at the turn of the twentieth

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<sup>14</sup> See Janet Sydney Kaplan, 'May Sinclair.' Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1975) 47-75; and Hrisey Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne English Author Ser. 192 (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

century as both a social experience and as a mode of representation. For example, Diane Gillespie, in ‘“The Muddle in the Middle”: May Sinclair on Women’, examines the political organisations that Sinclair feared could harm as well as help individual women.<sup>15</sup> Laura Mumford, too, looks at Sinclair’s female protagonists’ positional relation to mass movements such as suffragism and the war. She gives a close reading of Sinclair’s use of the vortex in her treatment both of suffragism and the war in order ‘to contrast false and dangerous attempts at community with the liberating form[s]’.<sup>16</sup>

Criticism on the self-consciously Modern novelist continued to develop. Penny Brown’s exploration of the female novels of self-development considers the personal growth of a female protagonist, which ‘allows for a probing exploration of the responses of the character to their situation and their own aspirations and endeavours’.<sup>17</sup> As Brown writes, Sinclair ‘was preoccupied with the theme of self-development and the subject of the nature and role of women.’<sup>18</sup> Brown’s analysis of the complex relationships that affect the female protagonists in their search for selfhood is taken up in my study. Jane Eldridge Miller looks at Sinclair’s struggle against traditional forms and conventions in her Modernist novels. She argues that Sinclair’s ‘modern content and feminist ideology exerted [pressure] on traditional fictional forms’.<sup>19</sup> Miller contends that Sinclair’s ‘feminist concerns were always tempered by her aesthetic interests, and what she strove for during the Edwardian period was a narrative form and

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<sup>15</sup> See Diane F. Gillespie, ‘“The Muddle in the Middle”: May Sinclair on Women,’ Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature 4 (Fall 1985): 235-51.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Stempel Mumford, ‘May Sinclair’s The Tree of Heaven: The Vortex of Feminism, the Community of War.’ Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation, eds. Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich, and Susan Merrill Squier (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 1989) 168-83. 169.

<sup>17</sup> Penny Brown, The Poison at the Source: The Female Novel of Self-Development in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: St Martin’s P, 1992) 7.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, ‘May Sinclair: The Conquered Will.’ The Poison at the Source 11-49. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Jane Eldridge Miller, ‘New Wine, New Bottles: H. G. Wells and May Sinclair.’ Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel (London: Virago, 1994) 163-202. 164.

style that would allow her to depict the reality of women's lives as truthfully as possible.<sup>20</sup> I examine this contention in more detail throughout my study.

The key focus of feminist literary criticism, developed from the late 1980s, was on the relation between gender identity and language. This challenged the relationships between language, literary forms and women's and men's psyche. The work of the French feminists employed *écriture féminine* to describe a feminine style found in absences, ruptures, and the *jouissances* of Modernist writing. In my study, I refer in places to the work of the French feminists—Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous. Again, my intention is not to provide a revisionist account but to contextualise Sinclair's work. Like the recent scholarship undertaken with respect to Woolf's work, I argue that Sinclair's Modernist texts too may read through a feminine aesthetic. I therefore also use many of the ideas offered by French feminist theory in my examination of the relationship between Sinclair's women, psychoanalysis, and language.

Sarah Law's doctoral thesis (1997) traces the influence of mysticism in the writing of Sinclair, together with other women writers.<sup>21</sup> She shows how this anticipated later feminist critical thought in the drives of *écriture féminine*. This study has been useful in my examination of Sinclair's aesthetics in Chapter 6. Furthermore, I build on this work, looking at ways in which Sinclair's female protagonists may overcome their positions of loss in order to embrace an embodied feminine mysticism and gain psychic strength.

In 2000, half way through my research, the second biography on Sinclair was published. Suzanne Raitt's close analysis, May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian, fully

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<sup>20</sup> Miller, Rebel Women 188.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Law, 'May Sinclair: Mourning the Feminine.' ' "Écriture Spirituelle": Mysticism in the Writing of Evelyn Underhill, May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson,' Ph.D. thesis, QMWC, U of London, 1997. 100-144.

extends Boll's early, effusive account. She admirably utilises a wide range of unpublished artefacts that other scholars have hitherto ignored. However, Raitt considers Sinclair's work trapped in the intermediate ground between Victorianism and Modernism and suggests that Sinclair remained 'caught in the contradictions of her historical moment.'<sup>22</sup> Raitt examines Sinclair's early background in Philosophical Idealism and believes that this impeded her full assimilation into the field of high Modernism. As even her title suggests, Raitt is unable to fully endorse Sinclair's membership as a dominating presence in the field of Modernism with conviction; she frequently resorts to 'ambivalent' to describe her. This is a sad indictment for a writer who wishes to escape the backward forces that tie a woman to her past.

Most of the critics referred to above typically focus on the female protagonists in Mary Olivier: A Life (1919) and The Life and Death of Harriett Frean (1922). However, as I argue in my examination, Sinclair offers an early depiction of a female aesthetic in The Creators (1910), and her interest in female, interiorised narratives is also reflected in The Three Sisters (1914). Moreover, Sinclair's work on the female mystic and the uncanny experience in many of her short stories and novellas, for example, has been, by-and-large, neglected. It is only very recently that scholars have begun to acclaim this area as they note its association with Sinclair's work on the First World War.<sup>23</sup> In addition, I suggest that Sinclair's huge output of non-fiction profoundly engages with her own cultural history and the issues surrounding womanhood at the beginning of the twentieth century. In my study, therefore, I open the gaps in current scholarship.

My method of examination in this study is to look at each of Sinclair's key Modernist texts that deal with a strong female protagonist between 1910 and 1923. A

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<sup>22</sup> Raitt, May Sinclair 3.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Suzanne Raitt, ' "Contagious Ecstasy": May Sinclair's War Journals.' Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate, eds. Women's Fiction and the Great War (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 65-84.

close analysis of each text is attentive to contextual issues—for example, aesthetic, psychological, and political. I argue that Sinclair does in fact fully embrace Modernism: her work reflects the new ideas in aesthetics (Imagism, Vorticism, the contemporary discussions on space-time); the very latest developments in psychoanalysis; and women's radical involvement with politics. As advances were made in all of these fields, constantly evolving into new forms, so too Sinclair's work metamorphoses. An appraisal of her texts in my examination reflects the clear developments in her style and aesthetics. I also offer a critical appraisal in light of her immediate contemporaries, both literary and within the wider cultural-psychological scene. In addition to the theories of the psychoanalysts discussed above, Sinclair was heavily influenced by the network of women surrounding her: these women encouraged, reviewed, and aided each other in their artistic endeavours.<sup>24</sup>

I argue that the very eclectic nature of the influences apparent in her work represents the flux of Modernism. Sinclair, indeed, was always at the cutting-edge of Modernist techniques. The pen-and-ink caricature of Sinclair by Jean de Bosschère in figure 1 gives a graphic illustration of this:

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<sup>24</sup> See examinations by, for example, Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940 (London: Women's P, 1987); Bonnie Kime Scott, introduction, The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1990) 1-18.



Fig. 1. Caricature of May Sinclair by Jean de Bosschère.

Sinclair is depicted as a winged figure, ready to take off and alight onto her next Modernist project. Under her close scrutiny is the head of Man, which she is attempting to read phrenologically. Moreover, penetrating the eye sockets of the skull, she is able to analyse the human soul. The pinned notes that surround her refer to the ideas she developed in her aesthetics: psychology; the unconscious; sublimation; mysticism. Emanating from Sinclair/her work and hovering in the background is the figure of Psyche, holding aloft Cupid's heart in one hand and a hoop of barred thorns in the other. This suggests the divisive nature inherent in the lives of Sinclair's female protagonists.

In Chapter 1, I dwell on the innovative methods of the Medico-Psychological Clinic and the challenges these presented as they inform the crucial context to Sinclair's scene of writing, and bear a direct influence upon the psychology of her female protagonists. As Patricia Waugh argues, a neglected intellectual context for the construction of Modernism has been in the re-examination of the scientific epistemology at the beginning of the twentieth century. 'In attending to Modernist engagements with science,' Waugh writes, 'it may be possible to arrive at some alternative conceptualisations of the relationship between subjectivity and authorship, the epistemological status of artistic texts, and the interpretative role of readers.'<sup>25</sup> The parallel between these fields similarly informs my historicist reading of Sinclair's Modernist texts.

In Chapter 2 I take the starting point for my examination of Sinclair's fiction as 1910 with the publication of The Creators. With its portrayal of female artists in contemporary London, The Creators is therefore a self-reflexive mode for Sinclair, highlighting the forces that hinder or encourage the artistic flame. I discuss Sinclair's

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<sup>25</sup> Patricia Waugh, 'Beyond Mind and Matter: Scientific Epistemologies and Modernist Aesthetics,' Significant Forms: The Rhetoric of Modernism 14 (Apr. 2001): 5-31. 5.

immediate influences—including the suffrage movement, arguing that she inherited many of its ideals—together with her work on the Brontë sisters, her female literary precursors. However, the female artist is a problematic figure for Sinclair and, by offering a number of female writers and a number of locations, she scrutinises the circumstances under which a woman is able to create. Both Nina Lempriere and Jane Holland must struggle against forces that oppose their genius: for Nina, it is her sexual drive and she removes herself to a separate sphere in order to devote herself solely to her artistry; for Jane, it is the maternal instinct and she is split between her desire to create and her wish to remain at the centre of her family.

In The Three Sisters, as I discuss in Chapter 3, Sinclair presents the life of ordinary women. This novel marks a new development in Sinclair's oeuvre: here she fully engages with the *internal* life of her female protagonists. Again, Sinclair scrutinises the pull of sexual instincts and, through the path each of the sisters follows, offers different possibilities and different outcomes. She recognises that women need an outlet for expression of their desires and looks at alternative, subversive ways of expressing the body. While writing this novel, Sinclair became involved with the Medico-Psychological Clinic and had embarked on reading a wide range of psychoanalytic material: the theories of Freud, Jung, Janet, and Havelock Ellis are all reflected in the novel. Alice presents a contemporary case of a woman suffering from a psychosomatic illness as a result of repression. Gwenda looks to alternative means, such as freedom in nature, to find sublimation of her sexual desires. Mary, too, through the *mask* of ideal womanhood, follows a subversive route to achieve the conventional marriage she wishes for. Through the two conflicting views offered in the novel, the traditional and conservative versus the modern and psychoanalytic, Sinclair clearly indicates the importance of the new psychoanalysis.

In Chapter 4 I return to the female protagonist as artist, and consider the paths that must be negotiated in order to achieve freedom in which to create. Of primary importance in Mary Olivier: A Life is the contemplation of bonds of connection that can result in repression. In particular, I focus on this novel's intense exploration of the mother-daughter dynamic which, as I argue, points forward to the work of Melanie Klein. I also look at Sinclair's female aesthetics, and briefly refer to the now well-known work by Woolf on the female psychological sentence, suggesting that linguistically women offer a different vocabulary in which to express their inner lives. As Frances Harrison in The Tree of Heaven observes, this is the unspoken poetism that goes on inside women.

The negative model offered by The Life and Death of Harriett Freat is examined in Chapter 5. Harriett's life provides a commentary upon the damaging and infantilising effect the repressive bonds parents can place on their children. It also refers to the political and social implications of the spinster at the *fin de siècle*, suggesting that such a life is wasted and futile. I show that Harriett Freat offers a damning depiction of depressive femininity—the complete absence of a woman's libidinal resources and her incapacity for creative sublimation.

Possibilities of sublimation lie in other dimensions. Underpinning all the aforementioned novels are the novellas and short stories of a mystical nature that Sinclair was simultaneously writing. In my analysis of the 'new mysticism' in Chapter 6, I look at the disembodied female self, offering the possibility for a woman to exist in more than one state of being. My account takes into consideration contemporary discussions on space, time, and psychic invasion. Inherent in my discussion here is the idea of the non-fixed, fluid, feminine self. In Uncanny Stories, women frequently assume the forms of indefinite 'phantasms', often returning at the end of the stories to

redeem the suffering and split male. Sinclair presents these women with the capabilities of healing and reparation. They are frequently sited in positions of power and are able to enjoy sexual licence. However, these stories are also problematic for, in their subversive nature, they present codes of conduct, behaving, and 'being' not necessarily legitimised in everyday society.

In returning to the extract I quoted at the beginning, my aim in this study is to show how Sinclair fully explores the interior lives of her women and searches for a 'space' (both psychic and physical) that allows for an expression and a validity to their libido—sexual and/or creative. She argues that this may only be achieved through a synthesised form of the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation. 'Sublimation', as Sinclair explains, 'is a turning and passing of desire from a less worthy or less fitting object to fix it on one more worthy and more fitting' (DI 7). Sinclair's women, then, may overcome their divided life by finding psychic freedom through sublimation.

## Chapter 1

### The Medico-Psychological Clinic of London

The Medico-Psychological Clinic of London was one of the first psychotherapeutic enterprises of its kind that was available to the community using psychoanalysis (alongside other psychotherapeutic practices) as a form of treatment in England. In a paper written in 1945, Ernest Jones recalls that although he used psychoanalysis as a form of treatment in his practice in 1905, the Medico-Psychological Clinic was the first institution devoted to utilising psychotherapy and psychoanalytic methods.<sup>1</sup> The draft typescript (with handwritten annotations by May Sinclair and Jessie Murray) for the 1917 Appeal and Prospectus also claims its status as a forerunner in the field:

In this country but little attention has hitherto been given to the psychological treatment and psycho-neuroses . . . In England we have brilliant and expensive specialists in various branches of psycho-therapy, but, until June 1914, with the solitary exception of the Liverpool Psycho-Therapeutic Clinic for Suggestive Treatment, under Dr Albert E. Davis, we had nothing else.<sup>2</sup>

As well as the Liverpool Clinic referred to, the only other contemporary centre in Britain that I can trace using treatment through psychoneurosis and psychotherapy was Craiglockhart Military Hospital, made famous by the work of W. H. R. Rivers. This was initially set up in the 1870s as a hydropathic centre outside Edinburgh and evolved into its psychotherapeutic form of treatment in 1916; that is, *after* the founding of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Jones, 'Reminiscent Notes on the Early History of Psycho-Analysis in English-Speaking Countries,' International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 26 (1945): 8-10. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Draft typescript of 'Special Appeal in Time of War,' fo. 548, box 49, UP.

Medico-Psychological Clinic.<sup>3</sup> A feminist politics can be seen at work here:

Craiglockhart achieved its fame as a result of the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers by an ex-military, male doctor. The Medico-Psychological Clinic, however, was run as a rather more feminist enterprise. Many of its small group of dedicated doctors and staff were women and, until the outbreak of the First World War, its original aim was in the treatment of the *whole* community.

The Medico-Psychological Clinic was officially launched on 5 November 1913, running for the first few months from Murray and Janet Turner's home in Endsleigh Street.<sup>4</sup> Murray was active in the suffrage movement. In 1910, on behalf of the Women's Social and Political Union and in collaboration with the journalist Henry Brailsford, Murray gathered information regarding the violent conduct of the Metropolitan Police towards suffragettes in 1910.<sup>5</sup> This deputation was presented to the Home Office in Spring 1911. The Conciliation Committee found their findings shocking and the publication of their findings generated much discussion in the press.<sup>6</sup>

Murray graduated with a M.B., B.S. (Med.) degree from the College of Medicine, University of Durham, in 1909.<sup>7</sup> Part of the medical course involved an

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<sup>3</sup> See Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 (London: Virago, 1987) 180-1, 197.

<sup>4</sup> In August 1913 the International Congress of Medicine took place in London. Freud's psychoanalysis was discussed in the psychiatric section, with Janet criticising it and Jung defending it. See Henri Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry (New York: Basic Books, 1970) 344.

<sup>5</sup> Jessie Murray and Henry Noel Brailsford, The Treatment of Women's Deputations by the Police. Copy of Evidence Collected by Dr Jessie Murray and Mr H. N. Brailsford, and Forwarded to the Home Office by the Conciliation Committee for Women's Suffrage (London: Woman's P, 1911).

<sup>6</sup> See Times 23 Feb. 1911: 4; 3 Mar. 1911: 10; 14 Mar. 1911: 10; 18 Mar. 1911: 10; and F. M. Leventhal, The Last Dissenter: H. N. Brailsford and His World (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 80.

<sup>7</sup> See the 'Pass List for the Degree of Bachelor of Medicine,' Epiphany Term 1909 and 'Members of the University.' Durham University Calendar 1909-1910 (Michaelmas 1909): 137; 448. In 1895 a 'supplementary charter was granted, enabling the University to grant Degrees in all faculties [including medicine but not theology] . . . to women.' See Durham University Calendar 1908-1909 (Michaelmas 1908): 19.

examination in psychological medicine. Soon after this, she attended Pierre Janet's lectures at the Collège de France, Paris.<sup>8</sup> The subjects Janet discussed at this time included: normal versus morbid emotions; consciousness; hysteria and psychasthenia; psychotherapy; the psychology of tendencies; perception and social tendencies.<sup>9</sup> During her medical career, as well as chairwoman of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, Murray was an active member of both the Society for Psychical Research<sup>10</sup> and the British Psychological Society.<sup>11</sup> She also developed her interest in female sexual instincts. She was among the first members of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, attending its inauguration on 8 July 1914, and gave papers that included 'The Evolution of the Instincts' (21 January 1915).<sup>12</sup> In 1918 she wrote the introduction to Marie Stopes's Married Love. Here she discusses the increasing recognition of the importance of the child's early life:

Eugenists, educationists, physicians, politicians, [and] philanthropists . . . [agree that] the first seven years of life are regarded as the most critical. It is during these years that the foundations of the personality-to-be are laid 'well and truly' or otherwise. It is during these years that the deepest and most ineradicable

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<sup>8</sup> See obituary, Lancet 30 Oct. 1920: 922.

<sup>9</sup> See Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious 343. In her interest in the sexual instincts, Murray retained some of Janet's behaviourist psychology while also moving on to a development and synthesis of the new theories of psychoanalysis.

<sup>10</sup> In 1915 the Journal for the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) reports: 'Six members of the staff of the [Medico-Psychological] Clinic belong to the SPR, and the Chairman of the Board of Management is a member of our Council.' See Journal and Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (Feb. 1915): 25. The Journal had also previously advertised the inauguration of the Clinic and reported on its progress.

<sup>11</sup> She wrote 'The Involuntary Nervous System and the Involuntary Expression of Emotions,' delivered at the Proceedings of the British Psychological Society, 13 May, 1916. See British Journal of Psychology 8 (1916): 394.

<sup>12</sup> Some other members of the Medico-Psychological Clinic followed Murray's lead and also joined this organisation. See Lesley A. Hall, ' "Disinterested Enthusiasm for Sexual Misconduct": The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, 1913-47,' Journal of Contemporary History 30 (1995): 665-86. 667, 668. It can also be noted that William McDougall, a member of the Psychological Staff at the Medico-Psychological Clinic, expanded his influential and popular Introduction to Social Psychology (1908) in 1914 to include a discussion on sexual instincts. In A Defence of Idealism (1917), Sinclair refers to McDougall as 'the best available authority' on General Psychology (DI xvi).

impressions are made in the plastic constitution of the child, arresting or developing this or the other instinctive trend and fixing it, often for life. And it is during these years above all that the parents play the most important role in the inner history of the child's life, not so much by anything they directly teach through verbal exhortations, warnings or commands, as by those subtler influences which are conveyed in gesture, tone, and facial expression.<sup>13</sup>

Sinclair held a similar view, as I show in my study of her treatment of the complex relationship between mother and child in Mary Olivier: A Life and The Life and Death of Harriett Freaton.

Sinclair was involved with the conception and set-up of the Medico-Psychological Clinic before its official launch. She writes to Charlotte Mew in October 1913: 'I shall be most frightfully rushed just at first—helping with the Medico-Psychological Clinic wh. has got itself into being.'<sup>14</sup> On 5 November 1913 she writes again: 'Today . . . is the day of the Inaugural Meeting of the Clinic I'm working for'.<sup>15</sup> Evidence that Sinclair's mind is preoccupied with the set-up and running of the Clinic is given on her 1913 manuscript of The Three Sisters: she sketches an outline of the layout of a room in the Clinic on the verso of her writing paper.<sup>16</sup> A further letter to Mew in March 1914 explains how she is searching for suitable premises for the Clinic.<sup>17</sup> Her

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<sup>13</sup> Jessie Margaret Murray, introduction, Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties, by Marie Stopes (London: Putman, 1918) 2.

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair, letter to Charlotte Mew, 17 Oct. 1913, NYPL.

<sup>15</sup> Sinclair, letter to Mew, 5 Nov. 1913, NYPL.

<sup>16</sup> See fo. 97, box 4, UP.

<sup>17</sup> Sinclair, letter to Mew, 8 Mar. 1914, NYPL.

lawyer, Robert Singleton Garnett, is astonished by her request for £500 in order to place a deposit on the premises she found in July 1914 at 30 Brunswick Square.<sup>18</sup>

It is apparent that Sinclair had a very active role as a member of the Board of Management. Documentation shows that she wrote, with Murray's aid, all of the Clinic's publications during its lifespan. Sinclair's precursory draft for the first official brochure reflects her awareness of the new developments within the psychological field. Given below is the first surviving fragment that implicates Sinclair with the setting up of the Medico-Psychological Clinic:

A meeting was called on \_\_\_<sup>th</sup> of 1913 to discuss the establishment of a Med. Psy. Clinic in London in connection with u.c.

For the history and results of Psychotherapy it is only necessary to refer to the work of \_\_\_ J. C. [Jean-Martin Charcot of the Salpêtrière?], of Prof. Freud, Breuer, Jung and Adler in Austria and Germany, of Professors Ernest Jones and ? [Brill?] in Canada and America.

That is to say all these countries have been before us in the line of Med. Psy. Practice and research theory, it is only within the last \_\_\_ years that Psy. has freed itself from its associations belonging to metaphysics and theology and became allied to physiology, an experimental science. There can be no doubt that it has a great destiny before it. Only within still more recent years that it has become associated to a science and with the practice of Medicine.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See 'The Medico-Psychological Clinic Report' (1918): 1-8. 2. Fo. 548, box 49, UP; and Robert Singleton Garnett, letter to Sinclair, 27 Jan. 1914, fo. 29, box 1, UP. Boll notes that once in full operation at its new premises, the Clinic was commonly referred to as the Brunswick Square Clinic. See Boll, 'May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London,' Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 106 (Aug. 1962): 310-26. 313.

<sup>19</sup> Fo. 548, box 49, UP. On the reverse of this rough draft is a significant pencilled note relating to the Clinic: 'It is difficult to overestimate the value of this alliance.'

Britain. Much of the content of the Jones/Freud letters reflects upon the British psychological scene in its naissance. Although the Clinic drew upon the resources of many of the foremost practitioners of the burgeoning branch of psychology, serious attempts were made to curtail the 'pioneer venture' of the Clinic.<sup>22</sup> I will argue that this stems from its eclectic psychotherapeutic nature (as opposed to a rigid, Freudian psychoanalytic practice) and because it was set up and ran under the aegis of a large group of women. Many of these were to become prominent members of the Tavistock Square Clinic and the British Psychoanalytical Society.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 2, below, is an article reproduced from the Times, 6 November 1913:

LORD SANDWICH presided yesterday at a meeting at University College held to mark the opening of a medico-psychological clinic in London for the treatment of diseases by means of psycho-therapy.

LORD SANDWICH said that the mind had an immense power over the body. He did not pretend to medical or surgical science, but he had had great experience in healing. After the South African war he had some 60 wounded officers at his country home, and there was never a doctor or nurse in the house. He was both to the wounded men, and he was gratified at the success obtained. There were few serious maladies he had treated without success. He thought he might say he had never failed to relieve people in agonies of pain. He had attended people in palaces, in cottages, in hospitals, and in homes, and his patients had included a Hindu monk in his monastery, a Mahomedan in his mosque, and a Hindu princess who travelled 600 miles to see him. There were people who dubbed him a lunatic, an impostor, and possibly a liar, but that was a matter of indifference to him, as he knew pain had been alleviated and the sick healed. He had been asked to explain his power, but he had nothing to explain; he only knew what happened. If he was possessed of that power there must be many others possessed of lesser powers of healing.

DR. CONSTANCE LONG, in an appeal for financial support for the clinic, said that their patients were those suffering from depression, over-emotionalism, a morbid attention to bodily ailments, fear of all sorts, insomnia, and the drug habit. They would practise by suggestion, even by hypnotic suggestion, and in states of induced sleep, and by re-education. The clinic was supplementary to orthodox medicine, and not in opposition to it.

Fig. 2. 'Lord Sandwich's Experience in Healing,' Times, 6 Nov. 1913: 4.

<sup>22</sup> Each of the Medico-Psychological Clinic's brochures and other related documentation emphasises the 'pioneer' nature of the enterprise.

<sup>23</sup> 'The Medico-Psychological Clinic Report,' (1918) 1, fo. 548, box 49, UP. Elaine Showalter briefly alludes to the feminist enterprise of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, but her version is only half told as she is not aware of the other, crucial archival documents that I refer to here. See Showalter, The Female Malady 197.

At the end of 1913, Sinclair's friend Ella Hepworth Dixon, the suffragist campaigner and writer, wished to write a piece publicising and supporting the newly fledged Medico-Psychological Clinic. However, Sinclair's reply reflects the beginning of the turbulent and marginalized history of the Clinic:

It's most awfully good of you to think of writing about our Clinic—but we aren't allowed to have anything written about it that has not appeared in in [sic] the medical journals first. Where this has happened owing to the too great kindness of our friends or the press, or to the sheer bungling of our staff, it has got us into the most awful trouble with the authorities, and we can't afford it at this crisis while we're still suffering from Lord Sandwich's speech. We're coming out of it all right—all the better and stronger, in fact, but we simply can't do anything 'unprofessional.' Thanks, no end, all the same.

Sorry I missed you at the Sidney Lows. I was kept at Dr. Head's, explaining the situation to him.<sup>20</sup>

This letter hints at the scandal that may have affected the future of psychotherapy in Britain in the early twentieth century. Although Theophilus Boll, Sinclair's first biographer, has written on the founding of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, based on his discovery of the Clinic's first proof prospectus, appeal, and report, he was unaware of both the Clinic's wider implications within the practice of psychotherapy and a more direct association with Sigmund Freud.<sup>21</sup> To date, neither critics on Sinclair nor medical historians have uncovered the cache of letters between Ernest Jones and Freud discussing the Clinic, therefore failing to realise the significance of evidence found in a cross-section of archives, relating to both the Clinic and the history of psychoanalysis in

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<sup>20</sup> Sinclair, letter to Ella Hepworth Dixon, 15 Dec. 1913, NYPL.

<sup>21</sup> See Boll, 'May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic'; and letters between Ernest Jones and Sigmund Freud (see Appendix A).

Lord Sandwich's speech, referred to in Sinclair's letter to Dixon, created a 'crisis' for the Medico-Psychological Clinic. He presented its methods of treatment as if they were aligned with occult practices, rather than by the new psychoanalytic method of 'suggestion'.<sup>24</sup> It is apparent that Sinclair, as a member of the Clinic's Board of Management, visited Dr Head in order to explain the real objectives of the Clinic and make good a difficult situation.<sup>25</sup> The response created by Sandwich's speech created a crisis, I will argue, not just for the continuation of the Clinic but for the form of psychotherapeutic treatment practiced by its staff. Jessie Margaret Murray, Hector Munro, John Spencer, and Constance Long collectively published a letter that simultaneously appeared in the British Medical Journal and the Lancet on 15 November 1913, disclaiming all association of the new Clinic with occult healing:

It has been impossible to ignore the press notices of the inaugural meeting of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. It is distressing to the Committee to find that a great deal of misunderstanding has arisen, and we feel bound in justice to ourselves, to the pioneers of psychotherapy, and to the supporters of our movement to dissociate ourselves entirely and absolutely from the occult powers that Lord Sandwich claimed for himself. Lord Sandwich has expressed his sincere regret to the Committee for the misunderstanding he has caused, and this terminates his association with the Clinic and with the Committee.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lord Sandwich was an early patron and chairman of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. His name has been removed from the List of Patrons in the first 'proof prospectus'. See fo. 548, box 49, UP. This article corresponds to Ernest Jones's account of the negative press the Clinic gained in his letter detailing the history of the Clinic. See Jones, letter to friends, 2 Nov. 1920, CFC/F05/08, BPS. Given in Appendix A.

<sup>25</sup> It is most likely that 'Dr Head' is Dr Henry Head.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to the Editor. Lancet, 15 Nov. 1913: 1432. See also Letter to the Editor. British Medical Journal 15 Nov. 1913: 1312. The latter two signatories of John Spencer and Constance Long do not appear in any lists of staff members at the Medico-Psychological Clinic, suggesting that they subsequently withdrew their association with the Clinic. On 20 Dec. 1913 an additional letter appeared in the Lancet in support of the Clinic, signed by Charles Spearman, Professor of Philosophy of the Mind at University College

The signatories acknowledge the controversial nature of the new psychotherapeutic techniques the Clinic hoped to offer. Furthermore, they make a plea to the medical profession to:

appreciate to the full the difficulties and delicacy of the work we have in hand, the dangers to be avoided and prejudices to be overcome, and we trust that it will join with us in aiding a work which must of necessity be the object of adverse criticism and unavoidable misconception in its early stages.<sup>27</sup>

Two relevant and interesting conclusions can be made from this letter. Firstly, the novel treatment programme offered by the Clinic was raising considerable interest, critical or otherwise, within both the medical and the lay press. Secondly, the founders of the Clinic were determined to be taken seriously and realised that any association with quackery would be damaging and undermining. As I discuss in Chapter 6, Sinclair too was keen to distance herself from areas of ‘faith-healing, palmistry, clairvoyance, clair-audience, automatism, mediumship, and the rest’, believing them to be associated with ‘fraud and humbug and silliness’, and with persons ‘so disgraceful, so discredited, so absurd’.<sup>28</sup> I therefore surmise, from this evidence, that if Dr Head was to be part of the Clinic, he withdrew his interest as a result of the negative publicity.<sup>29</sup>

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London and the Clinic’s Psychological Director. See the proof prospectus of the Medico-Psychological Clinic for list of staff, fo. 548, box 49, UP [1914?].

<sup>27</sup> Letter to the Editor. *Lancet*, 15 Nov. 1913: 1432.

<sup>28</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions* (London: Hutchinson, 1917) 263.

<sup>29</sup> It can be added that Dr Henry Head was one of the doctors Leonard Woolf consulted in search for treatment for Virginia Woolf. Woolf lived at 38, Brunswick Square from November 1911 until her marriage to Leonard six months later but returned frequently to visit her brother Stephen, a future psychoanalyst, who kept his rooms on. It would be remarkable if she was unaware of the new psychotherapeutic enterprise taking place almost next door. Possibly, Leonard Woolf was in fact well informed about the unorthodox and controversial psychotherapy practised at Number 30, since the ‘crisis’ Sinclair alludes to was publicised in the newspapers. As Hermione Lee and others note, Leonard remained in control of Virginia’s treatment and it is arguable that he would not have wished to subject Virginia to a practice that was in its experimental, unrecognised stage. During 1913-15, when the Clinic was in full swing, Virginia and Leonard Woolf consulted a large number of doctors for Virginia’s mental illness, including Henry Head, George Savage, Maurice Craig, Maurice Wright, and T. B. Hyslop. With

The proof prospectus is the first of three documents that now remains in existence for the Clinic, and can be dated to 1914. It is amended in Sinclair's handwriting and signed by Murray's initials. The Clinic's initial objectives were threefold:

I.—The treatment by medical and psychological means of functional nervous diseases and of functional disorders accompanying organic diseases.

II.—The advancement of this branch of Medical Science.

III.—The extension in the community of a knowledge of the laws of Mental Hygiene.<sup>30</sup>

It promised 'to provide at one convenient centre several of the different forms of treatment, both medical and psychological, that have proved useful in the large and heterogeneous group of disorders alluded to above, and to do this at terms which place them within the reach of those unable to afford the fees usually charged for private treatment.'<sup>31</sup>

From its conception, the Medico-Psychological Clinic was interested in innovative forms of psychotherapy. Its form of treatment was divided into six departments: medicine; psychology; psychotherapy; physical exercise; electric; and education. Under the title 'Psycho-therapeutic', the following brief description is offered:

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the possible exception of Head, Lee notes that the doctors Leonard took his wife to see were conservative and authoritarian. See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto, 1996) 182-3, 305, 329-30. It is wrong to assume that the Bloomsbury Group were responsible for 'discovering Freud' and disseminating his theories to the general public. Although, of course, he had become a popularised and topical form of discussion by the Bloomsbury Group in the 1920s, earlier credit for the assimilation of his theories in literature belong to others. I would put forward Sinclair's name as a frontrunner in this group.

<sup>30</sup> Proof prospectus for the Medico-Psychological Clinic, [1914], n.p., fo. 548, box 49, UP.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Patients here receive the particular forms of mental treatment which appear best adapted to their individual needs: e.g., varying degrees and forms of psychological analysis and re-synthesis, or suggestion, &c.<sup>32</sup>

Dr Hector Munro was Head of the Psycho-Therapeutic Department, and offered hypnosis as one method of treatment.<sup>33</sup>

The Clinic was re-established in Brunswick Square in July 1914. When the First World War broke out the following month, Munro immediately volunteered to go to the front as Commandant of an ambulance corps, and Sinclair joined him as a stretcher-bearer, secretary, and war correspondent. Yet again she put forward a large amount of personal funds to support her presence and I argue, as have others done (for example, Raitt), that she paid her way to the front-line. She was sent back to Britain after only two and a half weeks.<sup>34</sup>

Just as the suffragist movement put aside their political cause in order to support Britain during the war, the Clinic too radically rethought its remit with the outbreak of war: it restructured its treatment programme and, in particular, altered its original

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<sup>32</sup> Proof prospectus.

<sup>33</sup> The popularist attitude towards hypnosis as belonging to a borderland between a science and an occult art may be seen in Dorothy Scarborough's analysis. She writes:

Hypnotism enters largely into the fiction of modern times. Hypnotism may or may not be considered as supernatural, yet it borders so closely on to the realm of the uncanny, and is so related to science of to-day as well as to the sorcery of the past, that it should be considered in this connection for it carries on the traditions of the supernatural . . . It is only in more recent times that it has been rehabilitated in the public mind and thought as a science which may be used for helpful ends.

Scarborough, The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (New York: Knickerbocker, 1917) 245. Dr Anderson's attitude to hypnosis in Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier offers another contemporary view: ' "Oh, hypnotism's a silly trick. It releases the memory of a dissociated personality which can't be related . . . to the waking personality. I'll do it by talking to him. Getting him to tell his dreams." ' West, The Return of the Soldier (London: Daily Express Fiction Library, 1918) 166.

<sup>34</sup> Sinclair's novel The Romantic offers a portrayal of a young woman sent to the battlefields of Belgium with an ambulance corps. They join forces with another corps ran by Dr Donald McClane, a 'great psychologist' and 'psychotherapist' who could read people's souls. See Sinclair, The Romantic (New York: Macmillan, 1920) 88, 127.

premise regarding those who were to receive treatment. The retrospective report of the Clinic written in 1918 explains:

On the outbreak of War, the withdrawal of many promised subscriptions gave the Board serious cause to consider the alternative of closing down the Institution or transforming it to meet the more urgent requirements of a community at War. In consideration of the fact than modern warfare brings about an almost striking increase in nervous disorders, it was decided that by continuing its unique work, the Clinic would make its most effective contribution to the common cause.<sup>35</sup>

The 'Special Appeal in Time of War' (1917) refers to the eclectic array of European psychotherapeutic practices that the Clinic was now employing (Janet, Morton Prince, Freud, Jung, Déjerine and Dubois are all mentioned). In addition, as the 1918 Report explains, the remit of the Clinic, 'urged by a member of the Board' (Charles Myers?), was enlarged to 'meet the needs of ex-service men discharged from the Army on account of various nervous and mental disabilities, either directly due to War conditions ("War Shock") or aggravated by them.'<sup>36</sup>

Charles Myers, brother of Frederic, assisted on a voluntary basis at the Clinic from time to time during the war years.<sup>37</sup> He also worked at a field hospital in France and witnessed the psychological disorders of the soldiers, coining the term 'shell shock.' Showalter describes how facilities to treat these casualties were meagre, and that 'a group of country lunatic asylums, private mental institutions, and disused spas were taken over and designated as war hospitals for mental diseases and war neuroses. . . . By 1918 there were over twenty army hospitals for shell-shock casualties in the United

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<sup>35</sup> 'Report' (1918) 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Myers' name appears on the list of psychological staff in the 'Special Appeal in Time of War.'

Kingdom.’<sup>38</sup> It is unclear whether the Medico-Psychological Clinic is one of these; however, its involvement in the treatment of soldiers did much to promote the efficacy of psychotherapeutic techniques. The Clinic acquired additional premises in Brunswick Square with the sole purpose of providing free residential treatment for discharged soldiers. These premises were ‘excellently adapted to the requirements of war-shock cases.’<sup>39</sup> The 1918 report highlights that these cases were often in an advanced form, and many of the soldiers had been turned away from other institutions due to the severity of their illnesses. The Medical Officers of the Clinic felt ‘that in accepting cases which came to the Clinic as a last resort, they were acting more in accordance with the aims of the Institution, one of which is, wherever possible, to give the nervous sufferer a “Last Chance” when he is on the point of despair after the failure of other forms of treatment.’<sup>40</sup> As has been described in other accounts, the acceptance of psychotherapy and psychoanalytic practices gained a larger and more popularized following after the war; the male demand on such a large scale validated and gave an orthodoxy to such practices.<sup>41</sup>

The Clinic developed in other ways during the war years. In July 1915, a school was set up to train new staff in psychoanalytical practices. This was the ‘Society for the Study of Orthopsychics’ (SSO) and ran under separate management from the Clinic.<sup>42</sup>

The 1918 report explains the need for this training school:

In addition to medical or electrical treatment the majority of the patients required a course of psychological re-education. Many of the nervous conditions treated

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<sup>38</sup> Showalter, The Female Malady 168-9.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Report’ (1918) 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Showalter, The Female Malady 189-190.

<sup>42</sup> Boll observes that Sinclair coined the term ‘orthopsychics.’ See Boll, ‘May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic’ 316.

were found to be caused to a large extent by faulty emotional attitudes towards problems of their existence, accompanied, in many cases, by a fatal ignorance of the laws which govern human emotions and behaviour.<sup>43</sup>

The report continues to explain that the SSO applied psychology and sociology to the areas of 'work and recreation . . . delinquency, prostitution and other manifestations of social mal-adaptation.'<sup>44</sup> It aimed to treat these groups by providing a 'sufficient variety of satisfactory outlets for patients' resuscitated energies, or . . . to encourage by suitable means the liberation of energies locked up in morbid inner pre-occupations.' The 'psychological expert' would therefore release these repressed energies by 'handicraft, the plastic arts, music, recitation, dancing, games, gardening.' The report adds: 'This branch of the work . . . might . . . be called occupation-therapy.'<sup>45</sup> It can be seen that this is the forerunner to the form practised today.

Neither in his biography of Freud nor in his own autobiography does Ernest Jones make any allusion to the existence of the Medico-Psychological Clinic.<sup>46</sup> It is safe to assume that Jones ignored its existence because in 1913 he was setting up his own society, the London Psycho-Analytic Society, which was run along the lines of strictly Freudian psychoanalysis. The Medico-Psychological Clinic, as I have highlighted, was far more eclectic in its outlook and took on the training of lay analysts, something of which Jones adamantly disapproved (see Appendix A). Evidence for Jones's censorship of the Clinic is found in the archives of the British Psychoanalytic Society. In 1920 a series of letters between Jones and Freud directly refer to the

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<sup>43</sup> 'Report' (1918) 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>46</sup> See Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* (London: Hogarth, 1957); and Jones, *Free Associations: Memories of a Psycho-Analyst* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

Medico-Psychological Clinic (as the Brunswick Square Clinic).<sup>47</sup> These letters have not been published in any source and have not been discovered and reviewed in association with the psychoanalytic scene in Britain in the early twentieth century, let alone with Sinclair and her involvement. They bear witness to the constant struggle the founders of the Clinic were under to gain acceptance and credibility. Jones's tone in each letter is demeaning and censorious. After discussing the 'outrageous' and alienating' behaviour of Dr Elizabeth Meakin Herford, an early member of staff at the Medico-Psychological Clinic, Jones criticises the training practices at the Clinic's sister association, the SSO. He writes to Freud: 'I might remark on the difficulty caused in London . . . by analysts being analysed abroad for a few weeks or a couple of months and then on their return unloading their resistances on their colleagues.'<sup>48</sup> He suggests that the training practices followed by the SSO, may be 'short', 'imperfect' and therefore 'incomplete'.<sup>49</sup> However, a small fragment written by Sinclair shows that the Board of Directors of the Medico-Psychological Clinic were aware of possible criticism of the training undertaken by new analysts but had taken adequate precautions:

In their training [they] . . . will go hand in hand with each other every step of the way, each will throw light on the other's movements above all, each will check the results, correct, errors and exaggeration of the other.

. . . It is only by strict adherence to the lines of observation and analysis by an utter absence of personal prejudice and the prepossessions that the practice of psychiatry can be made in any way safe.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, letter to friends [includes Freud], 2 Nov. 1920, CFC/F05/08, BPS. See Appendix A.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Workbook 34, box 40, UP.

Jones continues with an inaccurate history of the Clinic, emphasising in its founding the energy of Dr Hector Munro and belittling the input of Dr Jessie Murray: 'M was only there for a few months and has had nothing to do with it since the outbreak of the war.'<sup>51</sup> In writing that Murray played a marginal role in the running of the Clinic Jones is disingenuous. From the Clinic's artefacts (Prospectus, Appeal and Report) and other documentation in Sinclair's archives, it is apparent that Murray was the life force behind the Clinic. Laura Price, secretary and a student at the School of Orthopsychics from 1919 to 1922, writes: 'Its originator and the prime mover in its foundation was Dr Jessie Murray.'<sup>52</sup> She continues:

[In 1918] the physicians on the Clinic Staff, in addition to Dr Jessie Murray, were Doctors James Glover, E. B. M. Herford, J. Stewart Mackintosh and Hector Munro, all of whose services were gratuitous. Of these physicians the main bulk of the work fell on Dr Jessie Murray and Dr James Glover. . . . By the autumn of 1919 Dr Jessie Murray had . . . contracted the illness which eventually proved fatal and was no longer able to do any more active work.<sup>53</sup>

Price adds in a further letter to Boll: 'When the news of her [Dr Murray's] death came it was obvious to me that she had been the leading spirit in the foundation and work of the Clinic . . . and that everyone at the Clinic at that time felt that the heart of the Clinic had stopped.'<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Jones criticises the Clinic, arguing that it has a 'bad repute in the medical profession'. All the therapists are lay, 'mostly women, and often badly neurotic women.' Jones concludes his letter by calling the Clinic 'unprofessional' and harbours

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<sup>51</sup> Jones, letter to friends [includes Freud], 2 Nov. 1920.

<sup>52</sup> Laura Price, letter to Theophilus Boll, 23 Oct. 1959, fo. 530, box 48, UP.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the 'secret hope' that some day it will 'collapse' so that it may be 'convert[ed] into a *proper* place'.<sup>55</sup> Freud and Rank's reply is in cautious, placatory terms suggesting that a form of healing should be made in the rifts which emerged at this time in the practice of psychoanalysis in Britain (and remain to this day). The letter suggests the possibility of reunification, and promises that the Professor (Freud) will look into the situation if he comes to England.<sup>56</sup>

In one of his letters, Jones refers to the Sixth International Psychoanalytical Congress, held 8-11 September 1920, at The Hague. Both Elizabeth Meakin Herford and James Glover attended the Congress, which led to their meeting with Karl Abraham and their subsequent training with him in Berlin.<sup>57</sup> After his Freudian analysis with Abraham, Glover returned to London as 'a total convert to psychoanalysis. He firmly believed that only psychoanalytic treatment, on proper Freudian lines, should be applied to all patients accepted by the Clinic, and that the eclectic practice which Dr Jessie Murray had established should be abandoned.'<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Dr Glover proposed that the psychotherapeutic part of the Clinic and the students enrolled in the SSO should affiliate with the British Psychoanalytical Society, founded in 1919 by Ernest Jones and eleven others as a successor to the London Psycho-Analytical Society.

Elaine Showalter is therefore right to suggest that the aims and practices of the Medico-Psychological Clinic have become marginalized by history. Furthermore, as my additional documentation shows, there was a very real, deliberate attempt by the orthodox, male medical profession to prevent this pioneering Clinic from development.

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<sup>55</sup> Jones, letter to friends [includes Freud], 2 Nov. 1920, CFC/F05/08, BPS; italics added.

<sup>56</sup> Freud and Rank, letter to friends, 18 Nov. 1920, CFC/F05/13, BPS. In German. Trans. Oliver Vogt.

<sup>57</sup> During the period under discussion, a number of the staff of the Medico-Psychological Clinic undertook analysis on the Continent. For example, Ella Freeman Sharpe received analysis from Hanns Sachs in Berlin.

<sup>58</sup> Boll, 'May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic' 320.

I argue here that Jones seems to fear loss of control when under direct competition from the more liberal, eclectic practices of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. This directly contrasted with the rigid, orthodox practices of the London Psycho-Analytic Society, run under his directorship.

Instances of men's fear of leakage occur in Sinclair's fiction. In Chapter 3 I trace the male anxiety of loss of control, as expressed by Mr Cartaret in The Three Sisters, in the face of unleashed female sexuality. In 'The Flaw in the Crystal', Harding Powell is terrified of the loss of self as his psychic boundaries dissolve. He attempts to regain control by invading Agatha Verrall's personality, and saps her of her creative energy. Similarly, in The Creators, as I discuss in the following chapter, women carry out their creative endeavours under strict opposition by patriarchal society. The forces that inhibit or encourage artistic development are examined in depth throughout my examination of Sinclair's Modernist texts; I argue that they are also evident in Sinclair's own pioneering enterprises, both fictional and non-fictional.

## Chapter 2

### 'Serving a Double and Divided Flame': The Creators and the Female Artist

#### I. Introduction: 'The Spiritual Certainty of Women'

In 1908 May Sinclair wrote in the suffragette newspaper Votes for Women:

The coming generation will, I believe, witness a finer art, a more splendid literature than has been seen since the Elizabethan Age. . . . Art to-day is dying of the materialism of the nineteenth century, unnerved by that long period of spiritual torture, of paralysing doubt. It is dying for want of a religion, of a spiritual certainty. . . . And as Art . . . is of all things the most dependent on spiritual certainties, its future lies . . . in the hands of the women. . . . The Twentieth Century will be the age of spiritual certainty. . . . And this thing . . . *this spiritual certainty will, I believe, come through the coming revolution, by the release of long captive forces, by the breathing in among us of the Spirit of Life, the genius of enfranchised womanhood.*<sup>1</sup>

Sinclair's article is written in the language of hope and vision. She looks to a revivification of art and literature through the 'genius of enfranchised womanhood', underlining her conviction and exhilaration in the power of the 'spiritual certainty of women'. Sinclair urges women to form the spiritual avant-garde, to re-energise and provide a new moral leadership in the creation of literature. These female artists will

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<sup>1</sup> May Sinclair, 'How It Strikes a Mere Novelist,' Votes for Women, 24 Dec. 1908: 211; italics added. Votes for Women was the official newspaper for the Women's Suffrage and Political Union. In a letter to Evelyn Sharp (writer and member of the Women's Suffrage and Political Union), whom she was introduced to in May 1906, Sinclair refers to the financial contribution she made 'to the fund' and reflects on the article referred to above that she was in the process of writing: 'It is also a forecast of the choices for Art and Literature "when we get the vote."' See Sinclair, letter to Sharp, 14 Dec. 1908, MS Eng. lett. d. 277, fos. 67r-68v, BL. Many of the views that Sinclair expresses in her article were later taken up by Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own: 'For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been.' Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929. London: Hogarth, 1956) 126.

overthrow the shackles and chains that hold them captives to the patriarchally-imposed code of silence, giving new life to the 'bones', 'death and corruption' of the contemporary state of 'transitional' art.<sup>2</sup> In her article, Sinclair uses her well-known and respected public voice to speak up for women's freedom of expression. Here merge her political, psychological, sexual, and aesthetic arguments. These arguments will also mark her Modernist texts that question the place of the female artist at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

I begin my examination of May Sinclair's texts with The Creators, published in 1910. I suggest, pre-empting Virginia Woolf, that around 1910 a new 'Spirit of Life' infuses Sinclair's own work, heralding a pivotal point in the development of Sinclair's oeuvre.<sup>4</sup> This, I argue, arises from the new enterprises she was involved in and the new politics that influenced her. Her writing began to focus more overtly on the new area that made her place in Modernism: the psychological realism of her female protagonists. It also marks the time when she first began to formulate her theory of aesthetics, looking specifically at creativity and the woman writer, and the importance of sublimation. Sinclair's involvement with the suffrage movement, her prolonged examination of the

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<sup>2</sup> Sinclair, 'How It Strikes a Mere Novelist' 211.

<sup>3</sup> Scholarship in the field of *fin de siècle* literature has closely examined the ideologies involved in the professional woman writer making her own living. Women began to seriously make a career out of novel writing in the 1890s with the rise of the New Woman fiction. See, for example, Lyn Pykett, 'Writing Women: Writing Woman.' The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing (London: Routledge, 1992) 177-91; Lyn Pykett, 'Writing and Gender at the Turn of the Century.' Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century (London: Edward Arnold, 1995) 54-76; Arlene Young, 'Bachelor Girls and Working Women.' Culture, Class, and Gender in the Victorian Novel (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) 119-56; and Ann Heilmann, 'The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Writer.' New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 155-93.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Waugh takes as her starting point Virginia Woolf's observation '[i]n or about December, 1910, human character changed' to examine some of the intellectual influences on Modernism at this time. See Waugh, 'Beyond Mind and Matter: Scientific Epistemologies and Modernist Aesthetics,' Significant Forms: The Rhetoric of Modernism 14 (Apr. 2001): 5-31. 8. See also Lyn Pykett, 'Rethinking Modernism.' Engendering Fictions 6-13.

Brontës' works, and her conscious considerations of what it means to be a female writer—all of which fuse in the writing of her own novel on the very subject—are key facets to Sinclair's subsequent development as an artist and the production of her own theory of female creativity.

As shown here, Sinclair's aesthetics and her political beliefs are closely entwined. By 1908 she had formally joined both the Women's Freedom League and the Women Writers' Suffrage League (WWSL), and began to write for a variety of suffrage newspapers,<sup>5</sup> thereby announcing her political and feminist affiliations.<sup>6</sup> In October 1912 she became one of the vice-presidents of the WWSL.<sup>7</sup> Sowon Park describes the WWSL, formed in 1908, as the first professional organization of women writers, attracting some of the most distinguished writers of the day.<sup>8</sup> In *Way Stations* (1913), a collection of speeches and articles dealing with women's suffrage, Elizabeth Robins, the WWSL's first president, explains the WWSL's objective: to obtain 'the Parliamentary Franchise for women on the same terms as it is, or may be, granted to men.'<sup>9</sup> The WWSL's founder, Cicely Hamilton, wished to find a more effective way of bringing the suffragist campaign into the public sphere in order to 'raise the public's consciousness

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<sup>5</sup> In 'Message,' Sinclair fully endorses the aims of the suffragettes and gives them her 'whole-hearted sympathy'. See *Votes for Women*, 1 Mar. 1908: 1. In addition to writing for *Votes for Women*, Sinclair's name was amongst the signatories to the 'Writers' Memorial' sent to Herbert Asquith urging the claims of a Women's Suffrage Bill which was being put forward at the time. See *Common Cause*, 23 June 1910: 168. Sinclair also wrote letters in support of the suffrage movement to the editor of the *Times*, 4 Apr. 1912: 7 and 19 June: 14. An unpublished typescript, clearly written for a suffrage paper, expresses her indignation at the government's plan to prevent married women from taking up paid employment. See 'Women's Suffrage,' [1913] ts., fo. 452, box 24, UP. (When this article was written, in the autumn of 1913, Sinclair had embarked on her new adventure, the founding of the Medico-Psychological Clinic.)

<sup>6</sup> See Theophilus E. M. Boll, *Miss May Sinclair: Novelist: A Biographical and Critical Introduction* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1973) 88; and Suzanne Raitt, *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 110.

<sup>7</sup> Boll, *Miss May Sinclair* 96.

<sup>8</sup> Sowon S. Park, 'The First Professional: The Woman Writers' Suffrage League,' *Modern Language Quarterly* 52 (June 1997): 185–200. Other prominent members included Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Marie Belloc Lowndes, Margaret Woods, George Paston, Alice Meynell, and Violet Hunt. See Park, at 189.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Robins, *Way Stations* (London: Hodder, 1913) 112.

of political gender inequality'.<sup>10</sup> The WWSL's prospectus explains its methods of action:

Its methods are the methods proper to writers—the use of the pen. It is entirely independent of any other suffrage society; at the same time it was formed with the intention of assisting every other suffrage society by the methods proper to writers. The qualification for membership is the publication or production of a book, article, story, poem, or play, for which the author has received payment, and a subscription of 2s 6d to be paid annually. . . . Women writers are urged to join the League. A body of writers working for a common object cannot fail to influence public opinion.<sup>11</sup>

League members were expected to bombard newspapers with letters, contribute to suffrage periodicals, write stories, plays and essays dramatising the demand for the vote in order to 'ensure ventilation of the subject in such ways as are open to them'.<sup>12</sup> Park explains that these methods 'harness[ed] literary activity to political and social change', heightening awareness of 'androcentrism' within the public domain, and thus influencing current opinion.<sup>13</sup> This primary objective appealed to Sinclair and presented a challenge that she took up with vigour. For example, as a refutation to Sir Almroth Wright, Sinclair wrote her political pamphlet Feminism, together with a letter to the Times, in a mere three days after Wright's letter appeared in the Times. She criticises his use of the 'ancient *argumentum ad hominem*' and his reference to women as 'a whole class, a whole sex, . . . [a] generalization'. Her argument develops as she takes

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<sup>10</sup> Park, 'The First Professional' 187.

<sup>11</sup> In Robins, Way Stations 112-13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>13</sup> Park, 'The First Professional' 189, 187.

issue with his hypothesis that ‘the “hysteria bacillus” is present as the pathogenic agent in every case of what the journalists are calling “Suffragitis.”’<sup>14</sup>

Although the WWSL’s primary method of agitation was through ‘the use of the pen’, it also took part in marches and other public demonstrations. Sinclair, too, was an active participant at these events, and took part in the ‘Great Demonstration’ organized by the Women’s Social and Political Union on 21 June 1908.<sup>15</sup> The WWSL members marched behind their appliquéd black and white banner designed by Marie Belloc Lowndes (see figure 3). Each member carried a banneret bearing their role models and female literary ancestors: Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters.<sup>16</sup> At another procession, illustrated in figure 4, known as the ‘From Prison to Citizenship’ March, held on 18 June 1910, Sinclair was again in attendance:

With the Women Writers walked many well-known women. Miss Cicely Hamilton . . . carried the great black and white banner with Miss Gascoigne-Hartley; Mrs Alice Meynell, Miss Alice Zimmern, Miss Peggy Webling . . . Miss Elizabeth Robins; editors of various papers, among them . . . Miss May Sinclair, the well-known novelist . . . Each carried a goose-quill and a black-and-

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<sup>14</sup> Sinclair, *Feminism* (London: Women Writers’ Suffrage League, 1912) 3, 4; Sinclair, letter to the editor, *Times*, 4 Apr. 1912: 7; and Sir Almroth Wright, letter to the editor, *Times*, 31 Mar. 1912: 7-8. Wright observes: ‘no doctor can ever lose sight of the fact that the mind of woman is always threatened with danger from the reverberations of her physiological emergencies. It is with such thoughts that the doctor lets his eyes rest upon the militant suffragist. He cannot shut them to the fact that there is mixed up with the woman’s movement much mental disorder; and he cannot conceal from himself the physiological emergencies which lie behind.’ Wright, at 7. It is this fundamental point that Sinclair takes exception to, highlighting the numerous ‘flaws’ in his argument.

<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Henry Nevinson, journalist and supporter of the suffrage movement, Thomas Hardy writes: I was in the crowd at their last attempt to present their petition—in fact, a girl-friend of mine was one of them’. Thomas Hardy, letter to Henry Nevinson, 5 Aug. 1909. The editors of the collected volume of Hardy’s letters suggest it is probable that Hardy was referring to Sinclair. See Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, eds., *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, vol. 4: 1909-1913 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 39.

<sup>16</sup> See Park, ‘The First Professional’ 191. Thus, the suffragettes were championing their women predecessors, and commemorating their lives.

white banneret bearing such familiar names as George Eliot, Fanny Burney, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning . . .<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 3. Women Writers' Suffrage League banner.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Vote 2* (25 June 1910): 161.

<sup>18</sup> Reproduced by the permission of the Museum of London.



Fig. 4. 'From Prison to Citizenship' March.<sup>19</sup>

Suzanne Raitt's use of terminology such as 'embarrassment' and 'ambivalent' to describe Sinclair's membership of the suffrage movement discredits both Sinclair and the WWSL.<sup>20</sup> Although Sinclair subsequently had problems with organised forms of suffragism, as described in *The Tree of Heaven* (1917), it stemmed from her interest in considering the individual rather than in viewing society as a mass, possessing a herd-like instinct. However, at this point, Sinclair's involvement with the WWSL gave her a close-up focus on the situation of the Woman Question as it was around 1908 to 1912. It may have encouraged her to consider perspectives that were novel to her; to build

<sup>19</sup> Reproduced by the permission of the Museum of London.

<sup>20</sup> See Raitt, *May Sinclair* 111, 112.

friendships with women in the league with similar backgrounds and beliefs to her own (Evelyn Sharp, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Alice Meynell and Violet Hunt became close friends from this time); and, most importantly, helped her to look anew at the role of women as artists in contemporary society, expressing their inner realities.

It was while working on instalments of The Creators for serial publication in the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine between 1909 and 1910 (published as a novel in 1910) that Sinclair's interest in the nature of the female artist and the impulses that cause her to create becomes apparent. In addition, during this time she was also writing material on the Brontë sisters.<sup>21</sup> A side-by-side examination of The Creators with these pieces of writing helps to illuminate the major issues that fascinated Sinclair during her career as a writer: the female consciousness; the psychological divisions within the woman writer; the dialectic between the inner world and the external reality; and the tensions that arise from this very dialectic. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Brontë sisters came to stimulate Sinclair's imagination: both in their art and in their own lives they represented the 'spiritual certainty' to which Sinclair herself was aspiring.

## II. 'The New Voice in Literature': The Brontë Sisters

Sinclair's introductions to the Brontë sisters' novels, mostly written and published in 1908 and 1909, gave her a public forum in which she first presented her view of the woman as a writer. Sinclair describes the 'supreme act of creation' as one where

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<sup>21</sup> Raitt suggests that Sinclair's interest was initiated in 1907 when she became fascinated by Emily Brontë's work. Although Raitt believes that Sinclair's first Brontë introduction to be written for Dent's Everyman Series was on Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, this was not published until 1921 (an edition by Ernest Rhys and another with an introduction by Margaret Lane were both published in the Everyman Series in 1907). See Raitt, May Sinclair 116 n.30. However, Theophilus Boll, Sinclair's first biographer, believes that Sinclair's introduction to Wuthering Heights was published in 1907. See Boll, Miss May Sinclair 213.

'imagination and actuality are fused'. Enlarging upon this, she declares that it is *within the buried, inner 'germ'* that the 'open secret of all great art' may be found:

To the artist, at any rate to the dramatist and novelist, whose supreme work is to develop the persons of his drama, to exhibit them in movement and in growth, all that is necessary is the *germ*—the undeveloped thing. What is more, it is the germ that alone is of use to him. Genius is sterile to the thing developed—the complete reality, overgrown and finished in alien soil. Genius imperatively demands its own, the exercise of its natural function to shape, to nourish, and bring forth. It acts more swiftly on a hint than on the most elaborate demonstration from without.<sup>22</sup>

She argues that a genius flourishes best in hostile conditions; a terrain that is rich and over-fertile leads to a stifling of talent. Sinclair believes, as she later shows in The Creators and Mary Olivier as well as in her examinations on the Brontës, that genius is *not* derived from a wealth of experience but stems from the mere 'hint' felt within.<sup>23</sup> For Sinclair, as this thesis examines, the inner life is supreme. Moreover, although she uses the conventional male pronoun in the extract above, this gives way to an impersonal appraisal of genius. It can be further adduced that, from her subject matter, the inner life Sinclair is depicting is specifically a female one.

The introductions reflect Sinclair's seduction by the richness of the creative imagination issuing from three women writers whose own external reality was one of great repression. In at once praising and defending the Brontës, she looks to them to

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair, introduction, Villette, by Charlotte Brontë, Everyman's Library Ser. (London: Dent, 1909) vii-xviii; viii; original italics. Much later, Katherine Mansfield expresses a similar view in a journal entry 'The Flowering of the Self.' Here she describes the creative self as 'a green spear [which pushes] through the dead leaves and through the mould, thrusts a scaled bud through years of darkness until, one day . . . we are flowering for our moment upon the earth'. April 1920. Katherine Mansfield, The Journal of Katherine Mansfield, ed. J. Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1954) 205. In both cases, Sinclair and Mansfield are putting forward the idea of transcendence in creativity.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair describes Charlotte Brontë as 'impatient of the obtrusive and protracted instruction of the actual.' See Sinclair, introduction, Villette, by Charlotte Brontë xviii.

give validity to her own position, that of a female writer in an 'alien soil'.<sup>24</sup> She feels that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, she is in a very similar situation to Charlotte Brontë: 'it was considered mysterious, not to say sinister, thing that a little unmarried lady living in a parsonage on the edge of a lonely moor should have understood passion as she did.'<sup>25</sup>

In addition to finding parallels in her own life with that of the Brontës, Sinclair also provides an interesting commentary on her role as their biographer. She dwells upon Elizabeth Gaskell's task—that of a novelist conducting a biography on the life of another novelist. This introduction reads as a metatext since there is an additional layer here: that of Sinclair, a novelist, who will later write her own biography of the Brontës, The Three Brontës (1912), describing Mrs Gaskell's role as biographer and the problems that they both must therefore contend with. She notes that as the lived experiences of both the Brontës and her own is a specifically feminine one, it is difficult for her to avoid the temptation to fill in the gaps in their biography from her own 'reality':

It may be questioned whether a novelist is the best possible biographer. He has the hardest, most invidious of tasks before him, *the presentation of a reality which is the same and yet not the same reality dealt with by his own art*. The difference of material necessitates a corresponding difference of method. He has to handle things actual and complete in themselves in the place of things imagined, developed, that is to say, from within. His imagination, that only

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<sup>24</sup> Raitt describes Sinclair's defensive stance as stemming from her desire to counteract the criticism that a romance was responsible for inspiring Charlotte Brontë's creativity. Sinclair was adamant that no external source, sexual attachment or marriage, stimulated Charlotte's writing; instead, its source came from 'within'. As Raitt argues, Sinclair's protective and defensive tone arises from the fact that indeed her own position as a 'prim virgin' (according to Arnold Bennett) very much resembled the situation of the Brontë trio. In her introductions, she sought to reflect the view that 'women . . . did not need a broad range of experience in order to write with genius' (Raitt, at 121). See Raitt, May Sinclair 116-121.

<sup>25</sup> Sinclair, introduction, Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë, Everyman's Library Ser. (London: Dent, 1908) vii-xv; x.

knows itself as creative, has to become suddenly passive. There are moments when he must repress it entirely in the interests of the truth. And yet there is the *impossibility of keeping his imagination altogether out of it*. There is the difficulty, with the facts solidly implanted before him, firm and imperative, of giving them such form and proportion as the novelist can give to the multitude of things imagined. The biographer must renounce the vanity of form. He must be the humble servant of the facts, the slow and patient follower of the order of events. In these straight paths the creative imagination will be a hindrance rather than a help.<sup>26</sup>

Although, at the beginning of the twentieth century, aesthetic standards were, on the whole, still derived from the writing of men, Sinclair turns away from her androcentric literary inheritance in order to make her aesthetic judgement. It appears, then, that while looking back at the Brontës' work to appraise their position as female artists during the mid-nineteenth century, she is at once also looking forward to reflect upon her own standing as a female artist of some repute by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Sinclair looks to a specifically female literary tradition that directly reaches forward to her, just as Virginia Woolf later was to focus attention on women's literary history in *A Room of One's Own* (1929): 'we think back through our mothers if we are women.'<sup>27</sup>

The Brontë sisters were Sinclair's literary foremothers; she was seduced by what they offered: 'the new voice in literature . . . the unsealing of the sacred springs, the revelation of all that proud, decorous, mid-Victorian reticence most sedulously sought to hide . . . there is a surer, a subtler, a more intimate psychology, a steadier hold of the

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<sup>26</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, by Elizabeth Gaskell, Everyman's Library Ser. (London: Dent, 1908) vii-xv; viii; italics added.

<sup>27</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 114.

uncompromising reality.'<sup>28</sup> It follows, therefore, that in these introductions, Sinclair is reflecting upon women's current social and political standing as she thinks back to the situation or 'reality' of woman in the Brontë era. The introductions show her searching for the emancipated female figure in woman's writing: 'Shirley Keeldar is the ancestress of the great modern heroines, big-souled, unsentimental, and untamed.'<sup>29</sup> These 'modern heroines', Raitt explains, are associated with 'a rebelliously analytic spirit which refuses to submit to masculine control.'<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the introductions exemplify modernity not just in the Brontës' heroines, but in the writers themselves: 'Emily had cast off all convention, all tradition.'<sup>31</sup>

Although she admits she finds the writing of Anne Brontë 'dull' she '*does* represent something . . . the restless misery of women born into the Victorian age before their time. All the Brontës were born before their time.'<sup>32</sup> This refrain of the Brontë sisters embodying the spirit of the modern woman constantly recurs in Sinclair's writing about them: 'Anne belongs . . . to the twentieth century. I am thinking of the spirit and essence of her work . . . Anne Brontë is an exponent of woman's rights, her right to her place in the sun; her right to love; her right to express her love, at any rate in literature, as she sees fit. . . . [T]he spirit of the twentieth century is there.'<sup>33</sup> Sinclair's fascination with the sisters and their writing is found here in the phrase 'her right to her place in the sun'. Sinclair therefore reads the Brontës as precursors to the feminists of her

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<sup>28</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *Villette*, by Charlotte Brontë xvi.

<sup>29</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *Shirley*, by Charlotte Brontë, Everyman's Library Ser. (London: Dent, 1908) vii-xv; xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair* 117.

<sup>31</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *Villette*, by Charlotte Brontë xii.

<sup>32</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, by Anne Brontë, Everyman's Library Ser. (London: Dent, 1914) vii-xii; vii; original italics.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* viii.

generation; their writing exemplifies all that the WWSL were arguing for in the national press, in their suffrage novels, and in their political pamphlets. When Sinclair writes: ‘Anne Brontë is up against all the Victorian dogmas and traditions, against eternal punishment; against St Paul; against the woman’s vow of obedience in holy matrimony. She is really . . . up against the marriage laws’,<sup>34</sup> she is voicing her own political manifesto and is using Anne Brontë to highlight her polemical argument. Furthermore, it can be argued Sinclair is fulfilling the dictates drawn up by Robins for the WWSL in the dissemination of suffrage literature. If read in this way, Sinclair’s work on the Brontës gains a new layer of meaning not yet examined.

Rita Felski has looked at feminist discourse at the *fin de siècle* and explains that it ‘acquired a performative and prophetic function, seeking to bring into existence through its own writing that political community to which it aspired’.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Lyn Pykett notes that a prime anxiety at the end of the nineteenth century was one about ‘cultural authority, and about the autonomy of the artist and of the domain of Art in a literary world increasingly dominated by markets in which the masses and women played an important part.’<sup>36</sup> She observes that some of the New Woman writers, such as George Egerton and Ella D’Arcy, ‘self-consciously distanced themselves from the traditional plots of the three-volume novel in an attempt to find an appropriate form for *exploring and articulating the inner lives of women*.’<sup>37</sup> Modernist women writers such as Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, as well as Sinclair, also self-consciously set themselves against established (that is, masculine) traditions in order to form a new feminine realism. I therefore argue that Sinclair’s Brontë introductions conceal a

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<sup>34</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, by Anne Brontë viii.

<sup>35</sup> Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995) 47.

<sup>36</sup> Pykett, *Engendering Fictions* 54.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 56; italics added.

subtextual, feminist agenda. Here, Sinclair is a self-conscious female writer exploring and articulating the lives of three other famous female writers in order to develop her own female aesthetic.

In turning to a female literary inheritance to propagate both the Brontës' and her own feminist stance, Sinclair is showing once again how important these linked networks of women were in first-wave feminist movement. They provided an alternative to the androcentric literary inheritance, and offered their readership a *feminine reality*. Fulfilling her political obligations to use literature to declaim to her audience, Sinclair highlights the importance of the sororal unification of women: 'With the Brontës, the tie of sisterhood, the devotion, the passion of sisterhood, was supreme.'<sup>38</sup> If New Woman fiction, as Kate Flint writes, 'may be said to have created and consolidated a community of woman readers, who could refer to these works as proof of their psychological, social, and ideological difference from men', then Sinclair's Brontë introductions offered a similar reading to her audience.<sup>39</sup> She dwells on the difference inherent in the writing practices between men and women, arguing that it is impossible for women writers to be divorced from their surroundings. Unlike men, they are unable to forget their domestic ties, the demands made upon them by family. Unlike men, they do not have a room of their own, physically or psychically, in which to write:

The lives of great men admit their suppressions. Their relations . . . do not affect them except as temporary obstacles to their career. . . . It is otherwise with great women. They cannot thus get rid of their relations. Their lives are inseparable from them, *their works in many cases inexplicable without them*. Suppression of

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<sup>38</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *Villette*, by Charlotte Brontë xii.

<sup>39</sup> Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 305. It can be observed here that Sinclair's introductions to the Brontë sisters, in Dent's new 'Everyman' ('Everywoman'?) Series, appealed to a mass readership. See Raitt, *May Sinclair* 116, 117.

the relation, even of collaterals, is out of the question. . . . *A woman cannot get away from family even in its absence . . . she is bound to it by infrangible, indestructible bonds. It, and all it has done to her or for her, has an enduring life in her memory. However much abandoned or ignored, its persistence there endows it with immortality.*<sup>40</sup>

Sinclair believes that because women are unable to escape the demands of domesticity, their writing is marked by it; in fact this is the feminine reality that they know, the one that they write about. This looks forward to The Creators and the depiction of the female genius who attempts to create but is chained by the bonds of domesticity. Yet in her introduction to Villette, as already noted, the creative act requires both ‘imagination’ and ‘reality’ and Sinclair stresses that ‘actuality’ is ‘the lesser power’ in this duo. Here, it can be surmised, Sinclair holds forth her aesthetic: that for a woman to have true creative genius, she must transform the bonds of her reality (such as domesticity and family ties) in order to sublimate the ‘germ of the real’, the inner life.

### **III. The Maternal Instinct vs the Creative Drive**

In Woolf’s To the Lighthouse (1927) two types of women are portrayed: the maternal Mrs Ramsay and the artistic Lily Briscoe. These two possibilities for women are separate and distinct, suggesting that in Woolf’s view they could not be reconciled in one woman. In The Creators Jane Holland fulfils this prophecy as she tries and ultimately fails to fuse and balance these opposing characteristics; eventually she must ‘pay’ for trying to do so. Her friends anticipate this outcome at the beginning of the

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<sup>40</sup> Sinclair, introduction, Life of Charlotte Brontë, by Elizabeth Gaskell xiii; italics added.

novel: if she marries, Nina Lempriere tells her, ‘ “There’ll be no end to your paying.” ’<sup>41</sup> Indeed, once married, Jane ‘served a double and divided flame’ (C 318). As her friends forecasted, tension develops in the Brodrick household and the family begins to fall apart.

Thus, Jane’s career as a writer is not sympathetic to a happy marriage. Her creative abilities become restricted by domesticity, and she soon realises that her writing must be marginalized to marriage and motherhood: she had ‘constrained the secret and incorruptible will’. On assuming the roles of mother and wife, Jane finds that her creative self is blocked: ‘[T]he sentences came in jerks; they gasped for breath; they reeled and fell; they dragged on, nerveless and bloodless, to an unspeakable exhaustion’ (C 287). This description of her writer’s block mimics the language used to describe the exhaustion Jane feels in her marriage. Under the accommodation that she must make for her married life, Jane shrinks physically and wilts intellectually. Finally, when she realises that she cannot be both a writer *and* a mother, Jane feels imprisoned by her marriage. She experiences her familial demands as a burden and a draining force upon her artistic energies: ‘There was no denying that she was surrounded, and that the circle was drawing rather tight’ (C 341).

However, Jane’s suffocating family ties constitute a different form of imprisonment to the self-imposed barricading in her room of her pre-married self in order to write. When Jane finds herself looking back to her previous, unwedded self, she pictures herself in her solitude in her top floor rooms in Kensington Square. It was as that self, as Jane Holland, that she was able to create and be a genius. There was no room for marriage. Returning to her present reality, Jane is aware of the ‘imminent disaster, the irreparable loss’ to her former self (C 286). In her study of British women

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<sup>41</sup> Sinclair, *The Creators: A Comedy* (New York: Century, 1910). 106. 1<sup>st</sup> ser. in *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 79-80 (Nov. 1909-Oct. 1910): 100-16, 240-55, 401-17, 520-35, 713-29, 834-48, 53-68, 193-207, 354-69, 529-44, 709-22, 840-53.

novelists, Elaine Showalter describes the symbol of the 'enclosed and secret room' in literature at the end of the nineteenth century as synonymous with 'the womb and with female conflict.'<sup>42</sup> She writes that the 'attic hideaway' stands for 'a separate world, a flight from men and from adult sexuality'.<sup>43</sup> While I accept this to be true, I argue that it is only by psychically retreating to this sphere, that Jane recovers a sense of selfhood. She reverts to her virginal, single self and gains a new sense of perspective of the circumstances under which it is possible to create.

George Tanqueray too is aware of the conflict between artistic and family life, saying early in the novel that all artists must avoid families and are indeed fortunate if their families have rejected them. He tells Jane: ' "If you and I have done anything decent it's because, first of all, our families have cast us off" ' (C 11). However, this highlights the main problem inherent in the novel: for women it is impossible to ignore the ties of family duty. Laura almost collapses as she struggles to combine looking after her invalid father with her journalistic deadlines. Yet, after he dies, Laura soon marries Prothero. This marriage is in fact successful as Prothero teaches her the nature of genius, that she must not fight it. Moreover, as both flourish as artists, their marriage is seen as a happy alternative to the norm: they put their energies into producing books rather than children, and Laura is happy to financially support Prothero's greater genius. However, this is the only depiction of a happy marriage in the novel. Other unions flounder as the conflict between female artistry and the traditional role of self-sacrificing wife and mother remains unresolved. Caro Bickersteth, an unmarried journalist, advises geniuses to avoid matrimony altogether.

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<sup>42</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (rev. ed. London: Virago, 1982) 33.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

At the heart of The Creators is this dichotomy between the maternal instinct and the creative drive; in one form or another Sinclair raises this dialectic in all her writing. Jane's creative side and her womanly side are likened to 'two sexes contending for the mastery' (C 448). This novel, in particular, addresses the split and concludes that, for her at least, it must remain an either/or situation; there is no midway. In 'Professions for Women' (1931) Woolf tells her audience that of the two difficulties of her life as a female writer, she managed to solve one—the killing of the Angel in the House. She was unable to resolve the second—'telling the truth of [her] own experiences as a body'.<sup>44</sup> In The Creators Sinclair considers these same problems, upholding some marginal female characters such as Gertrude Collett and Rose Tanqueray as the angels in the house. Sinclair also exposes the second difficulty that Woolf later expressed in her experience as a female writer: that of writing the female body in an androcentrically encrypted world. The novel's unsatisfactory conclusion may explain that she too was unable to resolve this issue adequately.

Sinclair's pamphlet Feminism (1912), written as piece of feminist propaganda for the WWSL, is a very useful document to study alongside her fiction. Here she expresses her belief that different women have different drives and it is important that each kind of woman should find their own particular form of fulfilment. For women possessing the maternal instinct, it would be detrimental to their well-being to deny them motherhood. As I will examine shortly, Sinclair argues that each woman must follow their own, 'instinctive' 'Life-Force': 'the Life-Force, like any other force when its channel is obstructed, will, of course, seek another'.<sup>45</sup> Rose embodies the maternal type and is seen to withdraw and become depressed when George denies her the chance

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<sup>44</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women.' 1931. Michèle Barrett, ed. Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing (London: Women's P, 1979) 57-63. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Sinclair, Feminism (London: Women Writers' Suffrage League, 1912) 30.

to have children. Rose has an absent mother and, throughout the duration of the novel, constantly searches for a mother surrogate. Unable to find one, and since George refuses to let her have her own children, she finds fulfilment in a pseudo-mothering of others. The natural (re)productive drive is thus also thwarted in Rose. Indeed, in Rose, Jane and Laura the theme of motherhood is used figuratively to denote women's creativity. Ann Heilmann has assessed this crisis of gender and sexuality in New Woman novels and argues: 'The slippage between the mothering of children and the mothering of texts was central to the paradigmatic sub-genre of New Woman fiction, the artist-novel.'<sup>46</sup>

The importance of race regeneration and the production of strong genes was a topical debate of concern. Sexual selection and the healthy marriage partner was based on eugenic principles, as has been described by critics on the *fin de siècle*.<sup>47</sup> There is an eugenic undertone in the Brodricks' marriage; this is made evident when Jane's second child is born sickly and her third dies. Hugh Brodrick surveys his second son with misgiving as he considers the consequences of 'degeneration. There could be only one opinion, of course, as to the cause and the responsibility' (C 395). He believes their son is the 'heir of an unstable nervous system' (C 397) and this is affirmed by his brother's, the misogynist doctor's, verdict: ' "I consider that last book of [Jane's] responsible for that child's delicacy" ' (C 401). Jane feels split, thinking that she 'had sinned . . . the unforgivable sin, the sin against the family, the race' (C 403). The patriarchal codes that instruct a mother must hold important her family before all else therefore induce Jane to feel personally responsible for their ailing child. Ironically, she soon finds out that sickly offspring run in her husband's family genes and *he*, not she, is to blame.

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<sup>46</sup> Heilmann, New Woman Fiction 154.

<sup>47</sup> This has become a recent area of interest for scholars writing on New Woman literature and early Modernism. See, for example, Pykett, Engendering Fictions; Heilmann, New Woman Fiction; Angeliqe Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions,' Women: A Cultural Review 10 (1999): 1-21; and Angeliqe Richardson and Chris Willis, eds., The New Woman in Fact and Fiction (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

Degeneration is traditionally a masculine narrative and therefore a gendered parameter. However, as shown above, Sinclair turns this on its head as she reverses the plot when it is revealed that it is in fact Hugh's family genes that are responsible for their son's weak constitution. Nevertheless, the Brodricks continue to blame Jane's genius for the breakdown of the family. Before marrying her, Hugh was attracted to Jane because of this very quality but 'once married . . . her genius had become of secondary importance to him' (C 407). Indeed, he begins to view Jane's genius as subordinate to her functions as a wife and mother. The malevolent, degenerative interpretation of genius will be examined in the following section.

In The Creators the character of Nina Lempriere attempts to negotiate the dialectic inherent in being a female artist in a male inscribed world. She personifies the sexual and textual relations between men and women.<sup>48</sup> Nina's character is charged with conflicting drives as she is portrayed as a strong, self-reliant woman with undercurrents of passion and sexual desire. Although man-like, she is also revealed to have a woman's vulnerability as she experiences sexual pain on being rejected by both Tanqueray and Prothero. In an attempt to negotiate this dualism, she self-consciously embodies androgyny and, just like Woolf's androgynous Orlando, comes to be seen to be the quintessential artist. Androgyny therefore frees Nina from the captive forces of womanhood, allowing her to write and ultimately become a successful artist. Nina's

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hardy wrote to Sinclair vis-à-vis The Creators: 'I am much interested in learning from the female characters the things that go on at the back of women's minds—the invisible rays of their thought (as is said of the spectrum) which can be beyond the direct sight or intuition of man. I recollect Leslie Stephen once saying to me that he liked women's novels for that reason: they opened to him qualities of observation which could not be got from the ablest of novels by men.' Thomas Hardy, letter to Sinclair, 7 Nov. 1910. Fo. 37, box 1, UP. One of Virginia Woolf's main achievements was to show that literature read with a feminist eye involves a dual perspective. First, she highlighted the fact that women's social reality is shaped by gender. Second, she showed that representations of women in literature may disrupt the traditional, symbolic system of patriarchy. This is exemplified in the famous literary disagreement between Woolf and her father about Charlotte Brontë's 'hysteria'. Woolf argues that Brontë's syntactical subversions and emotional outpourings are a replication of the isolation of writing women and a lack of cultural space. Stephen, however, in his literary essays, refers to these as a signal of Brontë's 'hysteria' and feminine instability. Moreover, it is well-known that Stephen was an inhibitory force on Woolf, crushing the life out of her writing.

experience is that there is no place for the woman writer in the androcentric world; such a figure is doomed to failure:

“Does n’t it look, Jinny, as if genius were the biggest curse a woman can be saddled with? *It’s giving you another sex inside you*, and a stronger one, to plague you. When we want a thing we can’t sit still like a woman and wait till it comes to us, or does n’t come. *We go after it like a man*; and if we can’t get it peaceably we fight for it, as a man fights when he is n’t a coward or a fool. And because we fight we’re done for. And then, when we’re down, *the woman in us turns and rends us*. But if we got what we wanted we’d be just like any other woman. . . . It’s borne in on me . . . that the woman in us isn’t meant to matter. She’s simply the victim of the Will-to-do-things. It puts the bit into our mouths and drives us the way we must go. It’s like a whip laid across our shoulders whenever we turn aside.” (C 105; italics added)

Nina’s employment of violent and pugilistic language is evidence that manliness and man-like qualities are ones that she consciously assumes in order to harden herself against her feminine self. The tension inherent in the novel is displayed in Nina’s powerful outcry against the hypocrisy of a segregated male-female world. Nina realises that she cannot win in such a world if she sets about her art as a female, and therefore adapts herself to fit the male code for success. Julia Kristeva comments in her essay ‘Women’s Time’ that in order to become social beings women must identify with the symbolic order and that this involves accepting the system of meanings and values that embodies patriarchy. By identification with patriarchal values, a woman internalises ‘masculine’ ideals of competition, aggressiveness and power, thereby seeking success and recognition *as if a man*. This therefore aligns her with the paternal modality. Yet, in doing this, Nina must sacrifice a part of her female self, her sexual identity. She

relinquishes part of her femininity when she forsakes her sexual desire for Tanqueray and Prothero. ‘ “There must be no more George Tanquerays,” ’ Nina tells Jane, ‘ “If I see one coming, I’ll put a knife into myself. Not hard enough to kill, but hard enough to hurt. So that I may n’t forget. . . . [I]f any woman is to do anything stupendous, it means virginity” ’ (C 106).

In The Creators, Sinclair identifies the sexual bipolarity that constituted the social contract which confined women to the private and sexual spheres, men to the public and cerebral spheres. Kristeva focuses on this connection between gender, symbolism, and the balance of power in ‘Women’s Time’. She writes:

Sexual difference—which is at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction—is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language, and meaning.<sup>49</sup>

Sinclair’s novel is concerned with gender distinctions and the resulting imbalance of ‘power, language, and meaning.’ In an androcentric society, women are offered only a restricted experience of life. Sinclair encourages women to develop to their full potential, and attempt to overcome gender as a means of repression or differentiation. She negates the orthodox view that experience is a necessary precursor for talent to flourish. Due to the lack of opportunities available to them as a result of their gender, Sinclair recognises, women have a rather more limited outlook than their male counterparts. Yet, Sinclair believes that this should not absolve them of their ability to create. Indeed, she argues that experience ‘spoils you. It ties you hand and foot. It perverts you, twists you, blinds you to everything but yourself. I know women—artists—who have never got over their experience, women who’ll never do anything

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<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time,’ Signs 7 (Autumn 1981): 13-35. 21.

again because of it' (C 268). As already noted, this follows her celebration of the Brontës' talent to write from the inner life. In Sinclair's attempt to reconstruct the female self, she highlights the pitfalls of living according to external standards, concepts, and codes. For her, reality was an internal one and involved an exploration of consciousness and knowledge of the self. This functions to locate women in mind, perception, and intellect, contravening the Edwardian emphasis of women as body.

This view of Sinclair's is reinforced by her arguments in Feminism. Here, she puts forward her demand for '[u]nsexual solutions', a non-gendered classification (F 17). Likewise, The Creators reflects upon the deep-seated fears that arose from the shifting gender and sexual boundaries that came about with the *fin de siècle*. The New Woman, the key figure of this era, epitomized such anxieties: she symbolized the cultural, social and political transformations. Heilmann has described the New Woman's impact as accentuating concerns about the 'feminization of literature and the demise of virile Englishness.' The New Woman became a determining force responsible for the spiritual health of society: she 'stood at once for the degeneration of society and for that society's moral regeneration'.<sup>50</sup> However, Sinclair rails against such an attitude in Feminism by declaring that degeneracy is a 'scourge of modernity' and that the finger of blame should *not* be gender-implicated: 'Whoever charges . . . women with hysteria, neurosis, and degeneracy stands self-convicted of a lack of balance and acumen' (F 7).

#### **IV. Removing the Angel From the House: Genius and Degeneration**

I suggested above that on one level The Creators enacts the ambivalence inherent in the dialectic between the maternal figure and the artistic one. However, on another level, there is also a crucial tension within the creative process itself: a tension between

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<sup>50</sup> Heilmann, New Woman Fiction 1.

positive creativity and the monstrous alternative; between creation and destruction, reparation and aggression. In The Creators Nina impersonates a wild freedom: 'She looked the thing she was, a creature of high courage and prodigious energy' (C 59). As George Tanqueray meditates on this aspect of Nina, he realises that 'she had a devil' that was responsible for driving her genius on. On speculating idly what it might be like to be married to her, he concluded that, 'career and all', she is 'pre-eminently unfit' (C 59). George thus gives expression that there is something 'degenerate' in her female devotion and success at her art.

In reflecting upon the aesthetic correlative of genius, that which is excessive, transgressive, and without restraint, The Creators represents the psychological fears and sense of cultural anxiety of the age. A failure properly to sublimate the self reveals a human subject that is fractured by his/her discontinuity and profoundly alienated from his/her self. I will argue that this is true for Jane Holland as her genius nature fails to find a united flame. This valuable area for study has been neglected by critics on Sinclair to date.

The Oxford English Dictionary is helpful in pinpointing the application of the word 'genius' in the context that has been employed by Sinclair in The Creators:

a.L. *genius*, f. *gen-* root of *gi-gn-ĕre* to beget, Gr. *γίγνεσθαι* to be born, come into being . . . 1. With reference to classical pagan belief: The tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character, and finally to conduct him out of the world; also, the tutelary and controlling spirit similarly connected with a place, an institution, etc. . . . [I]n the *Rom. De le Rose* [Genius] represents the native moral instincts of mankind as setting bounds to the range of sexual passion. . . .

- c. (a person's) good, evil genius: the two mutually opposed spirits (in Christian language *angels*) by whom every person was supposed to be attended throughout his life. Hence applied *transf.* to a person who powerfully influences for good or evil the character, conduct, or fortunes of another.
2. A demon or spiritual being in general. Now chiefly in pl. *genii* . . . , as a rendering of Arab. *jinn*, the collective name of a class of spirits (some good, some evil) supposed to interfere powerfully in human affairs. . . .<sup>51</sup>

A person with genius, therefore, is someone who is coming into another level of being and, by implication, has transgressive qualities. Moreover, as the definition above implies, a genius has the opposing qualities of good and evil. The Creators hinges around this very dualistic nature inherent in genius. Throughout the novel it is often shown to be a fragile, unsustainable state, continually on the brink of disrupting or evolving into a negative frame of being, madness, or degeneracy.

The angel in the house is the traditional and patriarchal image of the female and, most particularly, feminine muse. This image is derived from Coventry Patmore's long poem of the same name, celebrating married love. Nina Auerbach writes that the title of Patmore's poem has become a 'convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be'. Victorian women had no further identity beyond that of daughter, wife, and mother. 'The social corollary of this identification', says Auerbach, 'is an implacable association between womanhood and domestic purity'.<sup>52</sup>

Jane Holland in The Creators is also aware of this convention that places women and the maternal image in the androcentrically circumscribed space of the house. She notes that some women are more than happy to take their place there and engage with

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<sup>51</sup> 'Genius,' Oxford English Dictionary, vol. VI, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1991.

<sup>52</sup> Nina Auerbach, Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (Harvard: Harvard UP, 1982) 67, 69.

the role expected of them by a patriarchal society: ‘ “There are women—angels naturally—who become devils if they can’t have children.” ’ Jane recognises that, unlike Rose, she does not possess so much the maternal drive as the desire to write. She tells her husband: ‘ “I’m an angel . . . but I shall be a devil if I can’t have this.” ’ Yet, her next sentence to Hugh is also revealing: ‘ “It would all be very well . . . if it were simpler; if either you or I could deal with the thing, if we could just wring its neck and destroy it” ’ (C 327). She recognises that the personification of the unmentionable creative urge, ‘the thing’, not only takes its toll on their marriage but also turns her into that which is not an angel; a devil in fact. As Auerbach writes, ‘the ease with which the Victorian angel becomes demonic’, is evident here.<sup>53</sup> Hugh also begins to interpret his wife’s genius nature as something demonic:

He had reckoned with her genius when he had married her. He had honestly believed that he cared for it as he cared for her, that Jinny was not to be thought of apart from her genius. In spite of himself he was coming round to Henry’s view, *regarding genius as a malady, a thing abnormal, disastrous, not of nature . . . a thing altogether subordinate to Jinny’s functions as a wife and mother.* (C 328; italics added)

This view of genius fills Hugh with fear for, at its ultimate manifestation, it would remove Jane from the patriarchally-defined sphere; indeed, out of the marital house and thereby voiding their marriage ties: ‘there lurked, unrecognised and unsuspected, the natural man’s fear of the thing not of nature, of its own dominion, coming between him and her, slackening, perhaps sundering the tie of flesh’ (C 328). Conversely, Jane frequently and blithely refers to Gertrude Collett’s role as ‘the angel in the house’, even punning at times with reference to her taking Jane’s own place at the table as the ‘Angel

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<sup>53</sup> Auerbach, Woman and the Demon 63.

of the Dinner'. The angel in the house is all that Jane, the genius, is not, and because it is a patriarchally decreed role, it is contained and therefore utterable.

Both Jane and Hugh are unable to articulate the nature of the genius that threatens to come between them. It is without a name, but its malignant presence, possessing a neck that needs to be wrung, gives it a bestial or demonic embodiment. It is only referred to as 'thing' or 'it'. The absence of language to give expression to this manifestation of genius represents the very real fear of its malign, asundering power. Kelly Hurley, in The Gothic Body, thoroughly engages in a debate surrounding the 'insufficiency of language to cope and contain liminal phenomena'.<sup>54</sup> Hurley notes that in the compulsive repetition of the word 'thing' there is an element of hysteria. She writes: 'the rhetoric of Thing-ness is deployed to signal the loss of human specificity, the becoming-abhuman of the human body.' Similarly, as shown above, for Jane and Hugh the nature of Jane's creative drive assumes an 'abhuman identity for which there is as yet no language.'<sup>55</sup> It is this abhuman aspect of her creativity which threatens to overwhelm the stable home life she has created with Hugh, thus filling them both with dread.

Returning to Woolf's depiction of the angel in the house with the centrality of the demonic in mind, it is now clear that the mode of relation advocated and represented by the angel acts as a defence or control against the taboo of monstrosity. Woolf suggests that the fundamental issue for women concerning creativity is the taboo on aggression (monstrosity) associated with the construction of femininity: these are the 'many ghosts' Woolf believed woman writers still had to fight.<sup>56</sup> It can therefore be

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<sup>54</sup> Kelly Hurley, The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 29.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women.' Barrett, ed., Virginia Woolf 62.

surmised that the angel in the house is both a figure of persecution and a personification of a mode of relating. As Woolf explains, the angel afflicts the woman writer as she inculcates an acute awareness of audience and the imperative to please, thereby functioning to inhibit the creative process.<sup>57</sup> Jane Eldridge Miller shrewdly notes that Gertrude, the Brodricks' housekeeper, assumes this very threatening role towards Jane:

As the embodiment of the ideal of the womanly woman—the completely feminine, servile, self-effacing domestic angel—Gertrude is a threat and an admonition to Jane rather than a help. The ideally feminine woman is a recurrent figure in Sinclair's fiction, where she is always the villain, for she is the one who holds women back, and makes it impossible for them to forge new identities and narratives for themselves.<sup>58</sup>

The angel functions as a civilising force to create a domestic feminine ideal. Being the angel is the domestic alternative to being the artist. In The Creators the creative drive is fuelled both by reparative and destructive impulses: both angelic and devilish motivations. For the creative process to have an outcome, a process of sublimation is needed. Indeed, the theme of degeneration in The Creators is more significant than initially apparent. During the 1890s the aetiology of genius and insanity was a contemporary topic of debate. Susan Navarette has examined in detail the literature of horror and degeneration during this period, drawing on, in particular, the work of Cesare Lombroso and his disciple Max Nordau. Lombroso, an Italian criminologist,

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<sup>57</sup> Rozsika Parker analyses the complex network of internal and external object relationships in her psychoanalytic reading of the creative endeavour. She argues that the angel in Woolf's essay 'represents creative inhibition' and is a 'serious liability'. See Rozsika Parker, 'Killing the Angel in the House: Creativity, Femininity and Aggression,' International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 79 (1998): 757-73. 757, 765.

<sup>58</sup> Jane Eldridge Miller, Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994) 193.

classified the criminal type by mapping certain physiognomic features. He extended his study of the criminal type to include the man of genius. Genius, he insisted, was by its very nature excessive, a tetralogical distortion of 'normal' cerebration, as pathological in its own way as common criminality or brute savagery: 'the giants of thought expiate their intellectual force in degeneration and psychoses.' He branded genius as 'always a neurosis, and often a true insanity.'<sup>59</sup>

In The Creators two doctors with opposing medical views offer very contrasting opinions on the nature of genius. The traditional, patriarchal Dr Henry Brodrick follows Lombroso's conclusions: genius is a malady, a neurosis. He diagnoses Jane as a great genius but qualifies it: 'what was it, after all, but a great Neurosis' (C 360). Prothero has an enlightened, modern interpretation of genius, viewing it as the capacity to channel spiritual energies. His vision of genius is altogether more life-enhancing. In retaliation to Dr Brodrick's view that Jane is a neurotic, Prothero tells her, "Your nerves are very highly-strung—they're bound to be . . . but they are the *soudest* nerves I know" (C 413). He later expounds upon his view of the nature of genius to Dr Brodrick:

There were cases, he declared, where disease was a higher sort of health.

"Take," he said, "a genius with a pronounced neurosis. His body may be a precious poor medium for all ordinary purposes. But he couldn't have a more delicate, more lyrical, more perfectly adjusted instrument for *his* purposes than the nervous system you call diseased." (C 420)

An examination of Prothero's interpretation shows that it is entirely in line with the contemporary debate surrounding the psychological aetiology of genius. William James refers to the fully integrated self when he reviewed the current literature on the subject in his article 'Degeneration and Genius' (1895). He lists 'neurasthenia and

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<sup>59</sup> Cesare Lombroso, The Man of Genius, 1891. Qtd. in Susan Navarette, The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin de Siècle Culture of Decadence (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1998) 33.

hysteria' as associated with the degeneracy, and argues that manifestations of the degenerative form of genius is 'allied to epilepsy and moral insanity'.<sup>60</sup> After discussing William Hirsch's Genie und Entartung, eine psychologische Studie James concludes:

With strong obsessions one needs a strong will to keep sound, just as with a large body one needs large legs to keep active. The excessive sensibility of a Goethe would have made a psychopath out of him, but for his extraordinary intellect and self-control—with these additions it simply made him the mightier pattern of mankind.<sup>61</sup>

The nature of genius also owes much to that held by Frederic Myers (and, by association, the Society for Psychical Research) who introduces the idea of its relation to the subliminal self, which is explored more fully in Chapter 6 in this thesis. In Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death (1903) Myers also expresses his concept of the genius as a fully integrated personality:

Genius—if that vaguely used word is to receive anything like a psychological definition—should rather be regarded as a power of utilising a wider range than other men can use of faculties in some degree innate to all . . . [T]he man of genius is for us the best type of the normal man, in so far as he effects a *successful cooperation* of an unusually large number of elements of his personality—reaching a stage of *integration* slightly in advance of our own.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, Myers too explains that the genius is prey to '*degenerations and insanities*' if the 'subliminal rushes' are insufficiently or poorly integrated; that is, if he fails to properly

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<sup>60</sup> William James, 'Degeneration and Genius,' Psychological Review 2 (1895): 287-94. 287, 288.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 291.

<sup>62</sup> Frederic W. H. Myers, Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1903) 71-2.

'appropriat[e] the results of subliminal mentation to subserve the supraliminal stream of thought.'<sup>63</sup>

It is clear that Sinclair engages in these debates surrounding the concept of genius and creativity, applying them in particular to her female protagonists in The Creators. Here, the fully integrated, healthy, creative outcome of genius is symbolically represented as a unified flame. Each of the artists undergoes a period of struggle in their search for the single, unifying flame within them. An artist can only be successful once all his/her selves are fully integrated and are in balance. This flame therefore functions as a powerful representation of unity required for full artistic integration.

Prothero and Laura are careful to maintain and nurture the single flame of creativity. Their marriage is the only successful one in the novel as neither artist is split in their personalities nor torn by other demands upon their creative drive. Prothero believes in the idea of creative energy as a spiritual channel, suggesting the potential of artistry as a form of sublimation: '[Prothero's] genius was safe, it was indestructible. It had the immunity of the transcendent. It worked, not in flesh and blood, but in a divine material' (C 201). Laura learns from Prothero the possibility of transforming genius into a different, mystical borderland:

The song of birth, of the soul's plunging into darkness and fire, of the weaving round her of the fleshy veils, the veils of separation, the veils of illusion; the song of her withdrawal into her dim house, of her binding and scourging, and of her ceaseless breaking on the wheel of time, till she renews her passion and the desire of her return. (C 436-7)

The language here expresses Sinclair's interest in Eastern mysticism and her belief in the possibility of reincarnation. In A Defence of Idealism (1917) Sinclair devotes a

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<sup>63</sup> Myers, Human Personality 72, 71; italics added.

lengthy chapter to an exploration of the sublimative aspect of mysticism, and states that she was influenced by the idea of the cycle of rebirth in which the soul may be reborn in a stronger state:

To disciples who had no fancy for extinction, [reincarnation] offered an endless and exciting round of rebirths. . . . You only had to desire to live again, and you lived. Your Karma might indeed force you back again against your will; but then you are responsible for your own Karma. The whole thing is in your own hands. Desire binds you to the wheel of Life. Desire shapes your destiny for you within the wheel.<sup>64</sup>

For Prothero, then, genius has a timeless and mystical origin. This points the way forward to Sinclair's interest in the ability of the physical body to act as a vessel for a sublimatory force or gift that is spiritual in origin.<sup>65</sup> As I discuss in my analysis of mysticism in Sinclair's work (see Chapter 6), Sinclair started writing her uncanny stories around August 1910 which overlaps with the completion of her instalments of The Creators for serialisation in the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine.

Whereas Prothero views his body as an 'instrument' to conduct his gift, Jane writes from her body: her gift feeds off her blood and nerves. Prothero's vision is one that Jane does not have and is unable to discover; unlike Prothero and Laura's marriage and attitude to artistry, Jane fails to find the single flame. She is unable to construct a new identity for herself even though she confronts her split psyche between the 'angel in the house' and the 'monster'. 'The imaginative association of women with monstrosity, or with that which is conscious but not human,' writes Auerbach, 'is both a

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<sup>64</sup> Sinclair, A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions (London: Hutchinson, 1917) 331-32.

<sup>65</sup> Sinclair believes that Emily Brontë's work reflects a creative impulse arising from a mystical force. See The Three Brontës, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1912. London: Hutchinson, 1914) 170.

stigma . . . and a celebration of female powers of metamorphosis.’<sup>66</sup> Jane does not partake in a metamorphosis into a higher state of being and, at the close of the novel, she remains ‘torn and divided’: ‘[The Brodrick family] was like a wall, it would shelter and protect her so long as she was content to be sheltered and protected; if she dashed herself against it it would break her in pieces’ (C 451). She remains insufficiently sublimated and therefore, in Sinclairian terms, she fails as an artist.

#### **V. States of Being: The Location of the Female Artist**

The idea of landscape, geographical and psychical, has great significance in all of Sinclair’s novels under examination in this thesis, and will be particularly noted in conjunction with The Three Sisters and Uncanny Stories. I will show that in Sinclair’s writing, the external event represents or reflects the inner life. This is in tune with the Freudian premise that landscapes often represent psychic states, as examined in detail in Chapters 3 and 6.

Typically, contrasting locations in Sinclair’s novels represent an aesthetic attempt to place the female protagonists outside the psychological, cultural and social traps of womanhood. Frequently, the narrative setting of contemporary, domestic reality is juxtaposed with an unfettered, mystical, dream-like and nurturing landscape. This provides an alternative sphere for the women, away from the reality of cramped, repressive conditions. It is therefore suggested that in trying to find a sense of peace or freedom, Sinclair’s women must remove themselves from their everyday reality and from the oppressive source. The multiplicity of locations gives rise to a multiplicity of female subjectivities. By presenting a number of female artists, both throughout her oeuvre and within the novel under examination here, Sinclair examines the possible

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<sup>66</sup> Auerbach, Woman and Demon 65.

alternatives and outcomes available to women, and highlights the circumstances under which it is possible to create.

In The Creators, the location refers to the psychological situations of its protagonists: the scenes vary between the urban and enclosed spaces where Nina, Laura and Jane live, each taking rooms on the top floor of a block of flats; the well-managed Brodrick family household; the manicured and tamed appearance of Nicky's country house; the open moorland where Jane finds a sense of freedom; and the wild, savage, almost barbaric domain of Nina's Welsh Marches.

As with other artist figures in the novel Nina has no family ties and intermittently lives alone in London. Her London house is described as though it were part of her:

It was as if Nina had torn off shreds, fringes, whole layers of herself and left them there. You inferred behind her a long, half-savage ancestry of the open air. There were antlers about and the skins of animals. A hunting-crop hung by the chimney piece. Foils, fishing-rods, golf-clubs staggered together in a corner. Nina herself, long-limbed, tawny, aquiline, had the look of wild and nervous adolescence prisoned within walls. (C 102)

The vestiges of her self are described vicariously in the paraphernalia of outdoor, hunting equipment. Indeed, the urban environment is not her natural home and she feels imprisoned by it; she belongs to an elemental, wild and untamed habitat. At times of psychological crisis, she escapes to the Welsh Marches where she is able to sublimate her sexual self and produce her best work. Here, Sinclair reveals Nina as a primal, mythic creature true to herself and able to create her 'sinless masterpiece' (C 286). Nina's natural terrain is an example of where the topographical and the somatic mirror

each other. Her pure, virginal state is removed to the marginal, intermediate and border landscape.

Moreover, Nina's desire to escape the city and take refuge among the forests and mountains of her childhood fulfils the Modernist paradigm that to be a true artist one must become an exile and become alienated. The quality of her art depends upon her ability to accept this alienation and the sacrifice of her sexual, female self. Although she pays a heavy price psychologically, she remains undivided in her commitment. As shown in Nina's case, Sinclair's preoccupation with geographical boundaries is thus also a preoccupation with gender boundaries.

In Nina's longing for a return to the innocence of the countryside is a reimagination of her childhood home as a protected world which would restore her to her former self, before she was tarnished by the sexual ferocity and torments of city life. The multiple crises of failed sexual conquests thrown at her by the early twentieth century urban lifestyle (George Tanqueray and Owen Prothero) drive Nina to find solace in a utopian world of pastoral, asexual stability. Nina's retreat to the Welsh Marches is significant in this context: 'It was there that her undoing was accomplished' (C 236). Nina's 'undoing' is a relinquishing of her sexual state, a journey back to her pre-sexual or asexual self. In 'undoing' her sexual self she looks to a purer self in which to devote, undivided, to her creative flame. The venue for this transformation is her childhood home:

There had been moments . . . when she had had almost the assurance of its [her genius] ultimate return; when she had felt the stirring of the old impulse, the immortal instinct; when she longed for the rushing of her rivers, and the race of the wind on her mountains of the Marches. It would come back, her power, if

she were there, in the place where it was born; if she could get away from streets and houses and people. (C 307)

Nina views her genius as an 'immortal instinct' that derives its strength from the terrain where it was born; it is something other than of her own making. During her time among the mountains she forgets linear time and listens to her own internal rhythms: 'She lived in an order of time that was all her own, solitary, interminable, not to be measured by any clock or sun' (C 236).<sup>67</sup> Nina has replaced the 'real' world with a mythic one that is outside time and everyday reality; she lives in a timeless reality in which she is able to distance herself from the concerns of the contemporary urban lifestyle that the other artists lead.

Kristeva, in 'Women's Time', describes the historical representations of sexual difference. She equates 'feminine' history with cyclical or monumental time, and 'masculine' history with linear time. A Kristevan reading helps, therefore, to understand the implications of time and nature in The Creators. Retreating to a marginal sphere represents a refuge from the symbolic, paternal order which embodies society. For women, Kristeva argues, the social order is inevitably more 'frustrating, mutilating, sacrificial' than it is for men.<sup>68</sup> Nina's retreat is explained by a Kristevan interpretation as a refuge from the paternalistic, historical reality. Yet, by espousing a mythic ideal, one that is timeless and universal, Kristeva points out that feminism risks opting out of the historical struggle. Nina embodies this paradox: once she has retreated to her mythic sphere, she is marginalized from the text and alienated from the community of other female writers. Her physical absence is highlighted by the textual referral to her character as an aside.

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<sup>67</sup> In comparison, Jane's married life is marked out by the regular chiming of the household clock, religiously wound up every day by Gertrude.

<sup>68</sup> Kristeva, 'Women's Time' 24.

The power and vitality given in the descriptions of Nina's place of retreat is mirrored by her own personality, and the two are seen to merge. This bears a strong resemblance to Henri Bergson's conception of the subject-object relation and modes of perception.<sup>69</sup> A consequence of Bergson's sense of the interpenetration of mind with the world of objects is that the subject-object boundaries become blurred. On returning to the pure rivers and virgin mountains of the Welsh Marches Nina merges with her landscape as she assimilates its attributes: landscape and Nina become inextricably one. This fusion of the mind with the natural world recurs in Sinclair's fiction, most particularly, as I will later suggest, in The Three Sisters and 'The Flaw in the Crystal'.

Furthermore, as Nina becomes contained by the sense of place (a borderland) and hence effectively removed from time, she assumes an arrested or suspended image. Lothar Hönnighausen argues that a 'withdraw[al] from society and reality' is undertaken in response to the 'world of absolute temporality' that marks the decadent age.<sup>70</sup> Although she has negated becoming absorbed by the city and discovered the possibility of escape from such a life, it can be argued that in turn she is absorbed or contained by her rural setting.

Nina strips away the outer layers of her sexual, female self in order to reach what lies at her core, the single, undivided flame: 'virginity was the law' (C 307). Virginity keeps Nina pure for her creative drive; it is a state that does not allow anything to come between her and her desire to write. This is the inner state that Sinclair called upon for the artist to realise her ultimate reality. The language used to describe Nina in her

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<sup>69</sup> Sinclair's Bergsonian emphasis on subjectivity, flux and *durée* here is a reflection of her reading of the new scientific models of knowledge. Sinclair was fluent in French and could have easily read the first edition of L'évolution créatrice in 1907. See Patricia Waugh's article 'Beyond Mind and Matter' for the non-literary influences on the construction of Modernism.

<sup>70</sup> Lothar Hönnighausen, The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: A Study of Pre-Raphaelitism and Fin de Siècle, cond. and trans. Gisela Hönnighausen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 139.

stripped state is one of *jouissance* and celebration. Sinclair writes that Emily Brontë also had this 'ultimate vision' and that it was 'this superb attitude to life, this independence of the material event, this detachment from the stream of circumstance' (TB 170) that marked her as a supreme genius.

In Sinclair's depiction of Nina's stripped state to describe her inner reality, and in her writing on the Brontës, she alludes to nature as a transformative force. Both Nina and the Brontë sisters find a sense of empowerment against oppressive forces through the symbolic use of nature. In her introductions and biography to the Brontës, Sinclair depicts the sisters living in harmony with nature and the otherwise seemingly hostile moorland. Emily is described as being at her most free when out on the moors. Nature therefore has a nurturing role; it is a salve and a refuge. Nina, like the Brontës, is not confined to the closed, indoor existence where the patriarchal order must be obeyed.

Jane also feels that she must get away from the obstacles that the Brodrick family present and become reacquainted with herself:

[S]omething . . . announced itself as a wider and profounder instinct, an instinct of self-preservation, told her not to go. It told her to wait, to trust to Nature's way, and to Nature's wisdom in bringing back her youth. Nature's way was to weave over again the web of life so strained and worn, so tangled and broken by the impact of other lives. Nature's wisdom was to make her simple and strong, a new creature, with a clean vision and an imagination once more virgin to the world. In short, Nature's beneficent intention was to restore her whole to the genius which also had been a part of Nature's plan. (C 458-9)

Nature functions to purify Jane and returns her to her former, virginal self. Here the authorial voice intercedes, describing genius as part of the great scheme of things; Jane may be restored by nature if she submits herself to it. Kristeva refers to such a utopian

landscape as a place of refuge, symbolising a return to the maternal. This landscape provides an escape from the social order of paternalistic society. Rural settings and gardens in The Creators certainly offer respite, and nature is seen to be a salve to the modern, urban lifestyles. Rural idylls provide sanctuaries, or separate spheres, for the female artists away from society and sex.

In her city setting Nina is viewed as alien and strange.<sup>71</sup> She is repetitively characterised by Sinclair as ‘masculine’. While Nina uses her masculine temperament to give her the patriarchal right to roam at will, Jane is confined to the feminised sphere of the Brodrick household. However, Jane is frequently found within the setting of Brodrick’s garden. Like Nina’s Marches, the garden provides an atemporal sphere: it escaped modernity by being ‘at least a hundred years older’ than the house (C 153). Jane finds some measure of peace and tranquillity in the garden; it offers a respite from the divided life she experiences within the confines of the house. A garden is a representation of nature revised by culture; that is, it is an aestheticized site. Although the garden provides a locus of sensual beauty for Jane, its beauty is an artifice: it is only beautiful since it is maintained by Gertrude Collett. It is an illusion of paradise as it is nature subjected to human control. While Gertrude is in residence as housekeeper, the garden retains its pristine and cultivated state as she keeps the plants to their rightful place, training them to perfect order and propriety. However, when she leaves the household, they become over-luxuriant, proliferate and wild:

[Brodrick] paused and straightened a border, or propped some untended plant, top-heavy with bloom, or pinned back some wild arm of a climbing rose flung out to pluck at him as he went by. He could not but be aware that since Gertrude

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<sup>71</sup> Jane is also viewed as ‘alien’ by the Brodrick family; indeed she always feels an outsider and is never fully assimilated by the family.

Collett left there had been confusion and disorder in the place she had made perfect. (C 285)

Without the watchful eye of the resident caretaker, nature is left to run riot. This is in accord with the overall management of the Brodrick household. It runs smoothly only if kept under strict management and control. At first Brodrick is amused when he observes that Jane is unused to the domestic management of their home. She is unable to keep proper household accounts or keep the house in order. Yet, as she points out: “Gertrude . . . couldn’t do my work, and it’s been demonstrated that I can’t do hers. I don’t believe in turning people out of their heaven-appointed places and setting them down to each other’s jobs” (C 332). This gives voice to Sinclair’s personal ethos expressed in numerous places, both in her fiction and non-fiction, which refuses to categorise women into ‘one vast assumption: that there is an entity called Woman, unchangeable, indestructible, immanent in all women, in whom all women live and move and have their being, and through whom they are all indistinguishably the same.’<sup>72</sup>

Whereas Nina’s retreat is marked by its atemporality, Jane’s domestic life is measured out by the monotonous and regular chiming of the household clock. When Brodrick reprimands Jane for forgetting to wind the clock, Jane replies that she is happier when it is not wound. Jane, like Nina, is more comfortable living in time that is suspended and it is in the stillness of the garden that she experiences an epiphanic, mystical moment. When the clock stops chiming every quarter of the hour and the garden is held in an eternal moment of stillness, Jane is able to transgress temporal boundaries. The description of the garden takes on heightened proportions as Jane sits watching Brodrick tending to the plants:

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<sup>72</sup> Sinclair, ‘Women’s Suffrage,’ [1913], unpub. ts., fo. 452, box 24, UP.

The garden was *still*, with that *stillness* that earth takes at sunsets following hot days; *stillness* of grass-plots flooded by flat light; *stillness* of trees and flowers that stand *fixed*, held by the light, divinely vivid. Jane's vision had never been so radiant and so intense. (C 285; italics added)

At this fixed moment the garden provides the location for Jane's transcendental experience, her return to her former, unwedded self. It embodies the relationship between her repressive present and her momentary escape. Hönnighausen writes with respect to this dialectic that '[t]his particular experience of time results from the consciousness of living in a decadent age'.<sup>73</sup>

It has already been noted that Sinclair usefully employs the Bergsonian concern of the relation of consciousness with representation. In her philosophical works, Sinclair draws upon her knowledge of Bergson and her fascination with the fourth dimension to contemplate the correlatives of space and time, perception and memory. She writes in A Defence of Idealism (1917):

For it is true that in action, in life taken in the thick as it is lived, we *do* get a fusion of perception and of memory and interest and will, of time and space, in a continuity and oneness which knows nothing of the contradictions, the dilemmas, the presuppositions, the infinite dividings and limitings of the intellect. (DI 63)

Here, Sinclair is referring to the Bergsonian doctrine of the reality of the past. Bergson believed that within our psychical existence our whole past still exists. The sense in which memories survive might be that a past experience, apparently forgotten, should at some future time spring to mind and contribute to a perception. It is this 'fusion of perception and of memory . . . of time and space' that Sinclair refers to in her depiction

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<sup>73</sup> Hönnighausen, The Symbolist Tradition 139.

of Jane's flashback to her previous self. Although it is a memory, according to Bergson it is also psychically part of Jane as the self is constituted in fusion and continuity. The chiming of the clock which Jane comes to loathe marks this spurious, spatial time; it acts as an intrusion upon Jane's consciousness. Both Nina and Jane feel in touch with reality only when it is not marked by spurious time.

## **VI. The Female Artist and the Search for 'Adjustments and Solutions'**

Both Jane and Nina struggle to find an identity for themselves as artists in the world dictated by the codes of patriarchy. George Tanqueray is able to succeed as *both* a writer and a married man since the society he lives in allows him this as his right. Therefore, it is only in alternative locations and/or during suspended states of being that Nina and Jane are able to find freedom.

In The Creators Sinclair scrutinises the depiction and position of the female artist in contemporary society. It can be argued that The Creators acts as Sinclair's own testimonial to the demands of being a writer and becoming economically independent during the early part of the twentieth century. After its publication, an anonymous critic wrote to her: 'My view is with yours in so far as you believe the actual life of love and of home is incompatible with the life of work—that is if the work is to be great . . .'.<sup>74</sup> Clearly, the novel therefore records Sinclair's own difficulties as she came to terms with sacrificing aspects of her own private life to the demands of becoming one of the most popular writers in her era. A poignant letter to Thomas Hardy reflects upon the emptiness of her home life. This affirms that indeed it was not easy for Sinclair to reconcile herself to a solitary life, despite the fact she had just completed a novel

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<sup>74</sup> Anon., letter to Sinclair, 15 Jan. 1911, fol. 84, box 3, UP.

extolling the importance of celibacy as a desired state for the purpose of creativity: 'I haven't any one at home to say "It doesn't matter"'.<sup>75</sup>

Arlene Young argues that, while on one hand, values and assumptions in novels 'form an integral part of what purports to be an accurate reflection of the real world', on the other hand, the novel 'influences the attitudes and values of its readers most powerfully through the manipulation of cultural symbols'.<sup>76</sup> By focusing women's current social standing in The Creators—as female artists earning their own living—Sinclair thereby offers a self-conscious critique of society.

In Feminism, Sinclair argues that 'whether we like to admit it or not [there are] certain hard *sociological and economic facts*. . . . It is on the whole better for [women] and better for society that they should maintain themselves than that they should be ignobly or dishonourably dependent' (F 34; original italics). Sinclair writes, appraising the economic forces that operate against a woman:

Even now there are trades . . . where women [can] hold their own . . . In some trades where wages are now unequal . . . women would continue to hold their own because of their superior efficiency. And of course there is that precarious border line where, either through physical disability (*not necessarily arising from her sex*), or through individual inefficiency, woman keeps her footing only because of her low market-value. . . . Elsewhere there will be adjustments and solutions. (F 37-9; italics added)

Sinclair argues that 'adjustments and solutions' must be found in order for women to challenge the accepted patriarchal system of power. This takes literary representation in The Creators—she recognises that women require a different niche; juggling the

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<sup>75</sup> Sinclair, letter to Thomas Hardy, 31 Oct. 1910, Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection, Dorset County Museum.

<sup>76</sup> Young, Culture, Class, and Gender 3, 4.

demands of a family with the demands of a job is an impossibility, as Jane discovers. Instead, Sinclair argues, they must find a new psychological, sociological, and economic identity; a new place in which to find the self. In defining this dilemma through Jane, Sinclair shifts the personal into a political agenda:

She had so many balls to keep going. There was her novel; and there was Brodrick, and the baby, and Brodrick's family, and her own friends. She couldn't drop one of them.

. . . She was a fine juggler on her tight-rope, keeping in play her golden balls that multiplied till you could have sworn that she must have missed one.

. . . But now she was beginning to feel the trembling of the perfect balance. It was as if, in that marvellous adjustment of relations, she had arrived at the pitch where perfection topples over. She moved with tense nerves on the edge of peril. (C 342)

The metaphor of Jane as a juggler on a tight-rope highlights the precarious and controversial nature of her task. She recognises that the interstices of domestic life—marriage and motherhood—and arthood are threatened as she tries to maintain both ideals. Where Nina must sacrifice her womanly self in order to succeed as an artist, Jane must ultimately sacrifice her creative drive to save her marriage.

The external conflict between artistic production and family obligation is therefore narrated through the psyche of Jane. She is constantly torn between the two imperatives, leaving her feeling trapped and imprisoned by both, unable to escape the binary oppositions. The inconclusive ending perhaps offers a textual representation of Sinclair's own inability to offer a resolution. Showalter criticises the use of such a device, arguing that the female modernists 'created a deliberate female aesthetic, which

transformed the feminine code of self-sacrifice into an annihilation of the narrative self'.<sup>77</sup>

In The Creators Sinclair pays particular attention to the conditions under which men and women create, focusing on the external circumstances that make it far harder for women, psychologically and otherwise, to create than it is for men. By depicting parallel creative processes—that of George Tanqueray and the three women protagonists—Sinclair is able to compare and contrast men and women's very different circumstances and pressures. George Tanqueray's experience as a genius is offered as the conventional benchmark or foil against which the women's experiences are compared. This reaffirms her view, as expressed in her introduction to Elizabeth Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë, that it is impossible for women to relinquish their bonds of domesticity.

The Creators also reflects Sinclair's development towards the view that genius stems from the ability to sublimate, a theory that she most fervently believed as reflected in both her psychological fiction and non-fiction. In particular, as Sinclair's work on female artists show, including her introductions to the Brontë sisters, she places the intricacies of *female* genius under close scrutiny. Her concern is primarily that artists should properly utilise the positive powers associated with genius. Aware of the tension inherent in such an attribute, she exposes the risks inherent in its improper use. This is explored more fully in her collection of uncanny stories and, most particularly, in 'The Flaw in the Crystal'.

Sinclair reveals the artists' experience of reality as more intense than for others. In A Defence of Idealism she writes that they share this heightened sense of reality with other groups, such as lovers, heroes, philosophers, musicians, and mystics. Prothero realises his genius as a psychic energy that is a real part of himself. He offers his

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<sup>77</sup> Showalter, A Literature of Their Own 33.

interpretation of genius as a spiritual force that utilises the artist's body as a vehicle. Any attempt to subdue or overcome this temperament endangers the artist's self, possibly leading to degeneracy and neurosis. Sinclair is increasingly attracted to this theory during the development of her oeuvre. In Sinclair's depiction of the nature of genius, she exposes the way the unconscious influences behaviour, and reveals the negative aspects of repression. She treats, in its complexity, the psychological difficulties associated with genius, and considers the medical view, elaborated by Myers, as I have examined. However, Sinclair, like Myers, the Society for Psychical Research, and, subsequently, Jung, illustrates that creativity as a natural activity transcends this paradigm.

However, Jane does not accept this innate sense of her genius, and tries to subdue or fight it when she realises that it is causing a rift in her marriage. As I have explained, genius is therefore also circumscribed by gender. Each artist undergoes a different experience of their genius nature according to how they position themselves within the gendered world. In protagonists such as the androgynous Nina and the camp, would-be poet Nicky, Sinclair comments on the fluid, porous nature of gender boundaries. Genius is traditionally associated with masculine qualities and to be successful Nina feels she must assume the mantle of masculinity to achieve this.<sup>78</sup> In other words, Nina (and Sinclair?) believes she would fail as an artist in her feminine, sexual self. She does not allow herself to write as a woman.

Nina's conscious wish to repress her sexual desire and sublimate her libido in her creativity reflects Sinclair's belief that to be a true artist the Life-Force must be channelled. In Feminism she writes:

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<sup>78</sup> Hurley writes: 'The female genius is even more rare than the female born criminal, but she is equally anomalous, and equally unfeminine.' She refers to Lombroso: 'woman of genius are rare exceptions in the world . . . Even the few who emerge have something virile about them. As Goncourt said, there are no women of genius; the women of genius are all men'. See Hurley, The Gothic Body 183-4 n.17.

What I venture to dispute is the conclusion that for a woman there is only one kind of alternative between frustration and fulfilment of the Life-Force, and that is—hysteria, neurosis and the detestable manifestations of degeneracy. I dispute it without for one moment blinking the frightful possibilities of the celibate and solitary life.

For the Life-Force, like any other force when the channel is obstructed, will, of course, seek another; and it will tend to discharge itself along some line of least resistance. With your degenerate the line of least resistance may be the path of perdition. But with the normal, healthy human being, capable of control, may it not be transformed, transmuted, merged with certain increased energies of the body and the brain? In the artist, the enthusiast, the visionary . . . may it not be transformed and transmuted into still higher and subtler energies? (F 30-1)

In her aesthetics Sinclair constantly expresses the imperative for ‘transformation’ or sublimation. As shown in the extract above, she believes that sexual energy should be ‘transmuted’ into a ‘higher and subtler’ energy. For Sinclair, sexual energy inhibits and drains the creative drive. It is a detrimental force for the female artist, as Jane is aware. She realises that her genius requires complete submission to its will, and her other desires must lie subordinate to it:

She had discovered the secret and rhythm of its life. It was subject to the law of the supersensible. To love anything more than this was to lose it. You had to come to it clean from all desire, naked of all possession. . . . For the divine thing fed on suffering, on poverty, solitude, frustration. It took toll of the blood and nerves and of the splendour of the passions. . . . It rewarded supremely the supreme surrender. (C 116-17)

Similarly, Sinclair argues that Charlotte Brontë underwent a similar sacrifice for her art. In her biography, she describes how Charlotte told Ellen Nussey: ‘ “The right path is that which necessitates the greatest sacrifice” ’ (TB 85). It is from this idea of ‘surrender’ and ‘sacrifice’ that Sinclair began to formulate her theory of sublimation in the artist; this is most vividly revealed in her uncanny stories (see Chapter 6).

In The Creators, Nina embodies conflict between the artist and the woman that Sinclair, like Woolf after her, attempts to settle in the context of androgyny. For Nina to succeed as an artist, she must confront ‘the frightful possibilities of the celibate and solitary life’ as she assumes the mantle of masculinity. Nina herself gives voice to this dualism, saying that the masculine imperative drives her on, while her womanly nature is ‘the victim of the Will-to-do-things’ (C 105). In her portrayal of this female artist, Sinclair argues that these attributes cannot compete with each other; one must be sublimated to the other.

## Chapter 3

### ‘[I]t is Always the Inner Life that Counts’: Charting the Landscape of The Three Sisters

#### I. Introduction: ‘Waiting for Something to Happen’

In the previous chapter I examined Sinclair’s depiction of the position of women in a patriarchal system of power, and highlighted Sinclair’s attempts to find personal freedom for her female protagonists within such a society. I argued that it was only during moments of retreat, where nature is seen as an uplifting and salvific force, that Sinclair’s women experience any sense of selfhood. In The Three Sisters (1914) the setting for the women is far removed from the urban, competitive, modern lifestyles depicted in The Creators, and most particularly focuses on a landscape where nature offers an unchanging and everlasting presence.<sup>1</sup> Yet the world that the three sisters occupy is still inscribed by gender politics, and the novel portrays the difficulties each sister must contend with in order to overcome the twin, and inter-related, contemporary debates on psychology and sexuality. By turning her attention inwards, Sinclair seeks to represent female internal reality in order to highlight different female responses to the same repressive family experience.

The Three Sisters thus continues and reflects a strengthening of Sinclair’s interest in the role of the female in society and her search for autonomy—both of which Sinclair explores through psychoanalytic interpretation. Sinclair charts the various manifestations of sexual desire, the unconscious, repression, and sublimation exhibited by Mary, Gwendolyn and Alice—all of which are a continuation of the themes

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<sup>1</sup> For Sinclair, as for Emily Brontë, Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, the setting is so much more than a mere backdrop.

examined in Chapter 2. Maggie Humm argues that psychoanalytic criticism ‘offer[s] a reading of the feminine rooted neither *entirely* in the social construction of femininity (which nevertheless organizes the feminine) nor *entirely* in biology, but in language and subjectivity.’<sup>2</sup> This definition is useful to bear in mind while undertaking an analysis of The Three Sisters, as each facet resonates in the novel.

While writing The Three Sisters, Sinclair became engaged with the founding of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, and started paying close attention to the works of contemporary psychologists.<sup>3</sup> She later declared in a letter that she had begun to study psychoanalysis in 1913 or 1914.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, 1913 marks a pivotal year for the reception of psychoanalysis in Britain as it heralded the first English translation of one of Freud’s works, The Interpretation of Dreams, bringing Freud and psychoanalysis to a wider audience.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, Sinclair’s writing from this time demonstrates both a familiarity and an application of the works of Freud, Jung, Janet, Adler, Abraham, and McDougall,

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<sup>2</sup> Maggie Humm, Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1986) 72.

<sup>3</sup> Part of Sinclair’s manuscript for The Three Sisters contains rough notes detailing the layout of a room in the Clinic and names Dr Jessie Murray as chairwoman. See fo. 97, box 4, UP [1913].

<sup>4</sup> Sinclair, letter to Reinald Hoops, 1932. Qtd. in Hrisey D. Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne English Author Ser. 192 (Boston: Twayne, 1976) 58.

<sup>5</sup> However, Freud’s work *was* available in Britain, in their original German editions, by 1905. See Dean Rapp, ‘The Early Discovery of Freud by the British General Educated Public, 1912-1919,’ Social History of Medicine 3 (1990): 217-43. 219. We know that Sinclair was fluent in German from the nature of her translation work in the 1890s. See Suzanne Raitt, May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 64, 81-2. Additionally, Sinclair’s workbooks give evidence of translations and notes from the German editions of Freud’s works. For example, she makes notes from Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie, highlighting areas of Freud’s theory on childhood sexuality and the relation of repression to later psychic powers. See workbook 43, box 41, UP. One of the boxes in the UP archive contains a collection of articles from The Alienist and Neurologist between 1909 and 1910, implying Sinclair’s interest in psychological theory before her alleged date of c.1913. Certain passages that deal with adolescent sexual development are highlighted and amended in Sinclair’s handwriting. For example, one passage marked with a tick states ‘Sex asserts its mastery in field after field, and works its havoc in the form of secretive, debauch, disease and enfeebled heredity, cadences the soul to both its normal and abnormal rhythms’. Another marked section looks at ‘the birthday of the imagination’, and notes that ‘nothing is real, but thought, feeling and sensation, and thus he may become an adept in the occultism of epistemology if not solipsism; or . . . wonder if he really lives, who he is and where, and if the actual world is really real.’ See fo. 504, box 47, UP.

among others. Therefore, The Three Sisters reads as an important novel in Sinclair's oeuvre as she embraces both the use of explicit psychoanalytical references and the use of a Modernist style in which to express them.

As Sinclair later expresses in her *Clinical Lectures* (1916), she found congenial for expression in her art the importance of a psychoanalytical view of sex and the sexual libido:

Wherever [symbols] appear they stand for the sexual libido, and their ritualistic intention represents man's primitive and incomplete effort at Sublimation—the conscious direction of the libido into higher channels. . . . [The sexual libido] chooses its own symbols, saturates them with its own emotion and so fixes them. It is the stuff our dreams, our visions and waking, undirected phantasies are made of. Their apparently fortuitous appearance is one of the most absolutely determined things we know.<sup>6</sup>

The landscape of Morfe is hugely significant for Gwenda: it is invested symbolically with her sexual libido and, as I will examine, it is in her restless crossing of the moors that she attempts to confront her sexual identity and reconcile her desire for autonomy. This reflects Sinclair's assimilation of Jungian theory by the time she had embarked on writing The Three Sisters. In the character of Gwenda in particular, she applies his use of archetypal symbols for the sexual libido, and, together with William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), demonstrates her awareness of psychologists' association between religion and sexuality.

The fundamental feature of The Three Sisters is the belief that sexual instincts lie at the root of determining the sisters' lives, and the consequences of repression are

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<sup>6</sup> May Sinclair, 'Clinical Lecture: Symbolism and Sublimation I,' The Medical Press and Circular (9 Aug. 1916): 118-22. 118.

pervasive and damaging. Sinclair pays particular attention in this novel to the internal reality of the characters' psychology and it is indicative that psychosomatic flaws mark every one of the major protagonists.<sup>7</sup> Jane Eldridge Miller contends that this 'shift in emphasis from the public to the private, and from action to consciousness,' anticipates the work of Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf; while neither Sinclair nor Woolf characterised this 'new kind of novel of consciousness as a particularly feminine mode . . . it was nevertheless uniquely suited for depicting those whose inner life dominates the outer'.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Penny Brown explains that the 'crises resulting from a clash between the inner self and the identity imposed by society are a major theme [in female novels of self-development] and despite refusal and rebellion often find resolution only in withdrawal or bitter capitulation, or more drastically, in madness or death.'<sup>9</sup>

Externally, the lives of the sisters are extremely ordinary, mundane, and unremarkable in which nothing happens; thereby anticipating Sinclair's description of Dorothy Richardson's fictional world in The Pilgrimage narrative: 'there is no drama, no situation, no set scene. Nothing happens. It is just life going on and on.'<sup>10</sup> The Three Sisters introduces the girls 'doing nothing . . . [T]hey seemed to be waiting for something to happen'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in The Three Brontës, published two years earlier, Sinclair also refers to the monotony of the passing of linear time: 'Day after day, year

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<sup>7</sup> While my focus is on the psychology of the female protagonists, others have argued that Sinclair's tradition in philosophical idealism is also evident in The Three Sisters. See, for example, Hrisey D. Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne English Author Ser. 192 (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> Jane Eldridge Miller, Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel (London: Virago, 1994) 195.

<sup>9</sup> Penny Brown, The Poison at the Source: The Female Novel of Self-Development in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: St Martin's P, 1992) 7.

<sup>10</sup> Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson,' Egoist 5 (Apr. 1918): 57-9. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Sinclair, The Three Sisters (1914. London: Virago, 1982) 3.

after year passed, and nothing happened'.<sup>12</sup> She elaborates upon such an existence led by the Brontë sisters in the biography:

An outer life of a strange and almost oppressive simplicity and silence; and an inner life, tumultuous and profound in suffering, a life to all appearances frustrate, where all nourishment of the emotions was reduced to the barest allowance a woman's heart can depend on and yet live; and none the less a life that out of that starvation diet raised enough of rich and vivid and superb emotion to decorate a hundred women's lives . . . for which no reality, no experience, could touch its own intensity of realization. (TB 166)

Such a life captured Sinclair's imagination for the stark world inhabited by the Brontës also provides the setting for The Three Sisters; a world that is both physically and emotionally barren. The 'starvation diet' referred to above is used with great effect in The Three Sisters. The three women all look to Dr Steven Rowcliffe for the promise of release from their repressive, captive lives in the Vicarage, and the dramatic incidents of the plot are generated by the way each sister attempts to gain his attention. Steven's presence arouses their latent, secret sexuality: 'It quivered like a hunting thing on the leash' (TS 9).

The Three Brontës therefore provides a key text to examine alongside The Three Sisters. It offers a further perspective on the conditions of narrow, restrictive and emotional paucity of lives lived by the women, yet also emphasises Sinclair's celebration of the richness they found in their inner lives. Indeed, Sinclair writes that she was so inspired by the Brontës' lives and their achievements that she has 'never been able to get away' from them (TB 236).

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<sup>12</sup> Sinclair, The Three Brontës, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1912. London: Hutchinson, 1914) 25.

However, as Suzanne Raitt points out, there is a fundamental difference between the lives of the Brontës and the female protagonists in The Creators, and the lives of the Cartaret girls in The Three Sisters. Whereas the former are able to find expression for their repressed lives in their artistry, and are all described as geniuses, the Cartaret sisters are ordinary women, living a humble and mundane existence.<sup>13</sup> In Chapter 2 I examined in particular the conditions under which women of genius are able to create; here I look at Sinclair's portrayal of women who do not have an artistic outlet but who also need to negotiate certain patriarchal ideological conditions if they wish to break free of their bonds of repression and live true to their inner selves.

## **II. The Rule of the Father: Tyranny and Sexuality**

The Three Sisters is significant in that it depicts absent mothers and a domineering, tyrannical father. The symbolic role of the latter has a crucial function in the repression of the sisters' sexual development and expression. Fathers in Sinclair's novels are consistently marginalized or portrayed in a negative light. In Mary Olivier Mary remains antagonistic toward her father who rules by tyrannizing his family but later evolves into the shadowy, shambling pathetic figure of an alcoholic. In The Three Sisters, Mr Cartaret too follows the Jungian principle in that the father figure is an image of power representing the logos. Sinclair pays particular attention to presenting his conscious and subconscious drives, using strong instances of symbolism to highlight his own repressed nature. His image reflects the problem of reconciling opposite characteristics, and can be read as Jung's archetypal father. On one hand, as 'the Vicar', his function is to

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<sup>13</sup> See Suzanne Raitt, May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 140.

oppose instinctual behaviour, and is the symbol of purity and sexual repression. Jung writes:

The father represents the world of moral commands and prohibitions . . . [He] is the representative of the spirit, whose function it is to oppose pure instinctuality. That is his archetypal role, which falls to him regardless of his personal qualities; hence he is very often an object of neurotic fears.<sup>14</sup>

On the other, barely able to conceal his own sexual instinct, the father 'is the devil[,] the symbol of sexual lust.'<sup>15</sup> Jung explains that the dualism within the father-*imago* has a great influence and compulsion over the psychic life of the child; indeed, it can 'also cause the same unconsciousness in the child so that it succumbs to the influence from outside and at the same time cannot oppose it from within.'<sup>16</sup>

Mr Cartaret behaves tyrannically and obsessively over his daughters in a manner that approaches the hysterical, reflecting his own fear of the unruly, ungovernable nature of sexuality. As Michel Foucault argues in The History of Sexuality, men project onto women all that is frightening and repulsive about physical bodies, and the construction of hysteria as a female disease was an expression of the need to keep masculinity free from corruption.<sup>17</sup> It follows that the focus of masculine scrutiny over the sexual health

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, Symbols of Transformation (London: Routledge, 1956) 260-1. Vol. 5 of The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. 20 vols., 1953-91.

<sup>15</sup> Jung, Freud and Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1961) 321 n.22. Vol. 4 of The Collected Works of C. G. Jung.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 316. Furthermore, Jung explains that the 'demonic power' of the father controls 'mortal destiny', resulting in 'melancholy, silent tragedies working themselves out, slowly and surly in the sick souls of our neurotics. . . . [T]he clutches of the demon . . . drives his unsuspecting victims from one cruel fatality to another; others rise up and win to freedom only to be dragged back later to the old paths, caught in the noose of the neurosis.' See Jung, vol. 4. 314. Therefore, implicated in this idea is the trap of destiny. Gwenda, Alice and Mary are each chained by these backward forces. This idea is explored in more detail in my Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, trans. R. Hurley, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 146-47.

of a woman's body, disavowing the man's own connection with the physical, itself becomes a site of hysterical attention.

The Vicar is portrayed as a man tormented by his sexuality which he does his best to mask, although this is not entirely successful: 'The Vicar's face had a subtle quality of deception . . . it appear[ed], at a little distance, the face of an ascetic. . . . [T]he half hidden lines of the mouth revealed its profound and secret sensuality' (TS 17).

Likewise, his study is depicted as a façade—the books are arranged on the shelves with the intent to deceive and mask his real taste:

[The] book-lined walls *advertised* him as the scholarly recluse that he was not.

He had an *eye to this effect*. He had placed in prominent positions the books that he had inherited from his father . . . The Vicar had carried the *illusion of scholarship* so far as to hide his Aristophanes behind a little curtain, as if it contained for him an iniquitous temptation. Of his own accord and with a deliberate intention to deceive, he had added the Early Fathers, Tillotsen's *Sermons* and Farrar's *Life of Christ*. (TS 17, 18; italics added).<sup>18</sup>

The words I have highlighted emphasise the extent of the fabrication the Vicar cultivates in order to carefully maintain his social exterior. He attempts to separate his true self from his appearance. Yet from the study emanates a strong odour, as if he has marked out his terrain, leaving no doubt to his masculinity.

After his third wife flees from his tyrannical rule to live in London, he is forced to repress his own sexual inclinations into 'a celibacy for which . . . he was utterly

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<sup>18</sup> On a less conspicuous shelf, the Vicar also has the novels of Marie Corelli. Corelli was a popular romance novelist, thus perhaps demonstrating the Vicar's sensual side. Additionally, Corelli criticised the suffrage movement and in 1907 was moved to write an anti-suffrage pamphlet, *Woman or Suffragette: A Question of Rational Choice*. Here, she condemned the 'loose conduct and coarse speech' of the suffragettes and warned of the dangers of women giving up 'the birthright of their simple *womanliness*.' Qtd. in George Bullock, *Marie Corelli: The Life and Death of a Best-Seller* (London: Constable, 1940) 223.

unsuited' (TS 21). While suppressing his own frustrations he belligerently 'stamp[s] on other people's passions' (TS 57). In the novel this is shown as his main obsession: he zealously curtails his daughters' expressions of their emotional drives, and the setting of the narrative dramatizes the extent he is prepared to go, transferring them from a comfortable seaside town to the barren, hostile village that is bereft of any life-enriching opportunities. Over the years, Mr Cartaret becomes blind both to the instincts of those around him and to his own nature: 'He had posed for more than thirty years to his parish, to his three wives, to his children and to himself, till he had become unconscious of his real thoughts, his real motives, his real likings and dislikings' (TS 21).

Although the Vicar attempts to control both his daughters and himself through the Victorian tradition of patriarchal repression, half way through the novel he becomes powerless. He has a stroke that is instigated by the shock of learning of Alice's sexual liaison and ensuing pregnancy with Jim Greatorex. The Vicar's breakdown is psychosomatic, mirroring Alice's earlier in the novel. His stroke erases all memory of the scandal that induced it and he is left enfeebled and docile, regressing into a state of child-like dependency:

Nothing was left of Ally's tyrant and Robin's victim, the middle-aged celibate, filled with the fury of frustration and profoundly sorry for himself. His place was taken by a gentle old man, an old man of an appealing and child-like innocence, pure from all lust, from all self-pity, enjoying, actually enjoying, the consideration that his stroke had brought him. (TS 297)

Alice's response to her father is to repress her true, inner self. However, as the novel unfolds, the effects and manifestations of Alice's repression are made apparent in the portrayal of her breakdown as a psychoanalytic case study. While treating Alice, Steven

is seen to be reading Pierre Janet's État mental des hystériques, published in 1893, although his response is not entirely sympathetic: 'He picked [the book] up and flung it out of sight as if it had offended him' (TS 178). Janet believed that hysteria was predominantly a result of pathological heredity and was associated with a dual personality. He also subscribed to the belief that hysterics are weak-minded, referring to them at times as degenerates. Janet's ideas about the dissociation of personality greatly influenced Myers, McDougall and Jung—all of whom were significant influences on Sinclair's thinking. Janet's name is included in her list of prominent psychologists in her handwritten draft of the first brochure for the Medico-Psychological Clinic.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Janet had trained her friend, Dr Jessie Margaret Murray, co-founder and director of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. The subjects Janet was teaching between 1902 and 1912 were: the comparison of normal and morbid emotions; consciousness; hysteria and psychasthenia; psychotherapy; the psychology of tendencies; perception and social tendencies.<sup>20</sup>

Steven's diagnosis and prognosis of Alice's hysteria shows that Sinclair follows a rather more orthodox Freudian paradigm; in this novel she depicts it predominantly as a defense mechanism caused by sexual repression. This highlights the rivalry of opinion between Janet and Freud that followed the publication of Freud and Breuer's Studies of Hysteria in 1895 which emphasises the sexual aetiology of hysteria and other neuroses.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Later, Sinclair discusses Janet's theories in her Clinical Lectures in 1916.

<sup>20</sup> See Henri Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry (New York: Basic Books, 1970) 343.

<sup>21</sup> Janet attacked Freud's theories at the International Congress of Medicine held in London in August 1913. In particular, he criticised Freud's sexual origin of neurosis, believing that hysteria belonged to a wider group of mental repressions. See Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious 344.

In The Three Sisters Sinclair follows the line of sexual causality for the root of Alice's illness, and this is further emphasised by the depiction of Alice's hysteria in language which bears the influence of the sexologist Havelock Ellis. In his discussion of hysteria in volume one of Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1905), Ellis writes that hysteria is often found in people with anaemic conditions; it can be cured by marriage; it tends to appear among young adults; and it is caused by sexual starvation: 'The condition of true hysteria is thus linked . . . to a condition which may be described as one of sex-hunger. . . . Hysteria is . . . frequently associated with anæmic conditions'.<sup>22</sup> Alice's condition is explained to Gwenda by the ever insightful Dr Rowcliffe as caused by 'starvation': ' "[S]he *will* go out of her mind if she's kept shut up in that old Vicarage much longer. And that she'd be all right—perfectly all right—if she was married. . . . [S]he'd be as strong as iron if she was married and had children" ' (TS 181). Alice's problem is that she is sexually repressed. In The Three Sisters Sinclair reflects upon the consequence of repressing this natural instinct as damaging and pervasive for some women.

Alice epitomises at once the pattern of instability inherent in the nineteenth-century's discourse on feminine sexuality which, as Foucault argues in The History of Sexuality, depended on the 'hysterization of women's bodies' and the resulting bipolar idea of woman as either a wholesome 'Mother' or her negative image of 'nervous woman'.<sup>23</sup> Alice, when she finds a way to realise her natural drives, is seen to successfully turn from the latter into the former. Alice's licentious desires lead to premarital sex with Jim, resulting in pregnancy. After her marriage to Jim she bears

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<sup>22</sup> Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol. 1 (1905. New York: Random House, 1936) 232-233. See also 218, 234.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, History of Sexuality 104.

numerous healthy children and sits among the 'happy din' of her family, 'plump and pink . . . smiling, tranquil among the cries of her offspring' (TS 362).

However, this is not a happy, satisfactory conclusion since Alice and her family remain isolated on the farm and excluded from the rest of society. Even Mary refuses to allow her children to visit the Greatorexes'. Alice has transgressed class barriers and has married beneath her; therefore, her isolation suggests an eugenic subtext. In the Victorian era, as Foucault explains, there was a real fear of contamination as a result of cross-class marriages and in the offspring inheriting bad blood.<sup>24</sup> Alice is aware of the step she has taken in marrying Jim and—in a manner that later comes to mark D. H. Lawrence's work—in her adoration of the man, there is also a real tangible sense of fear: 'her fear of the savage, violent and repulsive elements in the man who was her god; her fear of her own repulsion; the tremor of her recoiling nerves; premonitions of her alien blood, the vague melancholy of her secret motherhood' (TS 290). The ambiguous language reveals that she remains caught by the paradox of patriarchal, Victorian discourse on femininity with that of her own quest for self-definition and validation as a woman with a sexual identity.

Charlotte Brontë's heroines also openly voice their sexual yearnings only to be overcome with shame for their unfeminine behaviour. For example, Jane Eyre uses the metaphor of a monstrous motherhood to describe the product of her sexual urges: her desires are a 'new-born agony—a deformed thing' which she must 'strangle'.<sup>25</sup> However, as Sally Shuttleworth describes, Jane must veil these thoughts as Victorian

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 148-9.

<sup>25</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (1847. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 244.

femininity was 'predicated on a condition of concealment, on a disjunction between surface control and inner sexuality.'<sup>26</sup>

While Alice's psychological response to the repressive tyranny exerted by their father manifests itself in a psychosomatic illness, Mary's response is to assume her own mask, learnt from her father, under which she conceals her duplicitous nature. She too develops a habit of posturing and perfects it to such an extent that she loses all sense of self. She practises the art of being the angel in the house and appears to be nothing other than the good, wifely woman. In Way Stations (1913), Elizabeth Robins insists that woman's 'instinct for the mask', the false 'role' of femininity women frequently assume, must be discarded.<sup>27</sup> Later, Joan Riviere puts forward a similar argument in 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929). Riviere suggests that such a woman finds safety by *masquerading as guiltless and innocent*, and that her womanliness is assumed as a mask to prevent reprisals if her true self is uncovered.<sup>28</sup>

Like Gertrude Collett in The Creators, Mary is another of Sinclair's villainous female figures: by using her feminine charm she undermines Gwenda's sacrificial act and traps Steven into marriage. However, as Miller notes, their marriage is a superficial, conventional one. Mary 'staves off healthy change . . . and dull[s] men into stupor through her domestic entrapment.'<sup>29</sup> Therefore, marriage to Mary does not allow either professional or personal development for Steven as he succumbs to a life of physical and emotional ease, relinquishing his plans to become a doctor on the cutting edge of

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<sup>26</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Lit. and Culture 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 72.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Robins, 'Woman's Secret.' Way Stations (London: Hodder, 1913) 1-17. 7.

<sup>28</sup> See Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade.' 1929. Athol Hughes, ed., The Inner World of Joan Riviere: Collected Papers 1920-1958 (London: Karnac, 1991) 90-101.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, Rebel Women 197.

medicine. Dr Rowcliffe's thwarted ambition has a precursor in another literary doctor, Mr Lydgate, in George Eliot's Middlemarch. Mr Lydgate had high ideals to achieve in medicine: 'to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world.'<sup>30</sup> However, his plans too fall by the wayside as he becomes dragged down by a frivolous woman.

### **III. 'Nothing was Hidden, Nothing Veiled': Surveillance and Woman (as the Mirror Image)**

All domestic activity in the Vicarage is carried under the watchful, all-seeing eyes of the Vicar. The oppressive set-up of the household is described through the consciousness of Alice:

[The house] was so built that there was not a corner of it where you could get away from Papa. His study had one door opening into the passage and one into the dining-room. The window where he sat raked the garden on the far side. The window of his bedroom raked the front; its door commanded the stairhead. He was aware of everything you did, of everything you did not do. (TS 12)

As the consciousness of Alice continues, she reflects on the house's claustrophobic nature and feels that her father is even aware of her breathing. This gives rise to the contemporary idea, explored in more detail in Chapter 6, of the violation of psychical boundaries—that the Vicar invades her innermost personal space. Enclosed boundaries might constitute the parameters of the self or the general delimiting contours of human life.

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<sup>30</sup> George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. W. J. Harvey (1871-2. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 178.

Through Sinclair's depiction of the Vicar's insistent observation over the sisters' lives, Sinclair anticipates Foucault's theories on the repressive system of permanent surveillance. This was inherited by the Victorians from eighteenth-century institutional regimes such as prisons, factories, schools and hospitals. The distillation of the disciplinary techniques they employed is found in Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a circular architectural structure in which a central viewing tower ensures permanent visibility over the rest of the building, thus enabling the function of power. Foucault refers to this panoptic principle and the theme of discipline in both The Birth of the Clinic and in Discipline and Punish. Foucault argues against a literal reading of the solidarity of the walls of the penal institutions, and instead emphasises their transparency. The authority of the panopticon society can be felt everywhere: 'This Panopticon . . . has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.'<sup>31</sup> The panopticon, whose themes are 'at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency',<sup>32</sup> is not only a model prison but also a model for the origin of institutional discipline. It therefore gives way to the Victorian representation of interiority and social space. The Vicarage in The Three Sisters is organized around such an understanding.

The Vicar is preoccupied by his fears of losing control over his family. He likes to think that his 'inflexible authority and will' rule his household (TS 133). This is given forceful expression in the ritual of family prayers. He finds pleasure in the clockwork regularity of the prayer hour (in direct contrast to Jane Brodrick in The Creators who

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<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977) 207.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 249.

hates the marking out of her life by the regular chiming of the household clock), believing that its custom is an 'expression of his power' (TS 133). However, the narrator describes it as a 'performance' which begins with 'a look through his glasses, levelled at each member of his household in turn, as if he desires to satisfy himself as to the expression of their faces' (TS 133-34). However, when he turns to read the chapter on sin from the Bible his glance becomes 'uneasy' and he feels better 'when they were all kneeling, for now he had their backs toward him instead of their faces' (TS 135). The Vicar is unable to meet his family's eyes for he is conscious of himself as an 'enforced, reluctant celibate' (TS 136). Although his prayer hour is a mere social performance it is one that must be rigorously upheld as it maintains the surface control over the distinction between social restraint and sexual licence. It depends on him to redirect his psychic energy into a clearly defined social channel. The Vicar's preoccupation with the maintenance of control is behind his desire to place Alice under 'restraint' during her hysterical illness, thereby attempting to suppress her psychic energies. Steven is aware of the Vicar's motive: ' "He talks about her controlling herself" '(TS 181).

The Vicar's control over his family in the Vicarage is not the only regime subjected to surveillance. Steven, as Dr Rowcliffe, projects a medical system of surveillance: by examining the countenances of the sisters, he 'reads' their bodies to decipher their inner selves. While the Vicar's surveillance is a form of control, Steven's is an attempt to decode. As he surveys Alice in his doctor's guise, he undergoes a physical transformation, growing in stature to adopt the authority of a medical doctor:

All of a sudden he had become taller (much taller than he really was) and rigid and austere. His youth and its charm dropped clean away from him. He looked ten years older than he had been ten minutes ago. Compared with him, as he stood beside her bed, Ally looked more than ever like a small child, a child

vibrating with shyness and fear, a child that implacable adult authority has found out in foolishness and naughtiness; so evident was it to Ally that to Rowcliffe nothing was hidden, nothing veiled. (TS 72)

While Steven seems to grow, Ally shrinks into a child-like state of vulnerability, aware that his scrutiny will unveil her hidden self, her sexual nature. Ally knows that she 'can conceal nothing' from him (TS 72). As Steven 'look[s] down at her' he tells her that it is evident what is wrong with her (TS 74). In his role as a doctor, Steven possesses the tools to uncover the mind's secrets. In a later novel, The Romantic (1920), Sinclair makes an explicit reference to Dr Donald McClane, specifically a psychotherapist, who can 'see everything going on inside people . . . he wouldn't miss anything.'<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in Charlotte Brontë's Villette (1853), Dr Bretton is confident of his skills as a man of medical science and directs his authoritative gaze onto Lucy Snowe: ' "I look on you now from a professional point of view, and I read, perhaps, all you would conceal." '<sup>34</sup> Dr Bretton reads Lucy in an attempt to unveil her and penetrate the truth of her inner state from outward signs.

The gaze of the doctor, as Foucault suggests, is not of passive observation but of active agency to free an 'implicit structure'.<sup>35</sup> This epistemological framework is discerned in Sinclair's fiction. Steven does not merely read the secrets of Alice's inner self; he is the active agent through which the 'implicit structure' outside her grasp may be released. His gaze reads the signs of her body and detects the origins of her hysteria.

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<sup>33</sup> Sinclair, The Romantic (New York: Macmillan, 1920) 88.

<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Villette, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Lane (1853. Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 355.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1973) 120.

By suggestion, he frees her sexual attachment from himself and transfers it to Jim Greator, thereby facilitating a successful union.

The power dynamics implicit in this interchange occur not only between Steven and Alice, but also between Steven and Gwenda. While walking on the moors, Steven and Gwenda engage in a long, drawn out erotic power struggle, based on Steven's attempt to read Gwenda phrenologically. However, Gwenda, unlike Alice, resists interpretation. She does not allow Steven to penetrate her mind and thus achieves a sense of autonomy by her power to withhold: Gwenda's 'joy was pure and profound and sufficient to itself.' Steven finds something 'inimical' in her absorption that is separate from him and is no longer so 'sure' of her (TS 156-7). However, the novel closes with Gwenda's despondency that Steven ultimately refuses to read her in order to gain insight to her inner unhappiness. At this point, Gwenda experiences disempowerment and a disenchantment of self: 'Her eyes implored him . . . in the gaze there was the passion of entreaty . . . [b]ut Rowcliffe did not see it' (TS 385).

I have already described the idea of physical and social spaces being subjected to control. Mary is guilty of transgressing both physical and psychical boundaries. When up in the attic, she notices a draught but does not move to close the window for '[t]o have interfered with the attic window would have been a breach of compact, an unholy invasion of her sister's rights' (TS 70). Gwenda has a corner of the attic turned over for her sole purpose, albeit typically in 'the smallest, the coldest, the darkest and most thoroughly uncomfortable room in the house' (TS 71). It is a space that nobody else wanted and, like the moors, Gwenda appropriates it for her own. Yet respecting this physical space is a mere token for Mary later invades and violates the psychical space between Gwenda and Steven.

While in the attic Mary carefully locks away her summer clothes, an act invested with symbolism. Her clothes are 'poor, pretty things that she has hardly ever worn. They hung all limp, all abashed and broken in her hands as if aware of their futility' (TS 69). Hanging empty, they bear only the resemblance to the womanhood they cover. Devoid of the living, feeling, thinking, woman's body, they are futile and unfit. Mary feels remorse for them for '[a]fter all, they had been part of herself, part of her throbbing, sensuous womanhood, warmed once by her body' (TS 69). She closes them up in a trunk and buries them from sight. Similarly, like her sisters, she too must close and bury from sight her 'sensuous womanhood' although, unlike her dresses, she 'knew that there was no futility or unfitness in her' (TS 70) and she bides her time to use her womanly charms to ensnare Steven.

Alice also uses clothes and her physical charms as part of her campaign to captivate Steven. In addition, she invests her sexual libido in her specular image. When Alice surveys herself in the mirror, her prettiness is a 'delicious, intoxicating joy' to her (TS 87). Her recognition of herself is joyous as she sees in the mirror reflection an image more perfect than the one she experiences of her own body. This is the ideal ego that she believes others (the male onlookers) will identify with. As she turns to self-examination in her father's looking-glass, she is seeking to affirm in her reflection the vision of a female seductress:

She was turning slowly round and round, with her head tilted back over her left shoulder; she had just caught sight of her little white nose as it appeared in a vanishing profile, and was adjusting her head at another and still more interesting angle when the Vicar caught her. . . . [I]f Ally had not been blinded and intoxicated with her own beauty she would have seen him before she began smiling, full-face first, then three-quarters, then sideways, a little tilted. (TS 88)



This scene strongly anticipates Jacques Lacan's account of the mirror stage which marks the child's earliest entry into social life. In Lacanian theory, the specular image initiates the child into the two-person structure of imaginary identifications, orienting it forever towards identification with and a dependence on human images and representations for its form and outline. From the scene given above, Alice reflects an ego in which the self is dominated by images of the other and seeks her identity in a reflected other. Sinclair shows that Alice gives libidinal investment to her own specular image.<sup>36</sup> Alice also realises her position as a sexualised object to male attention: the men will do the looking—a controlling, inquisitive, and subjecting gaze.<sup>37</sup> Alice thereby fulfils the conventional role for women as the passive receiver of the active male gaze. The intention of the male looker-on either ensures that woman is contained within recognised domestic categories or his gaze has a more voyeuristic intent.

The logic of identity and male self-presence becomes, according to Shoshana Felman, male narcissism with women playing the role of the reflecting mirror: 'What [he] pursues in the woman is not a face, but a mirror, which, reflecting his image, will thereby *acknowledge* his narcissistic *self-image*.'<sup>38</sup> These roles are acted out between Gwenda and Steven. In Gwenda, Steven sees a vehicle for the expression of his

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<sup>36</sup> Freud refers to the scopophilic instinct in Three Essays on Sexuality. He writes: 'Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused . . . The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. . . .[L]ooking . . . has a sexual tinge to it.' See Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. 1905. SE 7, 156-7.

<sup>37</sup> The male gaze and the patriarchal point of view as sites of power are now part of commonplace feminist film criticism. For example, in Laura Mulvey's pioneering work, she examines the way film reflects 'erotic ways of looking and spectacle.' Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' Screen 16 (Autumn 1975): 6-18, 6. See also E. Ann Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (London: Methuen, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Shoshana Felman, 'Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,' The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) 133-53. 148.

romantic youth, where he has the potential to be great and achieve magnificence in his profession:

For under Gwenda Cartaret's eyes his romantic youth became fiery and turbulent inside him. It not only urged him to tremendous heights, it made him actually feel that he would reach them. . . . [H]e had ceased to be one of the obscurest of obscure little country doctors. He was Sir Steven Rowcliffe, the great gynæcologist, or the great neurologist (as the case might be), with a row of letters after his name and a whole column under it in the Medical Directory.

And Gwenda Cartaret's eyes never for a moment contradicted him. They agreed with every one of his preposterous statements. (TS 152)

While Gwenda can only live her life under patriarchal restrictions, she can look beyond into Steven's world; a world of unlimited opportunities and autonomy. Moreover, Steven's narcissism is satisfied through the admiring image reflected in Gwenda's eyes as his potential as a country doctor is inflated out of all proportion. This passage anticipates the well-known one by Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle . . .

Whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, what Steven desires from women is not so much knowledge but to be acknowledged. Gwenda here fulfils Laura Mulvey's premise that '[w]oman . . . stands in

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<sup>39</sup> Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929. London: Hogarth, 1959) 53-4.

patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning.<sup>40</sup> As Gwenda ultimately resists this, the distortion of the reflection results in her having to pay a high price: alienation and a barrenness of self.

#### **IV. 'The Unsealing of the Sacred Springs': Repression and the Language of Desire**

One of the early scenes of the novel introduces the three sisters waiting in the dining room for family prayers and is remarkable in its portrayal of a muted, silenced group of women. In a state of lethargy, the sisters appear as statues, frozen in 'supine, motionless attitudes . . . waiting for something to happen' (TS 4). Mary had ceased to darn socks, Gwenda had flung from her the book she had been reading, and Alice had spent the whole evening lying on the sofa. Mary and Gwenda could barely summon the energy to speak to one another; Alice could only let out a sigh.

The construction of language or, indeed, its lack, has an overriding significance in The Three Sisters. Sinclair represents the repression of sexuality and sexual desires symbolically to reflect the sisters' need to find alternative forms of expressing desire. On a linguistic level of expressing desire, Lacan defines language as the medium by which human beings are placed in culture and by which their sexual identity is formed.<sup>41</sup> Language encodes culture's values and perspectives, and transmits them. Like other representations, it reflects the place of the woman in culture and constitutes the one means by which that place is maintained. Social silence is part of the traditional

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<sup>40</sup> Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' 7.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth, 1977) 151.

constitution of female identity. Hélène Cixous, in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', maintains that the institutions and signifying practices of Western thought have been based on systematic suppression of women's points of view. It functions both on linguistic and sexual planes; therefore, the basis of female identity as an embodied subjectivity is completely absent. Sinclair vividly exemplifies this form of repression when Alice attempts to give expression or release to her sexual longing by frantic piano playing:

[She played] neither with her hands nor her brain, but with her *temperament, febrile and frustrate, seeking its outlet in exultant and violent sound*. She fell upon the Erard like some fierce and wild thing, tearing from the forlorn, humble instrument a strange and savage food. She played—with incredible omissions, discords and distortions, but she played. She flung out her music through the windows into the night as a signal and an appeal. (TS 13; italics added)

Her 'temperament' or instinctual drive governs her music and tries to make itself expressed; the language Sinclair employs in the extract given above represents Alice's instinctual behaviour. Alice neither plays with her hands (as she has been conditioned to do by her father) nor with her brain (as her reason might instruct). Instead, she plays from her instincts—or, her inner self. An analysis of Sinclair's manuscript for The Three Sisters shows that she deleted from Chapter VI the line 'the abrupt and passionate gesture of *desire deferred*.'<sup>42</sup> This adds weight to my argument that Sinclair/Alice looks to music to find another way of expressing what lies within. In Virginia Woolf's The Voyage Out (1915) Rachel Vinrace too searches for a form of self-expression in order to be understood. She is a gifted pianist, and explains to Terence Hewet that ' "[M]usic

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<sup>42</sup> Sinclair, fo. 95, box 4, UP; italics added.

goes straight for things.”<sup>43</sup> Music allows Rachel to express her own inner voice; this is one that she finds difficult to form in oral discourse.<sup>44</sup> However, her father, Willoughby, describes her as a ‘nice quiet girl, devoted to her music—a little less of *that* would do no harm’.<sup>45</sup>

Although Alice must suppress verbal utterance of her sexual desire, she attempts to find an alternative expression through playing the piano in an ‘improper’, ‘unrefined’ manner, which Cixous would term as use of a subversive language. In ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Cixous reflects upon this need to vocalise desire that has no accepted discourse:

I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, *overflow*; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows *unheard-of songs*. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of *luminous torrents* that I could burst . . .<sup>46</sup>

Here, Cixous argues for expressivity in terms of movement, abundance and openness. In her references to ‘unheard-of songs’ and ‘luminous torrents’ she is upholding notions of an expansive and jubilant creativity. For Cixous, women’s creativity ‘will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system’; that is, rather than the feminine being defined in relation to the masculine, it is all that which escapes being

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<sup>43</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Hogarth, 1915) 251.

<sup>44</sup> Suzanne Raitt observes that the piano ‘became a privileged means of self-expression in a number of Edwardian novels.’ She also notes that Lucy Honeychurch ‘uses the piano to excite and play out her own passions.’ See Raitt, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Early Novels,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 48 n.29.

<sup>45</sup> Woolf, *The Voyage Out* 97.

<sup>46</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1 (Summer 1976): 875-93. 876; italics added.

‘theorized, enclosed, coded’.<sup>47</sup> When Alice turns to the piano to give expression to her inner, female self, to ‘let it loose’ is ‘Alice’s defiance of the house and her revenge’ (TS 15).

As Sinclair admired the Brontës’ feminist consciousness and psychological awareness, so she declares in the introduction to The Three Brontës, ‘I believe that it is always the inner life that counts, and that with the Brontës it supremely counted’ (TB 15). She gives the following description of Villette:

The book is flung, as it were, from Lucy’s beating heart; it is one profound protracted cry of *longing and frustration*. This was a new note in literature.

*Villette* was the *unsealing of the sacred springs*, the revelation of all that proud, decorous mid-Victorian reticence most sedulously sought to hide.<sup>48</sup>

Sinclair’s language here, patently ‘one profound protracted cry of longing and frustration’ and ‘unsealing of the sacred springs’, is remarkably similar to that later employed by Cixous in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ to describe the ‘unheard-of songs’ of the body and ‘luminous torrents’. In The Three Sisters Sinclair explicitly reflects upon the three women’s frustrations. In examining their ‘sacred, secret springs’, she questions by what means can they become unsealed in order for the women to be able to express their true natures and motivations. In doing just this, Sinclair exposes the hypocrisy that surrounds the conventional ideas of women and sexuality.

From the extracts above, it can be seen how both Sinclair and Cixous associate creativity (piano playing and writing) with the unlocking, overflowing of female pleasure or *jouissance*. Since female desire is both repressed and misrepresented in a

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<sup>47</sup> Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ 883.

<sup>48</sup> Sinclair, introduction, Villette, by Charlotte Brontë (Everyman’s Library Ser. London: Dent, 1909) xiv-xv; italics added.

phallogocentric society, its expression by alternative means becomes a key to deconstructing that very control.

In 'Women and Madness' Felman addresses similar questions as she examines the position of woman in theoretical discourse. She looks at the woman in relation to ideas of absence and presence, illuminating the latent sexism in that all thought, scientific as well as artistic, depends on seeing identities, in difference, and finding symbolic continuities. Felman criticises the fundamental assumptions of Western metaphysics which privilege the idea of logos, centre, and presence within ideas such as 'Truth, Being, or Reason' and which set up hierarchies and binary oppositions like 'Presence/Absence, Being/Nothingness, Truth/Error, Same/Other, Identity/Difference'.<sup>49</sup> The first in each pair is valorised; negativity and difference are subordinated and transformed into the principles of femininity. It can be seen that in The Three Sisters Sinclair writes from the other, the gap, the absence—that is, from the feminine. Of course, it must be asked whether it is possible to speak outside the logic of identity without speaking madness.

From such an analysis, Alice can therefore be read as representing the female condition in a patriarchal society structured around the fundamental theme of sexual repression. Alice is unable to articulate her desire for Dr Rowcliffe; she must adopt alternative methods to symbolise what she is unable to utter. (Indeed, the Vicar is wary of seemingly innocent past-times such as playing the piano and walking on the moors, as he is aware that there is something improper in the manner that they are undertaken. For his daughters, who are allowed few other tasks or recreational amusements, they are

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<sup>49</sup> Felman, 'Women and Madness' 135.

indeed important entries to a sublimated self.) In fact, each of the three sisters attempt, by subversive means, to win the doctor's attention to herself.

The fifth chapter, merely half a page, reflects Sinclair's growing interest in brevity of style. It is denuded of the external event, depicting only the sisters' inner motivations. It is redolent with their sexual desire for Dr Rowcliffe; each sister is unable to verbalise their feelings, only think: 'Their stillness, their immobility was intense. And not one spoke a word to the other. All three of them were thinking' (TS 10). Mary plots to gain Dr Rowcliffe's attention by deception; Gwenda by showing her true self to him. Alice thinks: ' "I will make myself ill—so ill that they'll *have* to send for him. I shall see him that way" ' (TS 10). Then she makes her way stealthily over the piano to give expression to her sexual libido.

Additionally, this brief chapter stylistically represents the position the sisters currently occupy at this point in the novel. None of them have a discourse of their own in which to express their latent desires. They only know 'the snare of silence'—which marginalizes them.<sup>50</sup> Wordlessly sitting grouped together in the room, they are accepting the phallogentric position that imposes subordination onto women. Here they textually represent Cixous' 'domain which is the margin'.<sup>51</sup>

Alice also manifests signs of repression through physical symptoms.<sup>52</sup> She consciously decides not to eat in order to draw Steven's attention to herself. It is arguable that Alice is the one character who is true to herself since she does not try to

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<sup>50</sup> Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' 881.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Control of the female body is not purely limited to the symbolic plane. Sinclair also suggests that Alice's deliberate assumption of physical symptoms to demonstrate repression is a reflection of the female body as an arena for power struggles between men and women. This idea has already been documented elsewhere, for example in Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 (London: Virago, 1987).

refute her instinctual drives. Although unable to use the accepted codes for expressing desire, she turns to alternative forms to express her true self the best and only way she can. Steven treats Alice with care and sympathy and is shown to be knowledgeable of contemporary psychological ideas. During a walk with Gwenda he insinuates that he wishes to 'get to the centre of things' and this might be found by specialising in either 'women's cases' or 'nervous diseases' (TS 151). Yet, Steven finds himself in love with a woman who either refuses or is unable to open up and get to the centre of things. In contrast, Robina, the Vicar's third wife, consciously removes herself from the family circle, thereby creating personal space for herself to manoeuvre and gain a sense of autonomy over her life. Although Gwenda too attempts this, both through her efforts to sublimate herself in the landscape and then by moving away from Garthdale, she ultimately remains trapped. Ironically, her father's newfound weakened state and dependency becomes yet another controlling device: Gwenda's ingrained sense of duty and self-sacrifice means that she returns to the Vicarage in order to take care of him.

#### **V. Gwenda and Nature: The Desire for Autonomy**

Self-division is created from the desire for autonomy and agency, and the internalisation of society's conservative values. Sinclair expresses this dialectic in all three of the sisters, but most overtly in Gwenda. Her physical difference marks her out from the onset. Although she shares the same family features, she 'follow[s] the type obscurely': there is more colour and definition in her appearance than in her sisters' which imparts a 'decided and defiant manner . . . . About Gwenda there was something alert and impatient. Her very supineness was alive' (TS 4). The focus of the novel is most clearly on Gwenda and her struggle for self-realisation. Through the bulk of the novel she is portrayed as independent, strong, sceptical about received ideas, and attempts to put up

resistance to her father's control. When the Vicar sacks Essy because of her pregnancy, wanting to keep her out of sight, Gwenda confronts her father with the practical consequences. She tells her father, ' "Please take your head out of the desk, Papa. There's no use behaving like an ostrich; I can see you all the time. The trouble is, you know, that you won't *think*" ' (TS 130). Gwenda feels comfortable in entering the male space, the study, and talking to her father as an equal. Yet Sinclair does not allow her to rebel entirely. Although Gwenda can reject the patriarchally encoded system of values intellectually, it is evident that fundamentally she internalises and suffers from ideological expectations. First in the interest of Alice's health, then for her father's, Gwenda denies her own longings and succumbs to the Victorian ideal of feminine self-sacrifice and sexual repression. By ultimately adhering to her society's gender definitions and by devoting herself to her father there remains a prevailing sense of the futility of Gwenda's life. Like Jane Holland in The Creators, Gwenda is conscious of this dichotomy within herself:

There were moments when she saw herself as two women. One had still the passion and the memory of freedom. The other was a cowed and captive creature who had forgotten, whose cramped motions guided her, whose instinct of submission she abhorred. (TS 333)

Sinclair reflects here on a spinsterhood that has no palliative. Gwenda, who seemed at the outset so strong, energetic and full of essential life-force, now appears broken by both her father and her own sense of familial duty. She increasingly has less to say for herself; her submission renders her speechless and her passion is forced inwards, denied an outlet or a voice. The image of Gwenda left depleted and bound to the home echoes the description of spinsterhood in an anonymous article in the Freewoman in 1911:

The Spinster stands the racket. She pays the penalty. She is the failure, and she closes her teeth down and says nothing. What can she say? . . . And so the conspiracy of silence becomes complete. Then, mind and body begin. *They* get their pound of flesh, and the innermost Ego of the Soul, the solitary Dweller behind the Mind, stands at bay to meet their baiting.<sup>53</sup>

Gwenda, formerly a 'stubborn, intractable creature', is now entirely at the Vicar's feet. She 'who was capable of anything was capable of an indestructible devotion' (TS 302). For her, time is now an endless circle of her father's recurring needs. Just as at the beginning of the novel she is seen monotonously waiting for the ten o'clock prayer time which marked her evening, now her time is one of complete emptiness where all the days mould into one: 'His times, the relentless, the monotonously recurring, were her times too' (TS 302). Gwenda has become trapped by time.

As in The Creators, Henri Bergson influences Sinclair's representation of time in The Three Sisters. Bergson also offered guidance to modernist writers seeking to capture the effects of emotional relativity, for he suggests that a thought or feeling could be measured in terms of perceptions, memories, and associations attached to it. Gwenda develops such a relationship with the landscape of Garthdale. By turning to nature, Gwenda finds a validation of self and, initially at least, she optimistically seeks to find an alternative to the oppression and tyranny ruled in the Vicarage. As in the case of the Brontës, Gwenda's love of nature figures predominantly over human love for the latter ultimately disappoints her. Nature, as the transcendental signifier, fills the void left by a hostile society.

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<sup>53</sup> Anon, 'The Spinster,' Freewoman, 23 Nov. 1911: 602-605. 604.

For Sinclair, the external event is significant for the way it frequently represents or reflects the inner life. In The Three Brontës she highlights for attention the following description of time as depicted in Wuthering Heights: 'Time is marked as a shepherd on the moors might mark it, by the movement of the sun, the moon, and the stars; by weather, and the passions of the seasons. Passions, emotions, are always presented in bodily symbols' (TB 228). This is echoed by Gwenda's experience of time: 'her inner life moved with the large rhythm of the seasons and was soaked in the dyes of the visible world' (TS 335). Gwenda feels that her individual identity merges and is part of the surroundings.

The Three Sisters opens with a mythical, fairytale introduction, 'North of east', to usher in the setting of the novel. The terrain is part of the huge frame of geological time that renders all humans insignificant; it is bereft of any human artifice and refuses to be tamed by the activity of mankind. The houses themselves are part of the primordial essentialism: 'They have the silence, the darkness and the secrecy of all ultimate habitations' (TS 1). The geographical landscape is an important aspect of the novel and frequently signifies the oppressiveness and barrenness of Gwenda's life.<sup>54</sup>

It is useful at this point to examine Freud's comparable description of a psychological world projected into an external, physical space. In 1901 he wrote:

I believe that a great part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into the most modern religions, *is nothing but psychology projected into the external world*. The obscure recognition . . . of psychical factors and relations in the unconscious is mirrored . . . in the construction of a *supernatural*

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<sup>54</sup> For examples of examinations on the psychoanalytic meaning of landscape and place, see Mary Jacobus, 'A Whole World in Your Head: Rereading the Landscape of Absence,' Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading, Clarendon Lectures in English Lit. 1997 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 52-83; R. D. Hinshelwood, 'The Countryside,' British Journal of Psychotherapy 10 (1993): 203-10; and Andrew Samuels, 'I am a Place: Depth Psychology and Environmentalism,' *ibid.* 211-19.

*reality*, which is destined to be changed back once more by science into the *psychology of the unconscious*.<sup>55</sup>

Sinclair's fiction shows an early and deliberate use of Freudian projection. She notes in The Three Brontës scenes written by the Brontë sisters as being marked with 'psychological suggestion'. Also, Sinclair describes the sisters and the sense of place as inextricably bound: 'It is impossible to write of the three Brontës and forget the place they lived in . . . Emily Brontë's lane that leads to the open moors. . . . [I]t is the soul of the place that made their genius what it is' (TB 19). Similarly, the depiction of the landscape in The Three Sisters is developed on a primordial, elementary level, suggesting in its essence a fundamental barrenness and oppressiveness that denies any possibility for nurturance, generation, and fertility. However, Gwenda feels an overwhelming kinship with this terrain and in her obsessive tramping across the moors she seeks to find a refuge in it. Mulvey suggests that the 'wish to look' is intermingled with 'a fascination with likeness and recognition' and that this can extend to the relationship between humans and their surroundings.<sup>56</sup> Gwenda is different from her sisters in that, on their arrival, she immediately feels at ease and experiences a recognition with her surroundings. She has a natural affinity with the local terrain, and is able to relate to its mythological qualities:

The moors lifted their shoulders one after the other, darker than dark, into a sky already whitening above the hidden moon. And she saw Morfe, grey as iron, on its hill, bearing the square crown and the triple pendants of its lights; she saw the long straight line of Greffington Edge, hiding the secret moon, and Karva with

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<sup>55</sup> Freud, 'Determinism, Belief in Chance and Superstition.' The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, 1901, SE 6, 239-79. 258-9; original italics.

<sup>56</sup> Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' 9.

the ashen west behind it. There was something in their form and in their gesture that *called to her as if they knew her, as if they waited for her; they struck her with the shock of recognition, as if she had known them and had waited too.* (TS 57-8; italics added)

The landscape of Garthdale is personified as feminine and is overtly sexual in its enticement.<sup>57</sup> Gwenda is seduced by and attracted to it, feeling a longing for union with the shoulders of the moors rising into the night and the crowning lights that pinnacle the hill. The landscape and nature become the centre for self-reflection and a textual device for expressivity; they function as an arena for a personal version of associationism. Ellen Moers refers to similar female landscapes in Literary Women, noting their presence in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss ('In the Red Deeps') and Mary Wollstonecraft's Mary, a Fiction. These landscapes 'surge up' and offer 'a time of feminine stocktaking, an atmosphere of apartness'.<sup>58</sup>

Key to Sinclair's study of psychoanalysis and its application in her work is her use of the symbol. Typically, Sinclair employs the symbol to define a transforming moment of heightened lucidity and to signify the protagonist's newly enhanced sense of identity. The symbol in Sinclair's work represents a coming together of self, world, and other. Raitt refers to Sinclair's application of 'psychic symbolism' in her Modernist works.<sup>59</sup> Sinclair's reading of Jung, as demonstrated in her Clinical Lectures, shows its particular influences here. The Jungian symbol is imbued with psychic energy which is transformative. Thus, when a symbol is assimilated, psychic energy is liberated and can

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<sup>57</sup> In contrast, literature of the Romantic period traditionally defines the geographical landscape in terms of the sublime encoded as masculine.

<sup>58</sup> Ellen Moers, Literary Women (London: Women's P, 1978) 255.

<sup>59</sup> Raitt, May Sinclair 204.

be used on a conscious level. Raitt explains Sinclair's reading of these symbols as a transcendent bridge that holds in tension the primitive past and the evolving future. Each symbol is defined by and bound up with the libido.<sup>60</sup> Many of Sinclair's female protagonists are mystically associated with the moon. Nina Lempriere in The Creators and Agatha Verrall in 'The Flaw in the Crystal', as well as Gwenda, merge with the moon in an act of communion. The moon functions in each of these cases as a Jungian symbol, blurring the boundaries between religion and female sexuality. Sinclair uses the moon to represent the realm of the female other in her fiction; it provides an alternative to patriarchal culture.

Gwenda is intimately associated with the moon. When Steven first encounters Gwenda walking on the moors at night, she is marked by an identification with the moon:

She carried herself like a huntress; slender and quick . . . . She flashed by like a huntress, like Artemis carrying the young moon on her forehead. From the turn of her head and the even falling of her feet he felt her unconscious of his existence. And her unconsciousness was hateful to him. It wiped him clean out of the universe of noticeable things. (TS 39-40)

In her ceaseless walking, Gwenda flees the rule of the father that marks the Vicarage, and turns to the female realm where she feels most at one. While the moon intimately speaks to Gwenda's psyche it prohibits Steven from declaring his feelings for her. He is aware that he is unable to communicate with her when the moon is out. Steven is unable to 'get to the centre of things' with Gwenda; she resists masculine penetration. Although

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<sup>60</sup> See Raitt, May Sinclair 204.

Steven attempts to join in with her walking, he can only follow; he is never entirely at ease as he has encroached her space:

She shared the earth's silence and the throbbing passion of the earth as the orbed moon swung free.

And in her absorption, her estranging ecstasy, Rowcliffe at last found something inimical. . . . Gwenda's joy was pure and profound and sufficient to itself. He gathered that it had been with her before he came and that it would remain with her after he had gone. . . . As long as it lasted he was faced with an incomprehensible and monstrous rivalry. (TS 157-58)

The moon thus represents Sinclair's use of a Jungian archetypal image, symbolising the mother. Gwenda's identification with it reflects her ego poised between the inner and outer worlds, between subjective and objective, with an equal need to relate to each world. Raitt explains it as 'the contradiction between the past and the future; between archaism . . . and modernity . . . It memorializes and keeps alive the past without altering itself, and it is the psychoanalyst's one means of access to the unconscious and the ill-adapted libido that has been trapped there.'<sup>61</sup> This helps to explain Gwenda's instant affinity with Garthdale: her identification with the moon puts her in touch with the mythic, internal world that exists on a primordial level.

Furthermore, Gwenda's identification with the female moon and her desire for a union with it can be interpreted psychoanalytically as a union with a protective mother figure. A Lacanian account would explain that a child learns to create symbols by being forced to accept separation from the mother and to control the pain of her absence by creating substitutes for her. Thus, a Lacanian interpretation of the symbolic role of

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<sup>61</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair* 205.

nature in The Three Sisters can also be offered in addition to the Jungian one: the narrator states that the sisters' mother died after giving birth to Alice; that is, when Gwenda was an infant of about two years old. (It should be noted here that the girls are abandoned on two further occasions when surrogate mother-figures either die or leave the family home.) Hence the text aesthetically deals with Gwenda's struggle to come to terms with the traumatic and abrupt dissolution of the symbiotic union with her mother. There is evident a play between a desire to recapture the lost maternal unity and an antithetical wish for independence from the father. The moon and nature then become substitutive maternal objects. Likewise, in The Three Brontës, Sinclair interprets nature (symbolising a female and maternal persona) as another character in Wuthering Heights: 'True, adoration of Earth, the All-Mother, runs like a choric hymn through all the tragedy. Earth is the mother and nurse' (TB 215).

Steven's sense of exclusion arises from his awareness that Gwenda and her surroundings seem to be inextricably linked; that she possesses an innate oneness with nature that will make her forever separate from him. She draws energy and strength from the moors, and is able to find order to her thoughts while she walks, as described in Chapter XV. She realises that her 'singular passion for the place' must be kept secret (TS 57). Gwenda is therefore the typical Sinclairian heroine, strong, independent and androgynous, cast in the same mould as Nina Lempriere, and follows the original, Emily Brontë. The language used in the extract given above to describe Gwenda's ceaseless striding of the moors echoes Sinclair's description of Emily in The Three Brontës: 'tall and slender . . . tramping the moors with the form and step of a virile adolescent . . . one moment alert, intent, and the next, inaccessibly remote' (TB 168). One of the attractions that Emily held for Sinclair was that she acted independently and regardless of the material event; that she shows the insignificance of experience 'beside the spirit that

endures' (TB 170). In comparison, it is this same spirit that Sinclair recreates in Gwenda. Above all, both women share an 'adoration of the earth' (TB 173).

However, at the close of The Three Sisters Gwenda is alienated from nature: she is housebound and sapped of energy, described as being 'still' and 'inert'. As opposed to the figure presented at the beginning of the novel, Gwenda is now weakened and has become paralysed, unable to draw succour from nature. This again finds similar parallels with Sinclair's description of the end of Emily Brontë's life. Here Raitt notes that Sinclair was mesmerised by the image of Emily sitting on the couch, combing her hair; a description she returned to again and again in her biography.<sup>62</sup>

Gwenda's listlessness is translated as lifelessness or, indeed, a depiction of death in life. It occurs when she fully realises that her relationship with Steven has come to an end and, as a result of her earlier sacrificial act, she is the one that has been left behind to care for her father. At this moment Gwenda 'discern[s] in these things [nature] a power that would before long make her suffer. She had no other sense of them' (TS 383). Death arises when the energies of selfhood, often represented by sexuality, are expended. Death comes to the female character who is unable to properly negotiate her own narrative in sexual relations. In The Three Brontës Sinclair observes:

There was no career for any woman but marriage. If she missed it she missed her place in the world, her prestige, and her privileges as a woman. What was worse, she lost her individuality, and became a mere piece of furniture, of disused, old-fashioned furniture, in her father's or her brother's house. . . . A woman in these horrible conditions was *only half alive*. *She had no energies, no passions, no*

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<sup>62</sup> See Raitt, May Sinclair 130.

*enthusiasms. Convention had drained her of her life-blood.* (TB 132-33; italics added)

Although Sinclair is describing Victorian womanhood, it is this very image of woman that Gwenda comes to embody: convention too drains her life-blood. In her sacrificial act, by giving up Steven for Ally's sake, she sacrifices her own chance of personal, sexual happiness, and must succumb to the traditional role expected of her: as the last remaining daughter in the household she must wait upon her invalided father. Penny Brown explains that, for many of the female protagonists in novels of self-development, 'against the enthusiasm, longing, hopefulness, courage and determination . . . are ranged the deadly forces of . . . the tendency to self-sacrifice, submission and self-denigration and guilt which result in a fundamental sapping of energy, will and self-confidence.'<sup>63</sup>

## **VI. Aphanisis: The Fading From Life**

In a brief, two line paragraph tacked on to the end of Chapter LVII, Gwenda dreams of Mary lying dead with her dead child in her arms. This could simply be seen from a Freudian perspective as a wish fulfilment. Alternatively, Gwenda is finally coming to terms with the realisation that her relationship with Steven has run its course and that with its end comes the loss of self and meaning. The dream therefore can be seen as a projection: she is now viewing herself as an infertile and meaningless woman. Her life has become barren, 'futile and unfit' like the dresses Mary buries in the trunk. At the end of the novel, Gwenda exists within the accepted patriarchal paradigms, which silence her inner life. Desire, selfhood, and agency have become thwarted. This is the symbolic death of the female protagonist who no longer has a language in which to live.

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, *The Poison at the Source* 8.

The pessimistic ending of the novel renders Gwenda to silence, subject to the 'fading' that Ernest Jones calls 'aphanisis' or the disappearance of sexual desire, and associates specifically with women's fear of separation from a loved object.<sup>64</sup> However, for Lacan aphanisis means not so much the fear of seeing desire disappear as something more 'lethal': 'the level at which the subject manifests himself in this movement of disappearance,' or 'the *fading* of the subject.' This fading—on the side of death rather than life—is an effect of the division of the subject in signification, so that 'when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere . . . as disappearance.'<sup>65</sup> When Gwenda sacrifices Steven for Alice's sake, this constitutes a loss not so much loss of the loved object as loss of meaning of self. Up to this point, Steven's presence and their illicit meetings were able to sustain Gwenda and provide a defense against fading. Eventually, though, Gwenda realises that she cannot live out the rest of her life this way and implores Steven to take up a more lucrative living in Leeds. But Steven has grown comfortable and lazy and is settled in his practice. When he refuses to listen, Gwenda finally realises the futility of her life and the empty shell of her existence.

By the close of the novel, Sinclair concentrates on Gwenda's internal state as she comes to the realisation that the loss of Stephen is a stronger, truer reality than her own presence. Her sense of loss becomes itself the way of integrating her experience. The only real thing that remains at the closure is the gap, the absence, what is not there. Sinclair therefore suggests that Gwenda's failure to appropriate a discourse for herself results in alienation, repression, division, and a final silencing of self:

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<sup>64</sup> Ernest Jones, 'Early Development of Female Sexuality.' 1927. Papers on Psychoanalysis, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Baillière, 1950) 438-51.

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) 207-8, 218.

She rose. She gave him a long look—a look that was still incredulous of what it saw.

Her eyes refused to meet it as he rose also.

They stood so for a moment without any speech but that of eyes lifted and lowered.

Still without a word, she turned from him to the door. (TS 381)

This state of dumbness and lack of utterance, of demand for an impossible desire, is a recurrent motif in the novel. For Gwenda, sacrifice and suffering appear synonymous with desire. This can be argued to be the antithesis of Cixous's description of *jouissance* described earlier which celebrates the free flowing of sexual pleasure. Here, womanhood is seen as a burden and suffering is inevitable if the normal patriarchal codes are transgressed. As Gwenda leaves Rowcliffe's house she is no longer able to find solace in the landscape. She is now unable to sublimate herself in nature, for nature perpetuates itself *ad infinitum* in a manner that she cannot:

It discerned in these things a power that would before long make her suffer.

She had no other sense of them.

She came to the drop of the road under Karva where she had seen Rowcliffe for the first time.

She thought: "I shall never get away from it."

Far off in the bottom the village waited for her.

It had always waited for her; but she was afraid of it now, afraid of what it might have in store for her. It shared her fear as it crouched there, like a beaten thing. (TS 383)

The landscape is now most fully realised as a psychic projection of Gwenda's inner depression and desolation. Finally, it is seen to function symbolically as the melancholic underside of her pursuit of a personal idealism.

At the close of the novel, Gwenda's life-force and vitality ebb away. Her silence renders her female desire dumb and places her on the side of the unconscious. Inherent in this is the inevitability of death. All that remains for her is to continue living out the shell of her life, enacting the role of nurse to her father as she remains finally trapped in his house. This emptiness, marked by a sense of gap and absence (or Felman's 'other'), lies at the epicentre of the novel and arises from the clashing juxtaposition of the realities of the Victorian ideological condition for women.

In The Three Sisters Sinclair argues for women to follow their instinctual sexual needs. In Chapter XII she wryly inserts 'three middle-aged maidens' (TS 37) who live in Morfe and vie for Steven's attention. They act almost as phantom figures, as an ominous reminder to women if they suppress their sexual instincts. Eerily, they represent the potential outcome of the Cartaret sisters if they had followed their father's tyrannical regime. Although Mary and Alice find happiness in their marriages, the ending is a pessimistic one for the main protagonist of the novel. The tyrannical power of the father maintains its hold over Gwenda as she suppresses her true self and forces herself to become servile to his needs.

Gwenda's failure to find an appropriate discourse at the end offers an interpretation of Sinclair's aesthetics with the novel's close concentration on discontinuities, differences, and the dissolution of a secure self through an examination of boundaries. Thus the attention to boundary demarcations returns to the central issue of sexuality in the novel. Sexuality itself is fundamentally concerned with the dissolution and rearrangement of boundaries. The predominant feminine fear, as

reflected by Gwenda, is of being penetrated; the masculine fear of leakage is typically represented by the Vicar in his fear of loss of control in the face of unleashed female sexuality. By embodying the oscillating conflict between desire for distance and intimacy, solitude and union, it is shown that Gwenda reflects the importance of boundaries and space—both psychological and physical within the novel.

Felman provides an apt summation in 'Women and Madness' of the idea of what constitutes the 'real' and this can be usefully compared to the experience in The Three Sisters:

[N]ot as a convergence of reflections, as an effect of mirroring focalisation, but as a radically de-centering resistance; the real as, precisely, other, the unrepresentable as such, the ex-centric residue which the specular relationship of vision cannot embrace.<sup>66</sup>

The depiction of reality, or the female experience, as 'other' reveals Sinclair's vision of the feminine as complex and painful. The feminine vision must either be silent (Alice); laboriously work its way out of the constricting categories which had previously defined it (Gwenda, although she is defeated at the end); or simply be mad (the sisters' mother). At the uneasy closure of the novel, the nature to which Gwenda had constantly turned to as a sublimative force finally remains blank and obdurate. It no longer offers a transcendent, or psychic, symbol: 'she tried to recapture the magic of the flowering thorn-trees. But it had gone and she could not be persuaded that it would come again' (TS 370).

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<sup>66</sup> Felman, 'Women and Madness' 152.

## Chapter 4

### Mary Olivier: A Life. A Longing for Connection, A Desire for Separation

#### I. Introduction: Oscillations

May Sinclair's women constantly seek a space in which they can express and be true to their inner selves. Yet their ambitions are ultimately thwarted and the novels frequently end ambiguously. Mary Olivier: A Life (1919) is Sinclair's most overt example of a heroine who fully and consciously experiences this dialectic and the blockage it effects on the progress of her life. Mary Olivier expresses the desire for the 'both/and' vision rather than the dichotomized universe exemplified by the 'either-or' situation as expressed by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in her essay 'For the Etruscans'. She explains:

[The both/and vision] is the end of the either-or, dichotomized universe, proposing monism . . . in relation to dualism, a dualism pernicious because it valorizes one side above another, and makes a hierarchy where there were simply twain. . . . I find a both/and vision moves me most when it is in motion, that is, when dialectic, born of shifts, contraries, negations, contradictions.<sup>1</sup>

In reflecting upon Mary's struggle to realise the 'both/and' vision, the novel shows her state of flux, her oscillation between these states of being. In the very nature of her oscillation, an alternative is potentially offered in the construction of femininity and narrative. In this chapter I examine Mary's problematic of being, and Sinclair's own narrative devices to show the struggle of a female artist for self-realisation through her art, negotiating issues of mothering, creativity, production and reproduction.

The most famous female writer in Modern literature to broach this subject is Virginia Woolf. In 'Professions for Women' (1931) she describes the difficulties she

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'For the Etruscans: Sexual Difference and Artistic Production—the Debate Over a Female Aesthetic.' The Future of Difference, eds. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (Boston: Hall, 1980) 128-56. 132.

experiences as a woman writer. She explains: 'I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman . . . The Angel in the House.'<sup>2</sup> This woman instructs the woman writer to ' "Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." '<sup>3</sup> This is the voice that instructs the pen. However, the Woolfian writer must revolt against this instruction and overcome the power of this female voice for to obey it would mean death to herself as an artist; to listen to the voice would have 'plucked the heart' out of her writing. The feminine strategy is to move toward the masculine oppositional pole. That is, by the very act of writing, the female artist must become man-like. This is the stance that Nina Lempriere in The Creators assumes, as I examine in Chapter 2. However, as Woolf realises, the artist is unable to fully overcome the obstacles that prevent her from truly writing about her own experiences of the female body. Woolf continues to describe her attempt to write as a woman 'who speaks the truth about her passions'.<sup>4</sup> To write *as a woman* surely must endorse the position of femininity. Therefore, her essay attacks the core of the male tradition that censors her very consciousness as a female writer. Woolf suggests that to overcome the dichotomies of gender and politics, the female artist must place herself in a bisexual position. Therefore, as Patricia Waugh explains, while 'Woolf seeks to become aware of the paralysing and alienating determinations of the myth of Woman' she is equally keen to 'avoid embracing an identity articulated through an ideal of contained, coherent, "proportioned" subjectivity which for her expressed the dominant cultural norm of

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women.' 1931. Virginia Woolf: On Women and Writing, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Women's P, 1979) 57-63. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 62.

masculinity.<sup>5</sup> Inherent in this Modernist argument is the idea of a model of an oscillation between the 'and/or' position as I will now examine in relation to Mary Olivier.<sup>6</sup>

The artist's withdrawal from the clearly defined space of marriage and motherhood is not an easy one to negotiate. Mary Olivier's inability to let go of her mother and develop her own personality *true to herself* represents her failure to completely separate from her mother. As I argue in this chapter, a separation that is not fully achieved is a dysfunctional disconnection rather than a fully realised, healthy separation. I hold that Mary Olivier is an important work in the canon of Modern literature as it mirrors developments in the context of the historical rise of the female protagonist's search for an inner life.

Critics have noted the new pattern in Modern literature 'away from courtship' to the theme of 'maternal seduction'.<sup>7</sup> For Ellen Moers, this was 'a special contribution to modern literature, during a literary era uniquely hospitable to a very ancient, very female view of the nature of love.'<sup>8</sup> Moreover, she defines the mother-daughter relationship as undergoing a twist: it is the child's viewpoint which dominates and that the 'controlling literary consciousness is that of the subject of matriarchal authority.'<sup>9</sup> Jean Radford writes that 'in nineteenth-century fiction by women there is a curious silence about mother-daughter relationships.' The mother is 'fictionally "killed off" as an active agent in her daughter's characterisation.' Radford observes that in Mary

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<sup>5</sup> Patricia Waugh, Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern (London: Routledge, 1989) 10.

<sup>6</sup> Famously, critics note the artist Lily Briscoe's 'struggle between the desire for subjective autonomy and the desire to be at one with the mother-figure of Mrs Ramsay' in Woolf's To the Lighthouse. See Waugh, Feminine Fictions 109.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Moers, Literary Women (London: Women's P, 1978) 232-33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 233.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Olivier, however, 'the two women confront . . . each other in a symbolic return to the mother-child relation.'<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Penny Brown also notes that the opening of Mary Olivier invokes the 'traditionally sanctioned role of parenthood'.<sup>11</sup> Brown continues by explaining that this Victorian concept of the family is exposed 'as a morass of complex love-hate relationships, jealousies and emotional dependence and blackmail', and that Mary's 'greatest antagonist in her battle for selfhood is . . . her mother.'<sup>12</sup>

As Marianne Hirsch argues, the female protagonist must move away from both the conventional marriage *and* motherhood plot in an attempt to find autonomy: 'the fantasy that controls the female family romance is the desire for the heroine's singularity based on *disidentification from the fate of other women, especially mothers*'.<sup>13</sup> For Hirsch, a fully autonomous heroine is one who succeeds in her determination to shape a different plot and an alternative outcome for herself. By disengaging herself from the figure and story of her mother, she attempts to avoid her mother's fate: maternity. Nonetheless, as I will suggest, in becoming an artist, Mary Olivier's work may be seen as a creative progeny, and her methods of achieving her end result in fact mimics her mother's: in sacrificing herself for art's sake, she mimics her mother who had to sacrifice herself for her children.

Sinclair frequently scrutinises the role of motherhood in her fiction and seeks to find a place for her female protagonists beyond this narrowly circumscribed boundary. She looks for a sphere outside the typical one centred on the domestic situation. Sinclair's women under examination in my study express dissatisfaction with their

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Radford, introduction, Mary Olivier: A Life. By May Sinclair (1919. London: Virago, 1980) n. pag.

<sup>11</sup> Penny Brown, The Poison at the Source: The Female Novel of Self-Development in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: St Martin's P, 1992) 19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 20, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Marianne Hirsch, The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 10; italics added.

perspective of the roles of wife and mother, and often try to find fulfilment in a creative niche outside the sphere offered by the family and child-bearing. I therefore disagree with Terry Phillips's view that Sinclair 'deals sympathetically with the plight of women as mothers.'<sup>14</sup>

Although critics have noted in Sinclair's novels the development of the female protagonists' consciousness and their desire (or not) for personal freedom, they have failed to make the connection with what was happening in the development of psychoanalysis and object relations theory during this time. This provides a fruitful area for examination since, as I have observed, Sinclair was always at the forefront of new ideas and developments in cultural thinking, and her novels reflect their influence and immediacy upon her.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Freud developed a psychoanalysis that was based on the preoccupation with the father and paternal authority. Up to the 1920s, European psychoanalysis remained focused on sexuality and repression. This too had been taken on, albeit controversially, by the British movement as part of the cultural revolt against Victorian puritanism. However, when the Tavistock Square Clinic formed in December 1919,<sup>15</sup> with the phasing out of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, there was a significant influx of women analysts in the movement and British psychoanalysis came to be heavily influenced by the new outlook that these women offered. At about this time, the Tavistock Square Clinic began to cultivate its strong focus on childhood development. The analysts Susan Isaacs, Ella Freeman Sharpe, Barbara Low and Joan Riviere all joined the Tavistock Square Clinic after

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<sup>14</sup> Terry Phillips, 'Battling with the Angel: May Sinclair's Powerful Mothers.' Image of Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century, eds. Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham (London: Longman, 1996) 128-38. 128.

<sup>15</sup> This subsequently changed name to the Tavistock Clinic and then to the Tavistock Institute, as it is known today.

receiving their initial training at the Medico-Psychological Clinic, and their subsequent work reveals their background in early childhood development and education.

Melanie Klein (1882-1960) too was at the forefront of this new consciousness concerning childhood development and the role of the mother. The social historian Eli Zaretsky explains that the central role taken by the mother in the work of Klein and other object relations psychoanalysts was an important development in British social policies, eventually leading to the establishment of the welfare state in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>16</sup> Thus, as Zaretsky argues, psychoanalysis was reborn in the 1920s as an object relations theory, dominated by its relation to the mother.<sup>17</sup> Classical Freudian concepts of the ego, sexuality and the individual gave way to post-Freudian concepts of object, mother and group.<sup>18</sup> Sinclair's novel Mary Olivier: A Life, published in 1919, stands at the cusp of this developing psychological current that looks anew at the role of the mother figure; a model that could be either positive or negative for women.

Klein's theory of psychoanalysis is an invaluable tool in reading the mother-daughter plot in Mary Olivier. Klein's work involves a shift away from Freud's father-centred approach to a development towards a mother-focused approach. Key to understanding Klein is her insistence that the superego originates in early internal representations of the mother, far prior to the Oedipus complex as suggested by Freud. Her conceptualization of the pre-Oedipal domain holds Klein's particular interest to feminists. Klein was particularly interested in the very early stage of infantile experience, when the child feels at one with the mother, and its later influence on adult psychic reality. Klein's matrifocal account of psychosexual development begins with

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<sup>16</sup> Eli Zaretsky, '“One Large Secure, Solid Background”: Melanie Klein and the Origins of the British Welfare State,' Psychoanalysis and History 1 (1999): 137-154.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>18</sup> For both Freud and Klein, the term 'object' refers to an internal representation and not, as in later object relations theory, an interpersonal or intersubjective relation.

the infant's original psychic unity with the mother that develops from the starting point of intrapsychic and bodily unity inside the womb and at the breast. This is followed by experiences of frustration that evoke ambivalent feelings of love and hate. Eventually this leads to recognition of ontological difference from the mother and a successful psychic separation.

I note throughout this study, and most particularly in Chapter 6, that Sinclair is interested in the fluid, porous membranes between psyches. In her portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship in Mary Olivier Sinclair contemplates bonds based on interdependence and continuity, upon lack of separation and differentiation, and upon fluid and permeable ego boundaries. Sinclair argues here that such bonds are destructive and counter-productive for the development of the female artist. However, while lying out on the moor, Mary contemplates the craft of writing poetry and reflects on various styles. After reciting a stanza, the phrases 'The Mother. The Mother' intrudes upon her stream of consciousness,<sup>19</sup> thus illustrating the merging of her poetics with the maternal realm.

Throughout her fiction, I argue, Sinclair simultaneously urges for differentiation for the artist and a return to the maternal realm. This stands well in my argument that although Sinclair was fascinated and stimulated by Freudian theory, she was one of the forerunners of women (including Klein) who looked to explain women's difference as opposed to their equality. Thus, her works look at alternatives that seek to challenge Freud's insistence on the Oedipus complex.<sup>20</sup> In addition, it explains why she continually refers to female writers as her authority—for example, the Brontës and Jane Harrison—and frequently gives images of the archaic mother.

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<sup>19</sup> Sinclair, Mary Olivier: A Life (1919. London: Virago, 1980) 298.

<sup>20</sup> It is also worth pointing out here that it was the female British analysts who produced the main alternative to Freud's theory of penis envy in the 1920s. See Zaretsky, ' "One Large Secure, Solid Background" ' 141.

Sinclair's interest in the figure of the mother is also reflected in her private papers and artefacts, giving further testimony to her preoccupation with the female-centred works of other women writers. In one of her working notebooks, she expounds at length on Jane Harrison's examination of the matrilineal influence upon classical tragedy in Themis. Harrison studied the symbols found in the myths, literature, art, and artefacts of ancient Greece and found it to be an era of mother right with an emphasis on maternal property, the maternal line and kinship. This is before the patrilineal social structure came to replace the matrilineal, bringing with it the emergence of the spiritual over corporeal existence; that is, the Apollonian over the chthonian-maternal principal. Several passages Sinclair transcribed from Themis are relevant here:

Woman to primitive man is a thing at once weak and magical, to be oppressed, yet feared. She is charged with powers of childbearing denied to man, powers only half understood, forces of attraction, but also of danger and of repulsion, forces that all over the world seem to fill him with dim terror. The attitude of man to woman, and, though perhaps in a lesser degree, of woman to man, is still to-day essentially magical.

Man cannot escape being born of woman, but he can, and, if he is wise, will, as soon as he comes to manhood, perform ceremonies of riddance and purgation. Initiation rites teem with such ceremonies, and savage life is everywhere hampered by sex taboos.<sup>21</sup>

This passage that Sinclair highlights reveals her preoccupation with the difference and alienation between men and women, and women's 'forces of attraction . . . and of

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<sup>21</sup> Workbook 43, box 41, UP. Quoted from Jane Ellen Harrison, Themis: A Study in the Social Origins of Greek Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1912) 36.

repulsion'.<sup>22</sup> This simultaneous desire for connection and separation between men and women and, most particularly, within in the mother-daughter relationship is demonstrated in Mary Olivier.

Mary struggles to fully develop a true sense of self while remaining firmly attached to the mother, constantly seeking out her approval. It is only towards the close of the novel that Mary realises that she must reject certain indoctrinated values in order for her to achieve a measure of individualisation and therefore freedom (her own 'ceremonies of riddance and purgation'). However, in sacrificing her lover in order to tend to her mother, I claim that Mary's path to complete individualisation is not fully negotiated and therefore she remains chained and her sublimation is incomplete or, at least, not fully realised, and thus Mary remains a divided self. This directly results from her inability to successfully separate from her mother as a child.

My examination of Mary Olivier's narrative from her infant experience to her adult world and her development as an artist is largely based on an interpretation offered by a Kleinian psychoanalysis. Klein, as I have argued, was Sinclair's contemporary and had links with members of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, and thus comes from the same cultural matrix as Sinclair. However, present day psychoanalytic feminists return to Klein by way of Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan, revealing her weaknesses. Waugh's caveat about the use of Klein's theoretical focus on the pre-Oedipal period is worth bearing in mind. She warns of 'the dangers of founding a feminist aesthetics on a simplistic regression to an idealized pre-Oedipal sphere' based—like Freud's—on the

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<sup>22</sup> The passage Sinclair transcribes uncannily anticipates Adrienne Rich's work Of Woman Born. Indeed, Rich refers to Harrison on numerous occasions, stating that Harrison 'indicated, questioned, and challenged the prevalence of patriarchal values.' See Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1977) 56n.

instinctual drives and unmodified by the cultural environment.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Waugh and other revisionist critics also note that Klein neglects the mother as subject, and lacks any adequate account of the relation between language and the unconscious. While it is not my intention to reflect upon these revised accounts of Klein, I do refer to these inadequacies as they arise in my examination. Instead, my main aim is to emphasise Klein's groundbreaking theories in the phallogocentric atmosphere of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century parallel to Sinclair's own Modernist text on the mother-daughter relationship.

## II. Infancy—'Mamma's Breast: A Smooth, Cool, Round Thing'

Book One of Mary Olivier details the progress of Mary's first four years of life. The initial sections are purely based on Mary's instinctual perceptions: what she likes and does not like, what give her pleasure and what does not, her demands and her frustrations.

Crucial to an understanding of Klein is her insistence that the mother is the whole of life for the infant. At the centre of Mary's universe is her mother's breast. The breast is offered as a pacifier when Mary cries: 'Mamma's breast: a smooth, cool, round thing that hung to your hands and slipped from them when they tried to hold it' (MO 4). All globular imagery becomes reconstituted in the infant Mary's mind as images of the maternal breast:

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<sup>23</sup> See Waugh, Feminine Fictions 64. Waugh demonstrates these dangers in her chapters on modern, post-war and postmodern texts. Other revisionist accounts of Klein may be found in Elizabeth Abel, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989); Jacqueline Rose, Why War?—Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein. Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Mary Jacobus, '“Tea Daddy”: Poor Mrs. Klein and the Pencil Shavings.' First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1995) 129-54; and Lyndsey Stonebridge, The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

The knob in the green painted iron railing of the cot . . . fitted the hollow of your hand, cool and hard, with a blunt nose that pushed agreeably into the palm. . . .

The big white globes hung in a ring above the dinner table. At first, when she came into the room . . . she could see nothing but the hanging, shining globes . . .

Mamma was sitting at the far end of the table. Her face and neck shone white above the pile of oranges . . . (MO 3-4)

During her early period of development, the infant Mary perceives the mother-child unit as undifferentiated, at one with the wider environment, and thereby omniscient and omnipotent. Mary's happiness is complete when she is lying in bed with her mother who provides a shelter with her 'raised hip and shoulder' and feeds her on demand (MO 4). Klein describes the phantasy within the mother-child unit as a hallucination of the mother's breast when the infant is hungry and the mother is absent. A similar phantasy seems to inform Mary's perpetual images of the breast and breast-like shapes.

Maggie Humm also refers to the predominance of globular images in this passage in her psychoanalytical reading of Mary Olivier. She draws attention to the 'infant heroine's acknowledgement of the power of the maternal'.<sup>24</sup> Humm argues that Mary's sensual intimacy with her mother blocks her desire for autonomy, and that her subsequent development as an artist stems from the '*latent content within the symbolic*' maternal imagery, such as the breast configurations cited above.<sup>25</sup> In Humm's brief reference to the way that Mary, as an artist, returns to maternal imagery as an '*aesthetic object*', she claims that 'the artistic medium becomes the mother's body in adult life'.<sup>26</sup> This can be usefully compared with the work of Ella Freeman Sharpe, an early member

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<sup>24</sup> Maggie Humm, Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1986) 72-81. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 80.

of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, on the role of the unconscious that underlies sublimations in art: 'The unconscious omnipotent good control of the parental imagos results in the projection of a harmonious rhythmic representation in a symbolic way in reality. . . . Periods of sucking in infancy, when free from anxiety, are experiences of rhythm.'<sup>27</sup> Sharpe explains that the pleasure derived from the rhythmical intake of milk, the rhythm of breath and heartbeat ensues psychological health for the infant. The artist, she writes, recreates this rhythm in which is inherent 'self-preservation and all-libidinal unfoldment.'<sup>28</sup> I will return to this idea of Mary's aesthetics in my section 'Becoming An Artist: An Urge to Re/Create' later in this chapter.

In the second part of Chapter I, Mary experiences frustration due to the phantasy not fulfilling the function of the wished-for breast. Mary comes to recognise that her hallucination of her mother's breast does not satisfy her hunger. Thus, in Kleinian terms, she begins to experience the loss of the ideal part-object, realising that she is not in fact omnipotent and is indeed separate—psychically and ontologically—from her mother:

Mamma was sitting at the far end of the table. . . . When Mary saw her she strained towards her, leaning dangerously out of Jenny's arms. . . . She didn't want to sit by herself on Papa's knee. She wanted to sit in Mamma's lap . . .

[s]he wanted Mamma to look down at her and smile (MO 4-5).

Unable to achieve what she wants she is left feeling frustrated, and ultimately she is sent out of the room. At this point Mary is acutely aware of differentiation from her

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<sup>27</sup> Ella Freeman Sharpe, 'Similar and Divergent Unconscious Determinants Underlying the Sublimations of Pure Art and Pure Science.' *Dream Analysis: A Practical Handbook for Psycho-Analysts* (London: Hogarth, 1978) 137-54. 144.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 145.

mother.<sup>29</sup> The acceptance of unavoidable reality and ambivalence in the infant is a Kleinian condition of the depressive position.

An infant's inability to tolerate this ambivalence leads to the expulsion of its destructive impulses and a lack of experience of anxiety. Klein describes in her paper 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego' (1930) that the lack of anxiety implies an end to an exploration of the environment, lack of symbol formation, and the onset of childhood psychosis.<sup>30</sup> She reveals that anxiety and its resolution is the spur to development, an experience lacking in the life of her patient suffering from childhood psychosis. She describes the infantile ego's first method of defence as an expulsive mechanism. That is, painful experiences of aggression are expelled in order to defend against the anxiety attendant upon fears of retaliation from the attacked object. This is the beginning of Klein's formulation of the paranoid schizoid position.

Mary's attempt to build a brick tower in order to gain her mother's attention is a good example of Klein's description of the development of the ego in the infant. Here Mary learns that she is not her mother's primary focus, and her efforts to make her mother notice her go unrewarded. Mrs Olivier is standing at the window, observing her three sons making a snowman out in the garden. When she refuses to turn around to look at the tower that Mary is building, Mary is aware of her anger and resentment:

Something swelled up, hot and tight, in Mary's body and in her face. She had a big bursting face and a big bursting body. She struck the tower, and it fell down. Her violence made her feel light and small again and happy.

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<sup>29</sup> Harrison also observes that the weaning process introduces the idea of alienation to the infant. The mother 'wean[s] it from her own breast and feed it with honey and alien milk, but, sooner or later, the day of separation is at hand.' Harrison, *Themis* 37.

<sup>30</sup> Melanie Klein, 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego.' 1930. *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1986) 95-111.

“Where’s the tower, Mary?” said Mamma.

“There isn’t any tar. I’ve knocked it down. It was a nasty tar.” (MO 10)

Previously, critics have commented on this passage noting the use of Freudian symbolism.<sup>31</sup> While I do not deny that the tower Mary builds can be interpreted as a phallic symbol, I believe to accept it solely on this level is too reductive and simplistic. Indeed, an application of a Kleinian reading seems to offer a more fruitful analysis of the relationship between Mary and her mother at this point. Klein writes that observing a child at play can give an insight to its emotions and anxieties and thus to its latent unconscious thoughts. In ‘The Importance of Symbol Formation’ Klein explains: ‘the play technique . . . follows the child’s symbolic representations and gives access to his anxiety and sense of guilt’.<sup>32</sup> Mrs Olivier, standing at the window, is preoccupied with her sons who are at play in the external, male world while Mary is in the nursery, the world of femininity and babyhood. Klein writes that the play objects are invested with symbolic representation. In her attempt to seduce her mother and catch her attention, Mary uses the play objects of Roddy, her brother, in order to compete with the boys outside. However, failing to do so, she violently destroys the tower, and feels ‘light and small again and happy.’ While Mary’s tower may be interpreted as a phallic symbol, in the act of building it she symbolically turns to the masculine; in knocking it down she retreats to the feminine. She recognises her attempt to differentiate and realises that she is unable to succeed; therefore, in her destruction of the tower, she expresses her wish to return to the baby or semiotic state in which she can psychically merge with the mother and remain undifferentiated. Yet she has made the first step in attempting to separate. Later, as I will examine, Mary also turns to other objects belonging to her brothers,

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Janet Sydney Kaplan, ‘May Sinclair.’ *Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1975) 47-75; and Jean Radford, introduction, *Mary Olivier: A Life* (London: Virago, 1980). N. pag.

<sup>32</sup> Klein, ‘The Importance of Symbol Formation’ 102.

namely their schoolbooks, in an attempt to differentiate and separate from her mother. They are symbols of the masculine realm, a world in which one is observed and is of significance (as demonstrated by the scene described above of Mrs Olivier observing her sons at play, and ignoring Mary).

In 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935) Klein establishes her new working theoretical ideas on the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions.<sup>33</sup> She observes from her analyses of children that there is a fundamental shift in their object relations at about the age of four to five months. Instead of relating to the mother in part-object terms as an ideal good breast or persecuting bad breast, the child begins to experience mixed feelings about the mother that evoke a process of mourning, guilt and the onset of depressive anxiety. Infantile ambivalence, as long as it is tolerable, paves the way for burgeoning ego development, and whole object relations.

Whereas Mary Olivier's healthy separation from her mother is problematic, a successful mother-daughter separation is portrayed in Sinclair's The Tree of Heaven (1917). Although more conventional in style than Mary Olivier, this earlier novel also focuses on a mother whose existence is based around her relationships with her children. Like Mrs Olivier, Frances Harrison 'loved her three sons . . . with passion, and her one daughter, Dorothea, with critical affection.'<sup>34</sup> Dorothea quickly learns to differentiate from her mother and becomes a successfully individuated, autonomous person. Dorothea does not suffer from Mary's level of dependency on the mother: 'She went her own way more than ever, with the absolute conviction that it was the right way. Nothing

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<sup>33</sup> Klein, 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States.' Selected Melanie Klein 115-145.

<sup>34</sup> Sinclair, The Tree of Heaven (New York: Macmillan, 1917) 28.

could turn her. At thirteen her body was no longer obedient. Dorothy was not going to be her mother's companion, or her father's, either' (TH 45).

In contrast, during her childhood—and indeed, during the entirety of her relationship with her mother—Mary is seen to behave ambivalently toward her mother, oscillating between feelings of love and hate. The first short section of Chapter XV in 'Adolescence' gives an example of Mary's conflicting emotions towards her mother. It begins with Mary thinking how cruel her mother is, and ends with Mary feeling guilty about these thoughts, that they did not really belong to her, and that in fact she thought her mother adorable:

Her thoughts about her mother went up and down. Mamma was *not helpless*. She was *not gentle*. She was not really like a wounded bird. She was *powerful and rather cruel*. You could only appease her with piles of hemmed sheets and darned stockings. If you didn't take care she would get hold of you and never rest till she had broken you, or turned and twisted you to her own will. . . . Somebody else's thoughts. Not yours. Not yours. . . . You heard yourself cry: 'Mamma, Mamma, you are adorable!'

That was you. (MO 124; italics added)

Mary's thoughts towards her mother constantly oscillate: they move 'up and down'. In Radclyffe Hall's The Unlit Lamp (1924), Joan Ogden similarly is unable to escape the stifling bonds that her mother imposes on her, and Joan's feelings towards her mother too oscillate between love and hate: 'Joan looked at her and hated her; and before the hate had time to root, began to love her again'.<sup>35</sup>

In turning from hate to love Mary exemplifies Klein's theory of reparation. Here the child's capacity for love and mental health is totally dependent upon its ability to

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<sup>35</sup> Radclyffe Hall, The Unlit Lamp (1924. London: Hammond, 1956) 220.

internalise a good whole object. However, whole object relations cannot be achieved without some pain attendant upon the 'loss of the loved object' (Klein refers to this as the good breast which is lost during weaning), guilt at the realisation that destructive attacks in phantasy have made the persecutory object 'bad', and the subsequent urge for reparation.<sup>36</sup>

Mary's frustration and suppressed rage directed at her mother is conflicted with a consciously expressed concern for her mother and a desire to protect her. Mary's infantile terror that her ambivalent mother's hate will destroy her love is defended against by both idealisation and denigration of her mother. Representations of ideal motherhood (examined in the following section) are made up of self-abnegation, unstinting love, intuitive knowledge of nurturance and unalloyed pleasure in children. The cultural fantasy of being 'at one' between the mother and child underpins the idealisation of motherhood. This fantasy encourages merging and promotes a dangerous inertia that blocks the development of mutuality and the recognition and mediation of differences.

Moreover, Klein argues that in order for the child to successfully individuate from the mother, she needs to transform her phantasy experience of her from that of the split and polarised good breast versus bad breast, into an integrated experience of her as ambivalent, whole and another subject in her own right. Although Mary becomes increasingly more conscious of her mother's limitations as she grows up, she is not able to make a final separation from her. In fact, the adolescent Mary resents the difference that separates her from her mother: 'Her new self seemed to her a devil that possessed her. She hated it. . . . She hated everything that separated her and made her different from her mother' (MO 129).

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<sup>36</sup> Klein, 'A Contribution' 121.

### III. The Mother: 'A Separate and Significant Existence'

Klein's formulations, although very useful in my argument to describe the situation of Mary in the mother-daughter relationship in Mary Olivier, tend to ignore the mother as subject.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, although critics have commented on the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in Mary Olivier, they have also mainly focused on the perspective of the daughter. I now turn my attention to that of the neglected situation of Mrs Olivier.

Dorothy Dinnerstein, who belongs to a group of psychoanalytically informed, feminist critics writing on motherhood in the 1970s,<sup>38</sup> suggests that cultural intolerance of maternal ambivalence, and cultural idealisations and envy of the mother both desexualise and dehumanise her. This cultural consequence of the Western style of exclusive mothering is in contrast to Klein's views, as described in my previous section, which argue that the infant's ambivalence towards the mother arise from an innate disposition of the instinctual drives of love and hate. Dinnerstein argues that patriarchal child-care arrangements encourage women to take sole responsibility for child rearing, putting mothers in a position of omnipotent control over their children.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, with little physical distance or psychological separation between the mother and child, the child views the mother's presence as the sole determining factor in whether her needs are met or not. Fathers have no part in this role. The child therefore responds to the mother as a magically powerful figure and maintains an infantile object relation to

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<sup>37</sup> Denise Riley highlights this flaw in Kleinian theory: 'the mother . . . remained curiously invisible and almost irrelevant: a cloud behind the "good" or "bad" breast. Since the infant would endure hell whatever she did or did not do, it followed that there was a sense in which she was hardly responsible for its well-being at all.' Denise Riley, War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother (London: Virago, 1983) 75.

<sup>38</sup> Others include Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax, and Jessica Benjamin.

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World (London: Women's P, 1987. Rpt. of The Mermaid and the Minotaur. 1976).

her, defining the mother as either all-good or all-bad. That is, the mother is idealised and denigrated in turn.

Dinnerstein believes that both men and women collude to maintain this status quo, which she argues dehumanises women since they are perceived either as all-powerful goddesses or as witches. Nancy Chodorow, amongst others (see below), holds that there is a dominant tradition of disavowal that surrounds the very active and aggressive life and death components of female sexuality involved in procreation, pregnancy and giving birth. Western patriarchal ideologies of mothering have tended to idealise maternity, robbing mothers of the right to experience aggression, hate and ambivalence consciously towards their babies and children.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the mother is unable to admit to the separate, inner life of her child. She treats her daughter as an extension of herself with no autonomous inner life, believing that her omnipotent bond with her child entitles her to special treatment. The child in this situation is only able to exist as long as it meets mother's needs first.

The idealised phantasy associated with the mother and child being 'at one', as represented by the image of the Madonna-and-child, is acted out by the mother in relation to her child.<sup>41</sup> Kristeva, in 'Stabat Mater', also refers to the Western cult of idealisation of the mother as virgin.<sup>42</sup> This idealisation of maternity undermines women's real experiences, and results in the fantasy that mothers are, or expected to be all-giving, asexual and pure. As Kristeva documents, the Western Christian culture of the Madonna myth continues to fuel the patriarchal phantasy of the ideal mother-infant

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<sup>40</sup> Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1978) 83.

<sup>41</sup> Estela Welldon discusses Western culture's idealisation of mothers as Madonnas in several case histories of women who are only able to relate to their own bodies and their children in narcissistic part-object relational terms. See Estela V. Welldon, Madonna, Mother, Whore: The Idealisation and Denigration of Motherhood (New York: Guilford P, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater.' 1976. Tales of Love, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 234-63.

bond. Kristeva asks: 'What is there, in the portrayal of the Maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, virginal, one, that reduces social anguish and gratifies a male being [?] . . . [I]s there something in that Maternal notion that ignores what a woman might say or want [?]'.<sup>43</sup>

The mother as Madonna, portraying this cultural idealisation, is a strong image in the early sections of Mary Olivier.<sup>44</sup> Mrs Olivier is associated with the Madonna when the child Mary plays her imaginary games and places her mother at the centre of her blue world where the father is excluded: 'Mamma was always there dressed in a blue gown . . . [b]ut Papa was not allowed in the blue house' (MO 5). It is clear from the use of religious iconography Mrs Olivier functions as a powerful and inspirational force in the young Mary's life. Sinclair offers another interesting depiction of the cultural idealisation of motherhood in one of her early novels:

It seems a simple thing to believe in the divinity of motherhood, when you have only seen it in the paintings of one or two old masters . . . But sometimes the divine thing chooses some morsel of humanity like Mrs Nevill Tyson, struggles with it and overpowers it, rending the small body, spoiling the delicate beauty.<sup>45</sup>

Sinclair observes that the works of art by the old *masters* perpetuate the cultural inscription of maternity. Moreover, she notes that this image is in fact humanised (or dehumanised) by reality as it 'struggles', 'overpowers' and 'spoil[s]' the 'divinity of motherhood'. The reality of motherhood besmirches the patriarchal depictions in paintings.

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<sup>43</sup> Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' 236.

<sup>44</sup> Also, at the beginning of The Tree of Heaven, Mrs Harrison is seen at the centre of the family, holding its members together. She tranquilly sits in her garden under the tree of heaven thinking about her children. This image of her is repeated throughout the novel. However, the depiction of maternal serenity is marred by a 'faint illusion of worry' when she realises she forgot to invite her relatives to tea (TH 4).

<sup>45</sup> Sinclair, Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson (London: Blackwood, 1898) 77.

The masculinist codes of maternal expectations are also evident in Mary Olivier. The essence of Mary's love for her mother does not bear witness to either what in reality her mother represents or what Mary can be to her mother. As a result, Mary experiences periods of great doubt, despair and feelings of failure as a daughter. The refrain that Mary repeats throughout the novel is that her mother is 'holy and unselfish'. In fact, this is what Mrs Olivier is *not*, although Mary's words perpetuate the maternal ideal. Mary's mother is narcissistic, manipulative and conniving. She inhibits Mary's growth and development as an autonomous person, and instead tries to shape Mary to her own ideal of Victorian girlhood. Mrs Olivier is unable to successfully separate from her daughter: she fails to recognise Mary as a woman in her own right, with individual choices and alternatives in life. Mrs Olivier expects to mould Mary into a replica version of herself, the image of ideal womanhood. She tells Mary: 'I like to see you behaving like a little girl, instead of tearing about and trying to do what boys do' (MO 70). She rejects Mary when she realises that she cannot subdue Mary's own will and temperament, and that Mary will not follow docilely in her footsteps. In contrast, Dorothy and her mother in The Tree of Heaven recognise each other as embodied subjects and that they have successfully separated. Dorothy admits that she likes her mother in spite of the fact ' "[S]he doesn't like me so very much. That's why she lets me do what I like. She doesn't care enough to stop me" ' (TH 130).

However, the mother's bond with her sons is not so successfully negotiated in The Tree of Heaven. Frances Harrison adores the solid physicality of her sons' bodies in childhood with an almost erotic fervour, wishing to perpetuate 'the illusion of their childhood as going on for ever' (TH 16). She mourns the passing of her sons' babyhoods, feeling that the babies in them die to be replaced by older children (TH 43-4). Frances's preference is for her sons rather than for her husband. Indeed, she believes

that in 'choosing a husband you had to think of your children; and she had wanted boys that would look like Michael and Nicholas and John' (TH 10). Similarly, Mrs Olivier in Mary Olivier also makes it clear that her preference is for her son Mark, who usurps the place of her inept husband in her affections.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, Mrs Olivier simultaneously cares for her daughter and pushes her away. Her infliction of psychological pain on Mary is indicative of her own desire to feel masterful and gain some measure of control over her daughter. Since she cannot rule her daughter's life, she resorts to resenting her: Mrs Olivier tells Mary that her non-religious beliefs ' "[H]urt me every minute of the day. . . . But you seem to be positively enjoying yourself" ' and her mother's face is '[a]lways the same vexed, disapproving, remembering face' (MO 170). Mrs Olivier's antagonism towards Mary rests uneasily with the traditional image of the mother as the spiritual centre of the family. Far from motherhood offering women empowerment and purpose, it is seen as a destructive and alienating force; one that draws asunder family life. The reality of motherhood, as represented by Mrs Olivier, is shown to be manipulative, abusive and subject to control.

The dominant patriarchal phantasy of womanhood conflates femininity with maternity. Patriarchal ideologies of gender construct the feminine (especially in terms of sexuality and psychology) as predominantly passive. Mrs Olivier attempts to shape her daughter after her own likeness; that is to be a passive and self-sacrificing construct. Therefore, to confront the actual reality of the active, aggressive life and death potential of female sexuality and psychology, particularly in mothers, is to confront something

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<sup>46</sup> The mother's preference for her sons—in her adoration of their physical fitness—in both novels reflects contemporary eugenicist thinking. In 'A Defence of Men' (1912), Sinclair writes:

Not only is she conscious for the first time of Herself as an individual with inalienable rights, as an end in herself, she is profoundly conscious of the Race. The Race whose guardian and saviour she is. The Race that has its sanctuary in her blood and flesh. . . . [The woman of to-day] says: "It is the flesh and blood and nerves of *my children* you are wasting. And I won't stand it. For I *know!*"

Sinclair, 'A Defence of Men,' English Review 11 (July 1912): 556-66. 564; original italics.

unholy or evil (non-Madonna like), and to confront a psychosexual taboo (for example, women's aggression). Maternal ambivalence can be likened to a push-pull oscillation. It describes the tension inherent in the dichotomy between autonomy for one's own inner freedom and the submission to conform to the expected and culturally decreed role of the sacrificial element inherent in motherhood.

In Chapter 2 I examined the problematic of motherhood for Jane Holland in The Creators. I noted that she reflects the maternal ambivalence as described here. Jane Holland feels pulled in two directions between the expected role of angel in the house who must submit to her family and children, and her creative drive (described as a dehumanising influence) that takes her attention away from her family. Sinclair continues to address this issue of maternal ambivalence in Mary Olivier.

Although Sinclair mainly portrays Mrs Olivier as the idealised mother, there are moments when this image slips and Mrs Olivier is shown to have a private life. This suggests that, in fact, the angel in the house is a carefully cultivated and carefully maintained image. To preserve her own standing, in order not to become an outcast like Aunt Charlotte with her overt sexual desires and Aunt Lavvy with her outspoken 'Opinions', Mrs Olivier conforms to accepted, cultural attitudes in an attempt to hide her maternal ambivalence towards Mary. Yet, when Mary refuses to conform to patriarchally accepted codes of femininity, the mother's psychic reality and/or phantasy life is upset since being 'at one' with her child must also involve Mary's submission to the passive, feminine ideal. Mary's internal and external world does not mirror her mother's, and therefore Mrs Olivier feels she has failed as a mother.

Mrs Olivier is also a sexual woman in her own right, with her own 'separate and significant existence' (MO 128). There are brief moments when Mary observes this. When Mrs Olivier plays the Hungarian March, 'when it was not Sunday', Mary is

aware that Mamma 'shook [the music] out of her body and not out of the piano' (MO 69). This offers an insight to the mother's private self; music provides an avenue through which Mrs Olivier can express her true feelings, those that cannot be verbalised, in a manner similar to Alice Cartaret's, as described in Chapter 3. Yet, when Mary later plays the piano in a 'joyous, triumphant' manner, her mother reprimands her, thus curtailing Mary's own personal and passionate expression (MO 177). In adulthood, Mary is consciously aware that her mother possesses a private, inner self. She realises that her mother prevented her from enjoying a sexual life by marrying Maurice Jourdain and that she wanted Mary to remain unmarried in order for her to stay by her side. Yet, as Mary notes, 'Mamma had married for her own pleasure, for her passion' (MO 229).

Kristeva observes in 'Stabat Mater' that motherhood makes passions circulate. This is apparent in the ambivalent relationship between Mrs Olivier and Mary. Passions not only affirm boundaries but force reflection, provoking both separation and unification, and thus provide a spur to individuation for both the mother and the child. However, an appreciation of individuation in each other is not achieved between Mrs Olivier and Mary. Mary comes to realise: 'To be happy with her either you or she had to be broken, to be helpless and little like a child' (MO 194). Mary's cyclical pattern of contest and reconciliation with her mother is psychoanalytically interpreted as a struggle for self-understanding and self-fulfilment. She finally realises that her desire for her mother's approval is ultimately destructive to herself. She tells Mark: '“Ever since I began to grow up I felt there was something about Mamma that would kill me if I let it. I've had to fight for every single thing I've ever wanted. It's awful fighting her when she is so sweet and gentle. But it's either that or go under” '(MO 249).

#### IV. A Longing for the Masculine Realm

Although Mary remains psychically attached to her mother, her intellectual affinities belong to the masculine realm. This explains her desire to take up her brothers' schoolbooks and to teach herself Greek. Virginia Woolf queries the desire to learn Greek in 'On Not Knowing Greek' (1925). She asks:

All the more strange, then, is it that we should wish to know Greek, try to know Greek, feel for ever drawn back to Greek, and be for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek, though from what incongruous odds and ends, with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek, who shall say?<sup>47</sup>

After all, she continues, 'Greek literature is the impersonal literature.'<sup>48</sup> For Woolf, it is in the very language that holds the fascination. 'Greek is the only expression' since 'it is the language that has us most in bondage; the desire for that which perpetually lures us back. First there is the compactness of expression. . . . Then, spare and bare as it is, no language can move more quickly, dancing, shaking, all alive, but controlled.'<sup>49</sup> The alien sounds of the ancient, dead language also fascinate Mary for the same reason: 'She wished she knew Greek; the patterns the sounds made were so hard and still. And there were bits of patterns, snapt off, throbbing wounds of sound that couldn't heal. Lines out of Mark's Homer. . . . She knew the sound patterns were beautiful' (MO 125, 127).

Mary's fascination with these strange sounds echoes that of Maggie Tulliver's in The Mill on the Floss. On learning Latin grammar Maggie 'delighted in [the] new words.' She finds that '[t]he mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context,—like strange horns of beasts, and leaves of unknown plants, brought from some far-off-region—gave boundless scope to her imagination, and were all the more

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<sup>47</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'On Not Knowing Greek.' Collected Essays, vol. 1 (London: Hogarth, 1967) 1-13. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 11.

fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret.<sup>50</sup> Walter Ong describes Latin as having ‘no direct connection with anyone’s unconscious of the sort that mother tongues, learned in infancy, always have.’<sup>51</sup> It is ‘[d]evoid of baby-talk, insulated from the earliest life of childhood where language has its deepest psychic roots, a first language for none of its users.’<sup>52</sup> Similarly, as Ong describes, Greek is the language of academic rhetoric: ‘Rhetoric was at the root of public speaking, of oral address, for persuasion . . . or exposition.’<sup>53</sup> The literature of ancient Greece that Mary learns belongs to this tradition. Like Latin, learning Greek was typically a male tradition learned in public schools, a tradition from which both Mary and Maggie are excluded. After sitting in on elementary lessons by the home tutor for their brothers, they determinedly continue to teach themselves. Thus, as Ong notes, both Greek and Latin are ‘sex-linked, a language written and spoken only by males, learned outside the home.’<sup>54</sup> Ong’s comments therefore throw light on the tradition that Mary aspires to. She seeks to empower herself with knowledge set aside as a masculine preserve in order to gain entry into the symbolic realm. This is in tune with Woolf’s observations that Greek literature is impersonal and its language is subject to control. It is the voice of the patriarchal tradition. As I will explain shortly, Mary ultimately returns to the semiotic realm when her poetry loses the control learnt from the influence of Greek verse and develops its own unique style written from the body.

A comparison can also be made between Mary Olivier and Miriam Henderson in Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage series (1915-1967). The young Miriam more overtly

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<sup>50</sup> George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, ed. Gordon S. Haight (1860. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 2.i 129.

<sup>51</sup> Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1982) 113.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 109.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 113.

rejects her mother and turns towards her father, before returning to a semiotic or pre-Oedipal realm.<sup>55</sup> Both Mary and Miriam are attracted to men whom they believe can offer a ‘thought process’; that is, father/instructor mentors they hope to learn from, become wise, and thereby align themselves with the progressive and masculinist ‘advance in civilisation’ that Freud later explained in Moses and Monotheism:

This turning away from the mother to the father points [to] . . . a victory of intellectuality over sensuality—that is, an *advance in civilisation*, since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses, while paternity is a hypothesis based on inference and a premise. Taking sides in this way with a *thought process* in preference to a sense perception had proved to be a momentous step.<sup>56</sup>

Both Mary Olivier and Miriam Henderson experience this distinction between the mother and father or, rather, feminine and masculine codes of being. In Mary’s code of values, her desire for the power of knowledge and language gives her access to a masculine world, believing this is the only one of true worth. With her first two suitors, Lindley Vickers and Maurice Jourdain, Mary assumes that these potential husbands will provide a suitable escape from the family entrapment. Later, in Book Five, she realises that she must reach her ideals herself and achieves a qualified level of escape through her art.

As Mary grows up, she becomes increasingly aware of her gender difference. When Roddy nearly dies of rheumatic fever, Mary overhears her mother telling the maid, ‘‘It wouldn’t have mattered so much if it had been the girl’’ (MO 67). Later, she observes that her muscles ‘‘will never be as good as his [Mr Ponsonby’s]’’ (MO 84).

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<sup>55</sup> Radford argues that Miriam Henderson oscillates ‘between the symbolic and the semiotic, constantly turning from one to the other.’ Jean Radford, Dorothy Richardson Key Women Writers (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1991) 91.

<sup>56</sup> Freud, Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays, 1939 [1934-38], SE 23. 114; italics added.

Mary is beginning to learn an inferior sense of the feminine in the patriarchal world of the Oliviers, where esteem, power and deference are conferred to the sons. This anticipates, as I noted at the start of this chapter, Virginia Woolf's thinking that women must either reach for the solution of androgyny and male identification in order to empower themselves, or accept the burden of femininity.

It also explains Mrs Olivier's desire for Mary to repress her sense of being an embodied subject. Mrs Olivier is aware that when Mary develops her 'masculine' character traits, for example, a liking for aggressive physical activities and intellectual pursuits, she is learning to become a separate, individual, embodied self. When a girl follows such pursuits, she is avoiding femininity since she negates the patriarchal imperative to conflate a sense of self, rooted in psychosexual identity, with phallogentric constructions of appropriate gendered behaviour and attitudes (defined according to biological sex). Klein describes that the process of becoming feminine requires the dropping of occupations deemed masculine, such as competitive sports and intellectual pursuits. Instead, there is an increasing pre-occupation with both feminine pursuits (in order to embody the masculine subject's phantasy of the desirable object) and cultural ideals that surround the desirable personal qualities of the potential mother. Here Klein is describing how the female subject must submerge any burgeoning sense of psychosexual autonomy under the weight of masculinist desire for the sexual, yet at the same time maternal, object. Mrs Olivier gives voice to this phallogentric imperative that Mary must suppress her embodied, autonomous and potentially masculinised self. She attempts to shame Mary by informing her that her male suitors laugh at her and are 'not interested in little book-worms' (MO 88).

The suppression of the development of female intellect was endorsed at the *fin de siècle* by the scientific language of the (male) psychoanalysts. In his collaborated

study with Freud on hysteria, Josef Breuer defines the adolescent girl who pursues intellectual development as an hysteric.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Breuer highlights the association of ‘liveliness’ and restlessness’ in the hysteric with the awakening of sexuality and a release of energy, offering the explanation that this ‘surplus quantity of free nervous energy [is] available for the production of pathological phenomena.’<sup>58</sup> Assuming that the hysteric is ‘sterile, no doubt’, Breuer gives a biological explanation to hysteria: it is defined from unsatisfied sexual and maternal drives, thereby linking female intellect with the reproductive function. He describes the qualities of the adolescent girl who is likely to become an hysteric, characterising her ‘energy of will’ and lively, gifted, intellectual nature: ‘They include girls who get out of bed at night so as secretly to carry on some study that their parents have forbidden from fear of their overworking.’<sup>59</sup>

There are numerous examples in fiction where the female protagonist seeks a private room and a private time of her own to develop her intellectual capabilities. These spaces are places of retreat, where the female protagonist can psychologically step out of the world of masculine imperatives and adult sexuality. Both Mary Olivier and Miriam Henderson in Richardson’s Pilgrimage are explicit examples of Breuer’s description of adolescent girls with intellectual natures, yet neither present symptoms of hysteria. When Mary is sent to Clevehead School, she specifically requests a ‘“room to herself” that turned out to be a servants’ garret on a deserted floor. You could wake at five o’clock in the light mornings and read Plato, or snatch twenty minutes from undressing before Miss Payne came for your candle’ (MO 146). Likewise, Miriam in

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<sup>57</sup> See Freud and Josef Breuer, Studies on Hysteria, 1893-95, SE 2, 240.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. This links to Klein in her reference to masculine activities like competitive sports, as I have mentioned. Mary is frequently shown to exhibit daredevil stunts, such as hanging by her arms from a high window ledge, and ‘brook jumping.’ Both activities are taught and encouraged by her brother. Mary’s zeal for such pastimes symbolically demonstrates her desire to be treated on a par with her bothers; she refuses to be marginalized on account of her sex. This is also replicated in her desire to learn ancient Greek.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Pilgrimage stays up at night reading: 'For the last six weeks of the summer term she sat up night after night propped against her upright pillow and bolster under the gas-jet reading her twopenny books in her silent room. Almost every night she read until two o'clock. She felt at once that *she was doing wrong*'. Miriam finds that in this '*refuge of silence*' she 'rediscover[s] the self that she had known at home . . . [I]t was herself, the *nearest most intimate self* she had known . . . it was herself, her own familiar secretly happy and rejoicing self'.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Katharine Hilbery in Virginia Woolf's Night and Day (1919) gets up early in the morning or stays up at night in order to carry out her secret study of mathematics:

Upstairs, alone in her room, she rose early in the morning or sat up late at night to . . . work at mathematics. No force on earth would have made her confess that. Her actions when thus engaged were *furtive and secretive*, like some nocturnal animal. Steps only had to sound on the staircase, and she slipped her paper between the leaves of a great Greek dictionary which she had purloined from her father's room for this purpose. It was only at night, indeed, that she felt secure enough from surprise to concentrate her mind to the utmost.

Perhaps it was the *unwomanly nature of the science* that made her instinctively wish to conceal her love of it. But the more profound reason was that in her mind mathematics were directly opposed to literature. . . . [S]omething . . . made her feel *wrong-headed*, and thus more than ever disposed to *shut her desires away from view and cherish them with extraordinary fondness*.<sup>61</sup>

Each of these female protagonists is aware of the subversive nature of her intellectual pursuits. Theirs is a solitary activity, conducted in secrecy, with the impression of

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<sup>60</sup> Dorothy M. Richardson, Pilgrimage I (1915, 1916, 1917. London: Virago, 1979) 282; italics added.

<sup>61</sup> Virginia Woolf, Night and Day (1919. London: Hogarth, 1930) 40-1; italics added.

something shameful in its undertaking. Indeed, concealment is necessary since they are pursuing *unwomanly* activities. However, each of the women referred to above gains pleasure from her study and awareness of her 'real, inner self'. Studying makes Mary aware of her 'independent and separate identity . . . struggling . . . for completer freedom and detachment' from her family (MO 290).

Woolf's passage from Night and Day, given above, has an interesting precedent in Sinclair's short story 'Numbers'.<sup>62</sup> 'Numbers' should be read alongside Sinclair's metaphysical study of mathematics in her chapter 'The New Realism' in A Defence of Idealism.<sup>63</sup> Here she discusses 'immediate experience, the perception of an object in space' (DI 156) explaining that this is a 'private space . . . and that the shapes, sizes, lights and shades, and positions of objects in this space are not absolute, but relative to the position of the perceiver' (DI 157). In 'Numbers' this relativity is made clear: when Arnold, the little boy at the centre of the story, is alone, he sees the procession of numbers as 'a pattern of ten colours' and six is 'pulpy, shapeless' and slips through his fingers.<sup>64</sup> Arnold, like Katharine Hilbery, finds that '[t]he fascination of letters was nothing to the fascination of numbers.'<sup>65</sup> In psychoanalytic language, Arnold is aware of his 'split' self, and the numbers represent his exploration of these different selves. As he grapples with numbers on his right hand and fractions on his left:

One night it struck him that since there was at least a right and a left in it, he might try starting with Himself. He tried it; and the horrible idea occurred to him

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<sup>62</sup> Sinclair, 'Numbers,' Egoist 9 (Oct. 1918): 122-23. This interesting story, based on Sinclair's fascination with the philosophical concept of Ultimate Reality, has not been documented in any of the bibliographies on Sinclair, including that of Raitt's recent biography. I therefore believe 'Numbers' has not been discovered by critics, leading me to surmise that there may be additional short stories by Sinclair, as yet unknown, published in the little magazines. Sinclair's workbooks held at her archive list numerous titles for short stories that have not been included in any bibliography.

<sup>63</sup> Sinclair, A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions (London: Hutchinson, 1917).

<sup>64</sup> Sinclair, 'Numbers' 122.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

that at this rate there couldn't be any Himself either. He was only *one of the ones*. . . . Luckily when the splitting began he always fell asleep.<sup>66</sup>

When Arnold asks if he can learn fractions like his brother, Mamma's 'pretty face had become suddenly very red, and she looked frightened.'<sup>67</sup> She explains that he is too young to understand them, and at this point Arnold's father interrupts Mamma's instruction. The father's voice is loud and controlling; it is the overseeing voice of patriarchy. He sneers at his wife, demanding the answer to the sum he sets her, knowing that Mamma does not know how to do fractions. Arnold is aware of the 'cruel trap' his father has laid for his mother, and his interest in numbers wanes as a result of his changed perspective: 'under Mamma's direction . . . all the interest and excitement' of the numbers disappear.<sup>68</sup>

Chris Willis, in her article ' "All Agog to Teach the Higher Mathematics" ', explains that '[m]aths was the stock subject for the academically-inclined New Woman of popular fiction.'<sup>69</sup> Willis's article also provides a useful summary of the opponents and supporters of the education of women at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>70</sup> The frequency with which such debates flared up in the nineteenth century over what a woman should and should not read is indicative of the power struggle concerning access to knowledge. This is implicitly bound up with the wider controversy over the very nature of femininity itself. Willis explains that much of the public discussion of women's higher education during this time explicitly focused on the knock-on effect it would have on marriage and motherhood. Willis refers to one of the opponents, Dr Henry Maudsely,

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<sup>66</sup> Sinclair, 'Numbers' 123; original italics.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Chris Willis, ' "All Agog to Teach the Higher Mathematics": University Education and the New Woman,' *Women: A Cultural Review* 10 (1999): 56-66. 59.

<sup>70</sup> See also Kate Flint's historical account in *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

who in 1874 (and therefore anticipating Breuer's remarks) spelled out that women's intellectual efforts would damage women's reproductive functions:

It will have to be considered whether women can scorn delight and live laborious days of intellectual exercise and production, without injury to their functions as the conceiver, mothers and nurses of children. For it would be an ill thing if it should so happen, that we got the advantages of the *female intellectual work at the price of a puny, enfeebled and sickly race.*<sup>71</sup>

I discussed in Chapter 2 the idea of the artist as a degenerate and the potential threatening, eugenic effect that it has on the family. Here this idea is developed: it is specifically the *female intellectual* that is responsible for the well-being and fitness of the nation's race.<sup>72</sup>

The idea of female productivity and the resultant progeny is not a new one in literary criticism. Since the second-wave movement in feminism and the congruent development in mothering psychology during the 1960s and 1970s, critics have written copiously on the association between the female artist and the production of a work of art as an offspring.<sup>73</sup> Although it is not my intention to repeat this now well-known material, it is worth highlighting these consistent and reoccurring images. In my next section I will examine not so much Mary Olivier's art as progeny but rather the desire to

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<sup>71</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'Sex and Mind in Education,' *Fortnightly Review* (April 1874). Qtd. in Willis, "All Agog to Teach the Higher Mathematics" ' 56; italics added.

<sup>72</sup> See also Angelique Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions,' *Women: A Cultural Review* 10 (1999): 1-21.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity,' *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 243-64; Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood,' *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, eds. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 352-77; Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse,' *Feminisms*, eds. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 371-96; and Barbara R. Almond, 'The Monster Within: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and a Patient's Fears of Childbirth and Mothering,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 79 (1998): 775-86.

re/create as a return to the mother-child dyad, referring to the parallel narratives of Melanie Klein, Ella Freeman Sharpe, and Julia Kristeva.

### **V. Becoming an Artist: An Urge to Re/Create**

When Mary first begins to write poetry, the verse that appeals to her has ‘a throbbing beat, excited, exciting; beyond rhyme. That would be the nearest to the Greek verse’ (MO 326). However, she finally achieves success and recognition when she gives up rhyme learnt from her study of rhetoric in ancient Greek texts. She tells Richard how, inspired by the subversive and new art of Walt Whitman, she realised: ‘ “[Y]ou *could* do without rhyme. I knew it must sound as if it was all spoken—chanted—that they mustn’t sing. Then I thought perhaps that was the way to do it” ’ (MO 338). She ‘counted the months till April when her poems would come out’ (MO 341). Mary’s wait for the publication date of her poems is the artist’s gestation period.

In her chapter on ‘Art and the Depressive Position’ Hanna Segal writes of the notion referred to in the section above that a ‘work of art is often felt by the artist as a symbolic baby’.<sup>74</sup> In Kleinian terms, symbol making is linked with the idea of reparation. In ‘Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse’ (1929) Klein first makes a connection between creative activity and very deep early anxieties. She explicitly explains the creative impulse as originating in the need to repair the damaged object. She writes: ‘In the analyses of children, when the representation of destructive wishes is succeeded by an expression of reactive tendencies, we constantly find that drawing and painting are used as means to make people anew.’<sup>75</sup> This inspires Klein’s subsequent work on the depressive position. For Klein, anxiety is caused by the conflict of destructive and reparative impulses toward

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<sup>74</sup> Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London: Routledge, 1990) 95.

<sup>75</sup> Klein, ‘Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse.’ *Selected Melanie Klein* 84-94. 93.

the breast, which she later understood as the original source and representation of creativity for the infant. While the rage and frustrations of infancy are vented, in imagination, against the frustrating object (the breast/mother), the depressive position is reached when the infant is able to deal with ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards the frustrating object; experiences guilt and depression about his/her destructiveness; and wishes to restore the maternal object which has been destroyed.

For Segal this line of thought leads to an important paradox: the artist's work is new and yet arises from an urge to recreate or restore. Insofar as creative work is a restoration of lost objects in the internal world it generates a sense of re-discovery; but insofar as the process is necessarily symbolic, the subject 'has the freedom of its use—it is something created anew.'<sup>76</sup> Segal captures this Kleinian paradox in a sentence that resonates extraordinarily, I believe, with Sinclair's Mary Olivier. Of the dual process of restoration and creation, she writes: 'It is a restoring in one's internal world of a parental couple creating a new baby.'<sup>77</sup>

Ella Freeman Sharpe also examined the relation between sublimation and the creative instinct. In her paper 'Certain Aspects of Sublimation and Delusion' (1929) she explains:

Art rises to its extreme height only when it performs the service—first for the artist, and unconsciously for ourselves—that it did in ancient times. That service is a magical reassurance. Great art is a self-preservative functioning. A vital communication is made to us in picture, statue, drama, novel. It is *life* that is danced, a world that is built in music.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Segal, Dream, Phantasy and Art 95.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; italics added.

<sup>78</sup> Ella Freeman Sharpe, 'Certain Aspects of Sublimation and Delusion.' Dream Analysis: A Practical Handbook for Psycho-Analysts (London: Hogarth, 1978) 125-36. 127-28.

This helps to analyse the manifestation of the ego in an art form as exhibited by Mary Olivier when she develops her talents as a poet. Sharpe continues her paper by explaining that the production of a work of art enables a sense of release for the artist as he/she struggles to overcome the ambivalence within his/her relationship with the mother: 'The ego secures release from anxiety of the incorporated hostile parents by a power of *externalizing it into an art form*, and this art form is an omnipotent *life-giving*, a restoration, milk, semen, *a child*.'<sup>79</sup>

Sharpe and Klein were colleagues in the British Psychoanalytical Society. Their parallel analyses of the creative impulse help to confirm the views of Sinclair, their contemporary. In 1916, in her two-part lecture published in the Medical Press and Circular, Sinclair expounds upon the difficulty of reconciling productivity with reproductivity, giving her personal opinion on the ideas of repression, the libido and sublimation:

[I]n man we have a creature in whom the libido is actually in conflict with itself and with its own sublimation. In man the primordial sexual desire . . . carries behind it the whole amount of the tremendous driving power stored up in the Unconscious. . . . In that lifting into aesthetic appreciation we have one of the first sublimations of the sex libido . . . [b]ut . . . sublimation cannot always keep pace with instinct, and the first oscillations in the balance between libido and sublimation begin.<sup>80</sup>

Here Sinclair upholds her view that sexuality is detrimental to the powers of creativity (see my discussion on sexuality and the female artist in Chapter 2). She follows Freud in viewing sublimation and repression as dipolar: sublimation is associated with a

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<sup>79</sup> Sharpe, 'Certain Aspects of Sublimation and Delusion' 130; italics added.

<sup>80</sup> Sinclair, 'Clinical Lecture: Symbolism and Sublimation I,' Medical Press and Circular 153 (9 Aug. 1916): 118-22. 120.

fruitful and embracing future, and repression with a sterile and inhibiting past. However, unlike Freud, Sinclair dispenses with the idea of sexual energy as the only form of the libido, and believes that *entirely* to ignore physical desires, not just sexual ones, hinders sublimation. That is to say, Sinclair acknowledges the importance of writing from the body in creating art and thus in sublimating the self to a higher form. Her writing (along with Sharpe's and Klein's) clearly anticipates that of the French feminists' *écriture féminine*. As I shall examine, Mary Olivier's art expresses a celebration of writing from the body.

According to a feminist, Kleinian reading of Sinclair, in phallogentric culture a forgetting of the primal bond with the mother's body is necessary in order for the child to successfully individuate. In the second part of her clinical lecture, Sinclair continues her examination on sublimation and, in line with the female British psychoanalysts, as forementioned, apports blame on the parents:

It cannot be said that they show up well. They and men's childish passion for them are the backward force that retard his development as an individual . . . A large portion of Professor Jung's book [Psychology of the Unconscious] is given up to the myth of the return to the mother for rebirth, and to the conflict with the mother . . . It must be fought to a finish, and the child must win it or remain for ever immature. If the parent wins, ten to one the child becomes a neurotic.<sup>81</sup>

Kleinian analysis, however, reveals that a self-contained individualism, based on a radical disidentification with, and forgetting of, the primal bond with the mother, is in fact a fragile ego position that can never be attained in reality. This is the crucial bond that needs to be negotiated for Mary Olivier to realise her abilities as an artist. In order for Mary to develop into an autonomous woman and become an artist, Sinclair portrays

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<sup>81</sup> Sinclair, 'Clinical Lecture: Symbolism and Sublimation II,' Medical Press and Circular 153 (16 Aug. 1916): 142-45. 144. In Chapter 3 I reflected on Jung's archetypal father whose demonic powers influence the psychic life of his offspring, trapping them into neurosis.

the need for her to undergo the imperative to separate, involving Klein's radical disidentification with the mother. However, as Mary recognises, this has potential estranging consequences that she is unprepared to undertake. It is only after Mrs Olivier's death that Mary realises: 'She had gone through life wanting things, wanting people . . . not able to keep off them and let them go. . . . [Happiness] had not come from the people or the things you thought it came from, but from somewhere inside yourself' (MO 378). Although Mary does eventually sublimate herself in order to become an artist, she is unable to completely free herself of her primal, psychic bond to her mother. This connection is reflected in her art.

At this point, Kristeva's distinction between the symbolic and semiotic elements of signification, as described in Revolution in Poetic Language (1984 [1974]), is a most useful aid in interpreting Mary's poetry. Symbolic signification refers to the organized structure or grammar that governs the manner in which symbols can function. That is, the symbolic is the element of signification that sets up the structures by which symbols can operate. By contrast, Kristeva refers to the child's acquisition of language that exists anterior to the mirror stage as semiotic. The disposition of the semiotic is stored in a receptacle known as the chora. It admits distinctive utterances, which are uncertain and indeterminate articulations in that they do not yet refer to a signified object. The semiotic is the organization of drives in language and is associated with rhythms and tones that are meaningful parts of language but do not represent or signify anything. Kristeva explains that these bodily drives are discharged through rhythms and tones.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Kristevan theory addresses the problem of the relationship between language and bodily experience by postulating that, through the semiotic element, bodily drives manifest themselves through language. Kristeva proposes that the

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<sup>82</sup> See Julia Kristeva, 'The Semiotic and the Symbolic,' Revolution in Poetic Language, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984).

processes of identification or incorporation that make the use of language possible, operate within the material of the body. She maintains that before the infant passes through Freud's Oedipal phase or Lacan's mirror stage, the patterns and logic of language are already operating in a pre-Oedipal situation.

That is to say, the semiotic indicates the primary relationship with the maternal body. This is the first body within and through which the infant communicates. It is now clear how Kristeva's concept of the semiotic is related to Klein's formulations of the archaic maternal or 'primitive' process. Mary Olivier owes her success as an artist to the power of the archaic maternal. In her poetry she symbolically re/creates the semiotic bond between mother and daughter.<sup>83</sup> Mary's poems attempt to describe the harmony found in the 'white dust . . . the wind in the green corn . . . the five trees—they would be the most beautiful poems in the world.' The images she tries to create 'make a pattern . . . a moving white pattern of sound that, when she tried to catch it, broke up and flowed away' (MO 125).

This has an immense intertextual significance. In Feminism (1912), Sinclair refers to the essential 'stream of the Life-Force of which Woman is pre-eminently the reservoir'.<sup>84</sup> Through the transmutation of its energy, 'Woman' may experience a heightened and more fulfilled inner life:

Whoever has known and can remember certain moments of heightened vision and sensation, when things seen—common things—trees in a field—a stretch of sky—became transfigured and took on I know not what divine radiance and beauty, whoever has known the exaltation, the exquisite and unspeakable joy,

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<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Abel interprets Virginia Woolf's work in a similar manner. She explains that the archaic maternal that prevails at the beginning of To the Lighthouse is one in which harmony, potency and fertility are ensured by the motherly presence. See Abel, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989) 19.

<sup>84</sup> Sinclair, Feminism (London: Women Writers' Suffrage League, 1912) 30.

the sheer ecstasy and the ultimate peace that accompany such vision . . . These are some of our [that is, women's] '**reverberations.**' (F 31-2; original emphasis) Mary's poems are visions arising from heightened psychic reality and inspired by beauty in nature. They are linguistic experimentations with form in an attempt to represent this psychic reality. Mary's search for a new linguistic form reflects a style that is non-linear and disjointed. This is Kristeva's 'poetic form': a search for the representation of sublimation through 'melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency . . . which decomposes and recomposes signs.'<sup>85</sup>

Sinclair too searches for her own poetic form in which to explore psychic reality in her writing. Her plots are constantly interrupted, preventing the linear movement of the narrative. Additionally, they are often inconclusive, suggesting an atemporality and intransiency of plot. Concentration of form, compression, obliqueness and symbolism are all well-known modernist tropes of technique that reinvent and realize identity. All are associated with the feminine, undoing patriarchal symbolic forms and style.<sup>86</sup> Sinclair's interest in modernist movements such as Imagism and Vorticism originates in their breakdown of conventional style.<sup>87</sup> The liberated linguistic forms are an attempt to represent reality as it is presented to the artist. One of the young artists in The Tree of Heaven articulates some of Sinclair's thoughts on these new styles in literary

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<sup>85</sup> See Julia Kristeva, Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 14.

<sup>86</sup> Feminist theorists—especially the French feminist critics—have made a parallel analysis of women's language to represent their subjectivity; much of this work has been undertaken in relation to Virginia Woolf. See, for example, Jane Marcus, Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1987); Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject (Brighton: Harvester, 1987); Abel, Virginia Woolf; and Rachel Bowlby, Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> See Sinclair's numerous articles on her modernist contemporaries. For example, 'Two Notes. I. On H.D. II. On Imagism,' Egoist 2 (June 1915): 88-89; 'Introduction' to Jean de Bosschère, The Closed Door (London: John Lane, 1917); ' "Prufrock: And Other Observations": A Criticism,' Little Review 4 (Dec. 1917): 8-14; 'The Reputation of Ezra Pound,' English Review 30 (Apr. 1920): 326-35; 'The Poems of F. S. Flint,' English Review 32 (Jan. 1921): 6-18; 'The Poems of Richard Aldington,' English Review 32 (May 1921): 397-410.

modernism: ‘ “But *movement and rhythm are realities*, not appearances. When I present rhythm and movement I’ve done something. I’ve made reality appear” ’ (TH 245; italics added). The artist’s account continues:

to unfold a scheme for restoring vigour to the exhausted language by destroying its articulations. These he declared to be purely arbitrary, therefore fatal to the development of a spontaneous and individual style. *By breaking up the rigid ties of syntax*, you do more than create new forms of prose moving in perfect freedom, *you deliver the creative spirit itself from the abominable contact with dead ideas. Association, fixed and eternalised by the structure of language, is the tyranny that keeps down the live idea.* (TH 245; italics added)

This articulation of linguistic exploration, the breaking up of the ‘rigid ties of syntax’, allows for greater freedom, movement, and spontaneity giving rise to new expressions of selfhood and subjectivity.<sup>88</sup> Woolf too frequently refers to the need for a new language to express the feminine or artistic mind. For example, in ‘On Being Ill’ (1926) she writes that words are insufficient to describe the body’s essences or sensations.

What is needed is a new form of expression:

[H]ow tremendous the spiritual changes that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down. . . . [T]he body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes . . . To look these things squarely in the face would need the courage of a lion-tamer; a robust philosophy. . . . Short of these, this monster, the body; this miracle, its pain, will soon make us taper into mysticism, or rise, with rapid beats of the wings, into the raptures of transcendentalism. . . . *[We need] a new language* . . . more primitive, more sensual, more obscene. . . .

There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds’ feet is

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<sup>88</sup> An erosion of syntax also emphasises the transgressive nature of the uncanny tale. See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1981) 76.

unknown . . . In health meaning has encroached upon sound . . . in illness . . . words give out their scent and distill their flavour.<sup>89</sup>

Sinclair also categorically asserts how she finds patriarchal language inadequate to describe her discussions on 'heightened vision and sensation'. In Defence she writes:

Throughout the foregoing metaphysical discussion one point must have struck the unmetaphysical reader, as it certainly strikes the mere writer: that a good half of the problems under consideration arose solely from *the limitations of language*. (DI 308; italics added)

She concludes by adding: the 'utter irrelevance of all this symbolic language' in the attempt to describe conscious states and the relation of subject to object (DI 309).

In Sinclair's texts we see how women frequently turn to other realms and other forms in which to express their inner selves. For example, in Chapter 3 I examined how Alice Cartaret turns to music to give expression to her unspoken, sexual longing. In The Tree of Heaven Frances Harrison draws attention to her 'self' as a woman. She tells her husband 'he had no poetry in his composition' and points out: '“You don't know . . . what goes on inside me”' (TH 11). This is the poetic form/heightened vision latent within women, suggesting that women have greater access to a stream of self-expressivity through alternative modes. These are the women's 'reservoirs' and 'reverberations' that Sinclair refers to in Feminism.

Mary Olivier's poems therefore belong to a discourse that is close to the female body and its emotions, defined by Kristeva as the semiotic. Mary's use of light, water and sound to express this may be examined alongside Sharpe's explanation of the artist's use of medium: 'The artist . . . communicates his emotional experience by

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<sup>89</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'On Being Ill' (1926), Collected Essays, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1967) 193-6; italics added.

manipulation of sound, gesture, water, paint, words.’<sup>90</sup> Sharpe continues to explain that the same ‘bodily powers’ are used in babyhood, but are infinitely developed in the artist. The one difference is that the artist subjects them to extraordinary control and manipulation, with the end result of the creation of harmony and design. In agreement with Kristeva, Sharpe defines art as ‘an ordering of emotional experience’:

The submission of emotional experience to a rhythmic order results in a unity of which the parts are fused in a harmonious sequence. . . . The major mechanisms involved are introjection and projection, creative art representing the projection of the artist’s introjection in some form to be perceived by the senses. This sensuous projection, if it is to be acknowledged as art, must exhibit . . . harmonious order, design and unity.<sup>91</sup>

In her review of Pilgrimage, Sinclair writes: ‘It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson’s stream of consciousness going on and on.’<sup>92</sup> This anticipates Woolf’s well-known observation of the length and elasticity of Richardson’s sentences:

She has invented, or, if she has not invented, developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender. It is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes. . . . Miss Richardson has fashioned her sentence consciously, in order that it may descend to the depths and investigate the crannies of Miriam

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<sup>90</sup> Sharpe, ‘Similar and Divergent Unconscious Determinants Underlying the Sublimations of Pure Art and Pure Science’ 142.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 139.

<sup>92</sup> Sinclair, ‘The Novels of Dorothy Richardson,’ Egoist 5 (Apr. 1918): 57-59. 58.

Henderson's consciousness. It is a woman's sentence, but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind . . .<sup>93</sup>

This concurs with Sinclair's own style as an artist in Mary Olivier.<sup>94</sup> It is marked for its subjective, individualistic and poetic nature. Sinclair's construction of language in this novel demonstrates a disturbance in linguistic structure in order to represent the fragmented and ambiguous nature of Mary's identity. In Mary Olivier, Sinclair dispenses with a linear narrative and conventional plot in an attempt, like her protagonist, to find an alternative to the symbolic, masculinist discourse. By using condensation, elaboration, interior monologue, and free association, Sinclair finds new forms both to constitute female subjectivity and to describe how that female subjectivity is constituted. Therefore, Sinclair's own work of art can be described as semiotic in its qualities of unboundedness, fluidity, refusal of closure, use of unusual linguistic constructions, and ellipsis.

Marianne Hirsch argues that, in Woolf's To the Lighthouse, 'Lily's solution to what art should be and to her completion of the painting' is dependent on her rejection of the aesthetic criteria of harmony, balance, order and permanence.<sup>95</sup> Thus, as Hirsch describes, the end of To the Lighthouse does not resolve the tension between the two forces but maintains them. Lily's dividing line can therefore be said to connect the masses on the right and left of her canvass as well as to represent their disconnection.

Similarly, I claim that Mary Olivier develops from the 'either-or' position to ultimately reach the 'both/and vision of the female aesthetic' discussed by DuPlessis as

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<sup>93</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Dorothy Richardson.' 1923. Barrett, Virginia Woolf 191.

<sup>94</sup> Janet Sydney Kaplan argues that the first novels in the Pilgrimage series influenced Mary Olivier. See Kaplan, 'May Sinclair.' Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1975) 47-75. 48-9.

<sup>95</sup> Hirsch, The Mother/Daughter Plot 112-13.

referred to at the beginning of my chapter.<sup>96</sup> This urges for a pragmatic reading based on multiplicity and change rather than the 'either-or' binary opposition. Loss of literary and linguistic constructs in Mary Olivier develop the disturbances of plot and language in order to explore Mary's own experience of an oscillating self between the symbolic and semiotic realms. The insight that Mary acquires at the end enables her to transform and sublimate her self into an artist. That is, she celebrates Sinclair's edict to transcend limited, cramped conditions in order to catch sight of Ultimate Reality, promised in the mystical flashes of white light. However, this is only finally achieved after Mary's mother has died. The reparation in Mary's split selves brings about a sense of healing and she finally is aware of what true happiness is. At this moment there is a disconnection from the masculine, external life of symbolic values and a move towards the female, inner, semiotic life of poetry.

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<sup>96</sup> DuPlessis, 'For the Etruscans' 133.

## Chapter 5

### 'Bound Hand and Foot in the Prison of the Past': The Repressed Life of Harriett Freat

#### I. Introduction: The Spinster and Power Relations

In The Life and Death of Harriett Freat (1922) May Sinclair specifically looks at the situation of the unmarried woman who is held back from personal development by her repressive circumstances. In Harriett Freat, Sinclair offers a bleak and condemning example of a woman whose life does not achieve sublimation. This recalls Mary's observation, in Mary Olivier, ' "[T]here was something about Mamma that would kill me if I let it. I've had to fight for every single thing I've ever wanted. It's awful fighting her, when she's so sweet and gentle. But it's either that or go under" ' (MO 249).

Whereas Mary achieves a sense of self-awareness and freedom by the end of the novel, Harriett Freat does not: during the course of the novel she remains frustrated and repressed by her relationship with her mother. She has no ability to put up resistance and 'goes under.'

Through her portrayal of Harriett, Sinclair reflects upon the power relations, psychological and political, that hold women back from achieving their personal freedoms. Therefore, I argue, The Life and Death of Harriett Freat is critical in Sinclair's oeuvre: it highlights her personal agenda for the importance of sublimation in women who experience cramped and repressed personal circumstances.

Sinclair's novels are densely populated with unmarried, virgin women. In Mary Olivier Dorsy Heron grows sad and wide-eyed in her spinster status while in The Three Sisters the 'three middle-aged maiden ladies' (TS 37) act as a counterpoint to the three sisters' pursuit of Steven Rowcliffe as a husband. In The Tree of Heaven Frances is

considered as the lucky one; her three sisters remain unmarried and forlornly follow in their mother's wake as futile, sterile shadows. Louie's 'virginity [is] sadder than Grannie's grief' (TH 25). Frances is fearful of the burden of her unmarried sisters: she is 'afraid of every moment she would have to live with them' (TH 22) and is aware of the 'embarrassment of . . . an eternal trio' (TH 24). While their mother gives her unmarried daughters an 'inimical, disapproving look', treating them with a 'sort of mystic hostility', she is 'soft and gentle' (TH 25) towards her one married daughter. This provides an oblique political comment on the status of spinsterhood: to remain unmarried is to be condemned, pitied and marginalised; to be married is to be accepted and constitutes the female ideal.

The emergent feminist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century took advantage of the negative portrayal of the unmarried woman, arguing that it would favour such women for them to become educated and have job opportunities to allow them to support themselves.<sup>1</sup> Many of these early feminists, Sinclair included, elected to reject marriage in order to pursue a career and fulfil their potential in a way that may have possibly been denied to them by having husbands and children.<sup>2</sup> By offering a politics of spinsterhood such feminists attempted to instigate social change by examining the cultural and psychological situation of women and bringing them to public attention.<sup>3</sup> For example, Dora Marsden's 'Notes of the Week' at the beginning of every issue of The Freewoman were an attempt to rally women to break out of their

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<sup>1</sup> See Sheila Jeffreys, 'Spinsterhood and Celibacy.' The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930 (London: Pandora, 1985) 86-101.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>3</sup> In my examination of Sinclair's work on the Brontë sisters, I show how she celebrates their creative ability that arose from their repressed lives and was, Sinclair claims, independent of sexual associations. She staunchly argues her case further on the publication of the newly-found correspondence between Charlotte Brontë and Paul Héger. 'The publication of the letters,' she writes, 'does not, I think, damage in the least my main contention—that Charlotte Brontë's genius, like Emily's, was independent of anything that her "master" could do for her or make her feel.' Sinclair, Letter to the Editor, 'The Brontë Letters', Times, 1 Aug. 1913: 10.

present state of existence, to become 'Freewomen', and to relinquish their servile state. Marsden theorises that women are not born spinsters but are moulded. She explains her political philosophy in the first issue of Freewoman:

Our journal will differ from all existing weekly journals devoted to the *freedom of women*, in as much as the latter find their starting-point and interest in the externals of freedom. They deal with something which women may acquire. We find our chief concern in *what they may become*. Our interest is in the Freewomen herself, her psychology, philosophy, morality, and achievements, and only in a secondary way with her politics and economics.<sup>4</sup>

Sinclair's own feminist treatises on the plight of women are given in her reply in the Times in 1912 to Sir Almroth Wright on women's suffrage, Feminism (1912), and 'A Defence of Men' (1912). They highlight her polemics in her psychological discourses on women and repression. In Feminism Sinclair takes issue with Sir Almroth Wright that women have no alternative between frustration and sexual fulfilment. She argues that there is 'everything' in the 'Life-Force':

What I venture to dispute is the conclusion that for a woman there is only one kind of alternative between frustration and fulfilment of the Life-Force, and that is—hysteria, neurosis and the detestable manifestations of degeneracy. I dispute it without for one moment blinking the frightful possibilities of the celibate and solitary life.<sup>5</sup>

Sinclair argues, against Wright, that the pursuit of other activities is not necessarily dependent on sexual functioning. She urges women to channel their energies—whether sexual, creative or spiritual—in order to overcome the bonds of repression, and sublimate themselves to a higher plane. Similarly, in her unpublished typescript 'The

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<sup>4</sup> Dora Marsden, Freewoman 23 Nov. 1911: 3; italics added.

<sup>5</sup> May Sinclair, Feminism (London: Women Writers' Suffrage League, 1912) 30.

Way of Sublimation' (1915), Sinclair argues that children must learn to overcome their bonds with their parents in order to undergo a healthy separation. In agreement with Jung she writes: 'Fathers and Mothers . . . and man's childish passion for them are the backward forces that retard his development as an individual. . . . [Conflict with the parents] must be fought to a finish and the child must win it or remain for ever immature. The dramas of our family life show us such cases every day.'<sup>6</sup>

Although in the early twentieth century an important strand of feminism upheld spinsterhood as a political and position and lifestyle, by the time of the publication of Harriett Frean the term 'spinster' had developed pejorative connotations. In the 1920s, the image of the spinster was associated with the discourses of the twin, popular theories of sexology and psychology, both of which received a negative press. The dominant, contemporary view of the spinster was as a neurotic, lonely, reclusive, 'sex-starved', 'incomplete', 'unnatural' woman who was unable to form good, healthy and sustaining relationships.<sup>7</sup> 'Prominent feminist writers', argues Alison Oram, 'create[d] alternate readings of spinsterhood, from within the various schools of psychology.'<sup>8</sup> Oram has examined some of these portrayals of spinsterhood in the inter-war period. She writes:

[The] traditional stereotype of the spinster . . . gained an additional inflection after the First World War, through the pathologising of spinsters' sexuality. Negative representations of single women changed in tone as a consequence of the influence of sexology and the new psychology . . . These new 'sciences' placed a premium upon marriage, motherhood and heterosexual fulfilment for

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<sup>6</sup> Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation,' unpubl. ts., 1915, fols. 436-8, box 23, 51-2, UP.

<sup>7</sup> See Alison Oram's article for a full analysis of the interpretation of the spinster within feminist politics during the inter-war period: Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-War Feminist Discourses.' Women's History Review 1 (1992): 413-433.

<sup>8</sup> Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted' 428.

women's psychological happiness, a condition spinsters were unable to obtain.

. . . [S]pinsterhood was still represented as a social and individual problem.<sup>9</sup>

The proliferation of 'spinsterhood' novels during the inter-war period examines this thwarted, repressed woman, and investigates her place in society. I argue that writers such as Sinclair, Radclyffe Hall, F. M. Mayor and Katherine Mansfield reflect a strand of feminism that highlights the spinster as a psychological and political position for women. In Hall's novel The Unlit Lamp (1924) one of the male characters makes an impassioned outcry in his observation on their status. He exclaims at the futility of such lives and the demands made upon them by others:

"How long is it to go on," he cried, "this preying of the weak on the strong, the old on the young; this hideous, unnatural injustice that one sees all around one, this incredibly wicked thing that tradition sanctifies? You were so splendid. How fine you were! You had everything in you that was needed to put life within your grasp, and you had a right to life, a life of your own; everyone has. . . . I tell you, Joan, the sin of it lies at the door of that old woman . . . that mild, always ailing, cruelly gentle creature who's taken everything and given nothing and batted on you year by year. . . ." <sup>10</sup>

The female protagonist of The Unlit Lamp, Joan Ogden, lives a bleak and thwarted existence similar to Harriett Frenan's. During the course of the novel, although she longs for personal freedom, Joan is unable to escape the emotional and repressive shackles that bind her to her mother. Her mother is 'like an octopus who's drained [Joan] dry.'<sup>11</sup> Joan's life, like Harriett's, is also a wasted one as a result of both familial and social

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<sup>9</sup> Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted' 414.

<sup>10</sup> Radclyffe Hall, The Unlit Lamp (1924. London: Hammond, 1956) 300.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

imprisonment: she is described as the 'virgin daughter withering on her stem'.<sup>12</sup> F. M. Mayor's novels, The Third Miss Symons (1913) and The Rector's Daughter (1924) offer other parallel narratives to Harriett Frean. Susan Hill regards The Third Miss Symons for its 'remarkable psychological depth, subtlety and assurance' that reveals a 'creative imagination and perceptiveness of devastating clarity and honesty.'<sup>13</sup> Here, Mayor's prose, like Sinclair's, is stark and cutting in its portrayal of a woman's life of futility and lack. Henrietta Symons is an unattractive character whose life reads as a litany of unfulfilled or wasted opportunities. She is one of five children in an affluent, mid-Victorian family, and as a small child she struggles to gain attention and affection from her parents. Conventional expectations and her inner feelings conflict and, unable to articulate her desire to love and be loved in return, her life unfolds as an ever-widening circle of missed opportunity for personal happiness.

Similarly, in The Rector's Daughter, Mayor looks at the situation of the woman whose life is one of service to others. Here, Mary Jocelyn places familial duty before self-fulfilment. However, Mary *is* capable of feeling passion: she 'had her fire, a little domestic fire that warmed the chamber of her heart' but she struggles to find an outward expression for her inner emotion, and loses the man that she loves.<sup>14</sup> While 'school[ing] herself to restraint' Mary questions her existence of self-sacrifice for others.<sup>15</sup> As Penny Brown points out, Mary regrets her experience of love as it serves to highlight the state of frustration and misery it leads her to.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hall, The Unlit Lamp 287.

<sup>13</sup> F. M. Mayor, The Third Miss Symons, introduction by Susan Hill (1913. London: Virago, 1980) n. pag.

<sup>14</sup> F. M. Mayor, The Rector's Daughter (1924. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>16</sup> See Brown, The Poison at the Source: The Female Novel of Self-Development in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: St Martin's P, 1992) 216.

Each of these literary depictions of the spinster illustrates the real, contemporary situation of the empty, unproductive lives of superfluous woman. In Sinclair's analysis of spinsterhood in Harriett Freen she uses all the negative characteristics that society attributed to the unmarried woman, thereby highlighting the plight of the woman who refuses to embrace autonomy and sublimation in order to move forward with her life. Throughout her polemics, as I have detailed, Sinclair urges women to be true to their own nature in order to find personal freedom. In Harriett Freen, by articulating the negative stereotype of the woman that society abhorred, Sinclair makes clear her claim for women to move with the times and escape the bonds that hold them back. Moreover, Sinclair is also articulating her own fears about a life that remains unsublimated. In this chapter I argue that although Harriett Freen reads as a case study, it is a clear example of the life that Sinclair personally abhorred and feared. Sinclair's letters reveal how hard she found it to find freedom to write and develop her craft as an artist while her mother was alive. This search for space was both a physical and a psychological one. At the very beginning of the twentieth century, Sinclair was living in London with her mother, and supporting them both through her translation work. She was also beginning to get her novels published. In 1901 Sinclair's mother died and letters from Gwendoline Keats ('Zack') during this time suggest that, although shaken, Sinclair experiences a sense of relief. Although Sinclair clearly fulfilled her duty in nursing her mother during her last illness, it appears that she also felt she had to keep something back for her self, for her writing.<sup>17</sup>

The scene of narrative in Harriett Freen is focused on the domestic sphere and the family dynamic. In this novel Sinclair reflects upon the damage done to her

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<sup>17</sup> For example, during Sinclair's mother's last illness, Keats writes: 'How terribly hard for you & sad. I can't think of anything to say, damn it. That it should come when you need all your strength, pluck & time for your work. . . . If you could only leave your mother I wish you would stay with me'. Keats, letter to Sinclair, 24 Aug. 1900, fo. 54, box 2, UP.

protagonist who refuses to engage in conflict with her parents, and retains her immaturity and childlike naivety for the duration of her life. Modelling herself on her mother, who is both the angel in the house and the angel of repression, does not allow Harriett to move forward and her personal development is arrested. Mrs Frean's power lies in inflicting an imprisoning motherly love to her daughter, providing a trap that Harriett is unable to escape.

This portrayal of a death within life explains the title of Sinclair's novel, and reflects contemporary psychoanalytic theory, that human nature is governed by life and death instincts. In 1920 Sinclair received a letter from Ida Hatch in which she discusses Mary Olivier. In her review, Hatch questions the title of this novel: 'Why Life? . . . It should be Death—decay—corruption.'<sup>18</sup> Her statement may have influenced Sinclair's choice of title for Harriett Frean, with its implication of the corruption inherent in the latter novel, that the mother's love is a stifling, life-denying force. This is given further emphasis by the Frean household: it is not a place where love is healthy and productive. The growth of the apple trees in the orchard is stunted: 'little crippled apple trees bending down in the long grass',<sup>19</sup> and another sterile image is given in the mother's blue egg workbox. The symbolism contained in this object has been frequently explored,<sup>20</sup> but of note here is the fact that this egg is hollow: it is empty and therefore infertile. The family house is described in terms of a prison with its enclosing brown walls and the balcony 'like a birdcage' (HF 9). Neither Harriett's psychic conditions nor her physical conditions allow for freedom and exploration. Unlike Sinclair's other novels, there is no freedom for the female protagonist to traipse unfettered across the

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<sup>18</sup> Ida Hatch, letter to Sinclair, 13 Oct. 1920, fo. 38, box 1, UP.

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair, The Life and Death of Harriett Frean (1922. London: Virago, 1980). 4. 1<sup>st</sup> ser. in North American Review 212-13 (Dec. 1920-Mar. 1921): 721-40, 65-80, 247-59, 389-403.

<sup>20</sup> See Jean Radford, introduction, The Life and Death of Harriett Frean (London: Virago, 1980) n. pag.; Brown, The Poison at the Source 37.

moors and experience the lack of restrictions offered by nature; nature has no place in this novel and is therefore unable to offer its force as a salve. Harriett remains locked in spiritual isolation within four walls.

In Harriett Freen Sinclair makes play of the traditional, separate spheres for men and women in the Victorian world where men are associated with the intellectual and the physical arena, and women are associated with the home and family, and had a moralising and decorative function. (I have referred to the conflict that arises for the female artist who feels split between these two arenas in Chapter 2 on The Creators.) Therefore, I argue, Sinclair's novel contributes towards the historical controversies surrounding the spinster as she engages with the political, social, cultural and psychological concerns of the spinster.

In the class politics of power, middle-class Victorian women cooperated and colluded with men in order to achieve middle-class control. Family rituals and customs were an integral part of social control. Elizabeth Langland argues that it was middle-class women who 'controlled the dissemination of certain kinds of knowledge and thus helped to ensure a middle-class hegemony in mid-Victorian England.'<sup>21</sup> Langland continues: 'middle-class women were produced by these discourses even as they reproduced them to consolidate middle-class control.'<sup>22</sup> This regulation by women will be examined in the following section in relation to Mrs Freen's control over Harriett's discourse. Langland writes that one of the major tracts of the period, John Ruskin's polemical lecture 'Of Queens' Gardens' (1864), tacitly gives middle-class women unprecedented political power.

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Langland, 'Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel,' PMLA 107 (1992): 290-304. 291.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Ruskin is one of the Victorian authors the Freat family read together. As I explain in this chapter, Harriett Freat presents a critique of the public dissemination of the vision of the self-sacrificing Victorian feminine ideal. Sinclair attacks the conception of Mrs Freat as queen (compare with the nursery rhyme at the start of the novel with Mrs Freat as the Queen, Mr Freat as the pussycat, and Harriett as the trapped mouse), presiding over the spiritual centre of the family with the only edict of behaviour being that which is 'beautiful'. In Ruskin's lecture 'Of Queens' Gardens' he addresses the female members of his audience as 'queens' thereby giving the classic statement of the high Victorian ideal of womanhood.<sup>23</sup> He reaffirms the male attitude toward nineteenth-century thinking in his examination of the complex discursive practices that constitute Victorian middle-class women's lives. Ruskin's appraisal of true womanhood therefore articulates accepted cultural ideals of the contemporary woman. At the centre of his lecture, Ruskin reflects upon domestic ideology that governs family life and offers a politicisation of the role women play as the angel in the house. He argues that feminine charm is intrinsic to the moral welfare of the family; it is the woman's responsibility for the moral 'gardening' of her family. In articulating the cultural ideal, his lecture confirms the role of woman as either an innocent girl or an angel-like wife, and the home as both a sanctuary and sanctum of moral behaviour. However, there is a subtext in his insistence that women must take responsibility for the moral health of society. He urges women to take a more active role and extend their 'queenly power' beyond the walled gardens into the wider world in order to exercise their social responsibility outside the home.<sup>24</sup> Ruskin depends upon the 'relations of the womanly to the manly nature' to achieve a 'harmonious idea . . . of what [is the]

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<sup>23</sup> John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens.' Sesame and Lilies, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1864. London: Smith, 1865) 122.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

womanly mind' and install a 'centre of order.'<sup>25</sup> Implicit in this is not so much a revolutionary or feminist agenda but in fact an attempt to maintain the status quo of society. As Elaine Showalter explains, Ruskin projects the hope of 'national redemption onto the spiritual virginity of women who were unravaged by the power drives of a rapacious commercial society.'<sup>26</sup> Women were supposed to use their female influence to provide a secure and peaceful haven for men: 'the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. . . . [W]herever a true wife comes, this home is always around her.'<sup>27</sup>

In Harriett Freen Sinclair carefully portrays the Victorian ideals of bipolar gender definition that belongs to the patriarchal, symbolic world. Mrs Freen embodies the non-competitive sphere of the feminine ideal, exhibiting passivity and unquestioning faith; and Mr Freen occupies the world of intellect, finance and speculation. Harriett is aware of the different nature of her parents. She felt that her mother's secret was 'some happy sense of God . . . some hidden gladness, some perfection' while her father's secret 'was harder, somehow, darker and dangerous' (HF 40-41). The product of the Victorian mother and father, Harriett, is fundamentally flawed by her upbringing and stays a stunted individual for the remainder of the novel and the duration of her life.

Sinclair, writing from her Modernist viewpoint, undermines and shatters the illusion behind the repressive conditions of the Victorian family. In her portrayal of Harriett, she exposes the truth of such ideals which cultivate feminine passivity and contained development. Thus Sinclair's novel offers a Foucauldian interpretation that aligns domestic discipline with regulating and normalizing practices. The

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<sup>25</sup> Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens' 123-4, 125, 179.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing (Virago: London; rev. ed. 1982) 184.

<sup>27</sup> Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens' 148, 149.

institutionalisation of the Victorian home, Michel Foucault argues, is deeply implicated in the ideology of power arrangements within class and gender systems. In his examination of the question of power, Foucault writes that ‘while the human subject is placed in relations of production and signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex.’ However, power struggles arise not so much from ‘an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather, a technique, a form of power. . . . [This] categorizes the individual . . . attaches him to his own identity . . . [and] makes individuals subjects.’<sup>28</sup> Throughout her works, Sinclair argues against this form of power that ‘categorizes’ the individual and wishes to expose the factors that chain her to her inherited tradition.

Although Harriett Frean reads as satire of Victorian ideals, it functions to highlight the pressure of a complex system of signifiers and the social codes that regulate (female) behaviour. Langland describes that ‘[s]ocial status was marked not only on the woman’s person and in her behavior but in . . . the Victorian home.’<sup>29</sup> Harriett is obsessed with reading social signifiers and becomes chained by them. She is unable to deviate from following the ideological practices of social behaviour and these are the terms in which her subjectivity is socially constituted. As a child, she observes with pleasure that ‘her father’s house was nicer than other people’s houses’ (HF 9), and learns to read the physical signs of the body, approving of the beauty and the straight, lean lines of her parents’ bodies. Therefore Prissie and Robin win her admiration whereas the Hancock family fail: Harriett notes that Connie ‘was squaring and thickening and looking horrid, like Mr Hancock’ (HF 27). Similarly, details of clothes became increasingly subtle indicators of class rank. Harriett is obsessed with the

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<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power.’ Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Brighton: Harvester, 1982). 208-26. 209, 212.

<sup>29</sup> Langland, ‘Nobody’s Angels’ 294.

flounces and bands on her mother's clothing, as if they confirm her status. Sinclair uses the nuances of Victorian etiquette to draw attention to the stifling codes of conduct and control of conventional behaviour that was expected.

However, by following the signifying practices of the Victorian middle-class lady, Harriett is unable to form her own autonomous identity. Although, after her mother's death, she attempts to make her own decisions (and therefore may be seen to rebel in a minor sense) she is insecure in making these new choices for herself and finds it easier to revert to her parents' customs and rituals. She tries to 'reinstale herself . . . [by] trying to retrace the footsteps of her lost self' (HF 108-109). The restrictive ideology is the only one she knows; without it, she is unable to cope and feels herself to be disembodied. Her sense of self is dependent on her class identity and the signifiers that map out this terrain for her. Therefore, she can only realise herself as 'Hilton Frean's daughter' (HF 116). When Harriett pays a social call on her neighbours, more than twenty years after her father's death, she feels affronted when they fail to recognise her father's name. In turn, she feels self-effaced and loses a sense of personal definition, thereby suggesting that her social self defines her consciousness: 'She was nobody in that roomful of keen, intellectual people; nobody; nothing but an unnecessary little old lady' (HF 168). From a Foucauldian analysis, Harriett is categorized by power relations which are 'rooted in the system of social networks.' She knows no other way of being; instead, by following the Victorian code of ideal womanhood and obeying the modes of behaviour taught by her parents, power relations 'constitute [her] modes of action'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' 224, 225.

## II. 'The Angel of Repression, the Psychic Censor'

Before all the paths of sublimation the Angel of Repression, the psychic Censor, stands and stops the way.<sup>31</sup>

In Chapter 4, by using Melanie Klein's matrifocal account of psychosexual development, I observed how Mary Olivier's growth as an individual is marked by her relationship with her mother. The Life and Death of Harriett Frean also focuses on a mother-daughter relationship and the negative influences this has on the daughter's developing self. Harriett Frean, unlike Mary Olivier, never realises a sense of autonomy and independence from the mother. She is unable to recover from the loss of her mother, and her repressed life stems from her melancholic state. I will now examine Harriett's lack of differentiation and her continual merging of ego boundaries with the mother's.

Harriett's failure to recognise herself as separate from the other and as a self-contained ego is derived from her repressed—or censored—upbringing. As Klein observes, adequate ego development depends upon the suppression of the experience of psychic unity with the mother. Harriett Frean examines the failure of the daughter both to seek actual freedom from her mother and to escape internalisation of the maternal world. As a consequence, Harriett's life is a cycle of repression and self-denial. Sinclair puts forward her interpretation of the damaging effect of repression in the 'The Way of Sublimation':

[W]hat happens mostly in cases of repression is that the libido instead of being diverted into ways of progress—controlled 'directed feeling;' creative action and

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<sup>31</sup> Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation' 31.

creative feeling; the passion for beauty and for truth or goodness; all the emotions which for want of a better word we call moral—is *arrested* and turned back into those ancestral paths from which with such infinite pain and difficulty and conflict the individual has emerged. *The adult becomes an infant*, the unconscious prey of his own primitive habits, instincts and memories. . . . The neurotic, without knowing it, is *bound hand and foot in the prison of the past*, his own and his ancestors, and there is no future for him until he is delivered.<sup>32</sup>

Harriett's state of being is 'arrested'; she remains a child trapped by her adult body. By continuing to live her life as she did when her parents were alive, she is attempting to cling to the past and recreate her childhood protected self. In later life her only pleasure is when 'her mind would go backwards, returning, always returning to the house in Black's Lane' (HF 174). This is psychoanalytically termed as a 'narcissistic relation to reality': Harriett sees herself as merged and continuous with her external world, particularly in relation to her mother. She is unable to differentiate as she does not perceive a difference between self and other. Harriett's constant self-effacement therefore results in a life of frustration and loneliness.

In his 1914 essay, 'On Narcissism,' Freud indicates that a daughter is unable to clearly distinguish herself from her mother, and therefore it is difficult for her to develop a clear sense of self.<sup>33</sup> Without a clear sense of self, the daughter is unable to fully develop into mature being in her own right. This relationship between mother and daughter is perpetuated in the daughter's interpersonal relationships. Harriett fails in her ability to establish successful relationships separate and apart from the one she has with her mother. Harriett is happier when returning home to her mother and father after attending one of the Hancocks' dances: she was 'afraid of being lifted off her feet and

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<sup>32</sup> Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation' 29; italics added.

<sup>33</sup> Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction,' 1914, SE 14, 73-102. 87.

swung on and on, away from her happy, safe life' (HF 47). She feels much safer with the anchorage of her father's arm around her when he comes to meet her at the bottom of the lane. Similarly Harriett is resentful of her friends who disturb the Freans' familial harmony: 'when they were there they broke something, something secret and precious between her and her father and mother, and when they were gone she felt the stir, the happy movement of coming together again, drawing in close, close after the break' (HF 49).

Since Harriett is unable to establish her own identity, unlike Mary Olivier, she does not suffer the painful experience of a disconnection or separation from her mother. Moreover, a failure to develop her own female identity is also a failure to possess her own voice. She fails both to enter the patriarchal symbolic order and to find an alternative, creative language to express herself. Harriett is first seen to be unable to articulate her desires at the vicarage tea party. 'She got up suddenly, not speaking, and left the table, the Madeira cake and the raspberries and cream. She could feel her skin all hot and wet with shame' (HF 13-14). When her mother asks why Harriett had not explained to her that she had not had anything to eat, Harriett replies: ' "Because I—I don't know" ' (HF 14). As I have discussed elsewhere, social silence is part of the constitution of female identity. Harriett is confronted with two choices at this point: to communicate through the dominant, patriarchal mode or to be rendered mute. Under her mother's cross-examination, Harriett chooses the latter.

In Harriett Freen Sinclair shows how the mother regulates the daughter's use of language in order to shape her into a 'proper' female. For Mrs Freen there are only two modes of behaviour: the beautiful and the ugly. According to Mrs Freen, 'beautiful' behaviour is that which follows the codes of being pertinent to the ideals of Victorian true womanhood. Therefore, by reflecting upon the 'proper' use of language, Sinclair is

also commenting upon its use within patriarchal control. Mrs Freen cooperates in the patriarchal power relations, described in my first section to this chapter, as she instructs Harriett in the 'proper' ways of behaviour. As Langland explains, by regulating 'what is sayable and how it can be articulated', discursive practices can constitute knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

In Mary Olivier Mary comments on this and voices what was wrong with her upbringing: ' "[W]e were brought up all wrong. Taught that our selves were beastly, that our wills were beastly and that everything we liked was bad. Taught to sit on our wills, to be afraid of our selves and not to trust them for a single minute" ' (MO 251). Whereas Mary has the ability to articulate the conditions of her repressed life; Harriett does not. Harriett struggles and fails to find a language of her own in which to express her self; indeed, she is often unaware of her own desires that need expression.

Harriett's mother regulates Harriett's mode of expressivity into that which is sayable and that which is unsayable. Ugly things are censored and Harriet is taught that there are certain things she is expected not to say: ' "You mustn't say things like that" ' (HF 15). Therefore, Harriett fails to articulate herself within the confines of masculine language, recognising that her feelings of frustration are not 'beautiful' and would be censored by her mother. Her struggle to appropriate a linguistic construction, as exemplified by ' "Because I—I don't know" ' , marks the beginning of her failure to express her true self.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Langland, 'Nobody's Angels' 291.

<sup>35</sup> This anticipates Luce Irigaray's examination of linguistic polarities of masculine/feminine as represented by analogies, repetitions, and oppositions in discourse in Speculum of the Other Woman. Like Woolf before her, Irigaray explains that female expressivity is inherent in the very blanks and ellipses of sentences: 'Don't worry about the "right" word. There isn't any. No truth between our lips'. She counters the masculine language of finding the 'right' word with the idea of female expressivity inherent in what they *do not say*, thereby rejecting patriarchal language. Irigaray urges women to reject the negative role imposed on women by masculine construction of language and recommends inventing or finding an alternative language expressed through the body. See Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985) 213.

I have already shown how Sinclair demonstrates her female protagonists adopting an alternative language in order to give expression to their feminine sexuality. For example, in Chapter 3 Alice Cartaret gives expression to her repressed sexuality by piano playing. However, in Harriett Freat, Harriett is crippled by her inability to express her female self and therefore remains silenced or censored by the codes of expressivity that her mother teaches her. Harriett does not invent or adopt an alternative language and her creative, feminine self remains unsayable. Mrs Freat only sanctions the masculinist interpretation of the 'proper' expression. There is no place for creativity in expressing the female 'other' in her dipolar world. When her father's financial speculations go awry and the family have to modify their living, Mrs Freat speaks for Harriett: ' "Harriett isn't going to mind" ' (HF 84). Again, her mother dictates a set code of behaviour for Harriett and censors any possibility of self-expression for Harriett. The textual absence of Harriett's thoughts echoes the inability of Harriett to think for herself. Similarly, when her father dies, Harriett is uncertain how to express her innermost feelings and can only resort to prescribed, conventional behaviour. While she is able to answer the condolence letters using a prescribed language, she struggles to find expression of her true, inner feelings and once again turns to her mother for a model of behaviour:

Her mother had some secret that she couldn't share. She was wonderful in her pure, high serenity. Surely she had some secret. She said he was closer to her now than he had ever been. And in her correct, precise answers to the letters of condolence Harriett wrote: 'I feel that he is closer to us now than he ever was.' But she didn't really feel it. *She only felt that to feel it was the beautiful and proper thing.* She looked for her mother's secret and couldn't find it. (HF 93; italics added)

She tries to reconstitute herself through her mother's code of behaviour. In failing to find her mother's secret, she cannot validate her grief. She is unable to give creative expression to her loss and her lack of experimentation shows her failure to develop a self independent from that of the mother. After her mother's death, with the absence of her psychic censor, Harriett is less certain about the incorruptibility of her adopted moral beauty and her sense of security slips: 'the beauty of that unique act no longer appeared to her as it once was, uplifting, consoling, incorruptible' (HF 148). She struggles all the more in her search to find an appropriate code of behaviour to survive on her own. In her seclusion, she seeks to rediscover her 'lost self', realising that she 'had followed her mother's mind . . . smiling when she had smiled, but with no delight and no admiration of her own' (HF 110). This is replicated in the narrative form which itself reflects the child's innocent story. Harriett's innocence is misleading: it stems from her failure to distinguish between self and others because she has no awareness of herself as subject; she has an overactive superego.

According to Klein, for a child to develop healthily it must recognise others as subjects. Klein's theory of subjectivity involves mourning, sadness, and object loss. Infantile ambivalence, as long as it is tolerable, paves the way for burgeoning ego development, and whole object relations. It is this phase that Harriett fails to realise. Klein describes the psyche in its earliest phase as being in the 'paranoid position'. Experience is fragmentary and discontinuous; thoughts and feelings happen *to* the infant and persecutory anxiety dominates. Reaching the 'depressive position' represents a level of achievement for the child, although persecutory anxiety is never fully conquered. This depressive position is usually achieved after the first year of life and the mother is set up as an internal object. It is based on the recognition that the mother is separate, therefore beginning the idea of subjectivity.

Klein observes that adequate ego development depends upon the repression of the experience of psychic unity with the mother. The question I ask throughout my reading of Harriett Freen is: what prevents Harriett from developing into an autonomous self? According to Klein, in a phallogentric culture, a forgetting of the primal bond with the mother's body is necessary in order for the child to individuate. This bond is repressed and eventually replaced by the ego's ideal sense of itself as totally separate from the other and self-contained. However, Klein reveals that this mythology of self-contained individualism, based on a radical disidentification with, and forgetting of, the primal bond with the mother, is a fragile ego position that can never in reality be attained.

In addition to the imperative to separate, which involves a radical disidentification with the mother, there are potent estranging consequences for the girl developing into an adult sexual woman. Klein argues that in normal, healthy development, the girl learns to reinterpret sexual reality via the paternal, Oedipal gaze, a gaze charged with phallogentric interpolations that call her sexuality into being-for-another. She responds to this objectifying gaze by becoming not a subject, but an object of her own internalised paternal gaze, and is rewarded for her newly attained self-estrangement, with attributions that she is becoming a 'normal', 'feminine' woman.

In Harriett Freen the father is a charismatic, potent sexual force. However, Harriett does not become 'feminised' by reinterpreting herself through her father's gaze for she remains firmly located within the pre-Oedipal realm. Harriett's sexual becoming instead pivots around an identification with the mother's autonomous sexual ontology and, specifically, her female potency. That is, for Harriett, the mother is the desiring body. As Harriett walks down Black's Lane, in the moments before her initiation into the world of adult sexuality, she reimagines herself as her mother: 'she arched her back

and . . . felt like a tall lady in a crinoline and shawl. She swung her hips and made her skirts fly out. That was her grown-up crinoline' (HF 17). Her acting out of the role of the mother is mirrored by the entrance Mrs Frean makes a few minutes later: '[h]er mother was coming down the garden walk, tall and beautiful in her silver-gray gown with the bands of black velvet on the flounces and the sleeves; her wide, hooped skirts swung' (HF 19). Her entry, as I shall describe shortly, signifies her censoring role as Ruskin's 'moral gardener'.

In 'The Effects of Early Anxiety Situations on the Sexual Development of the Girl' (1932) Klein describes that by identifying with what is good for her, the little girl develops a sense of integration and wholeness, and an adequate enough ego with which to face the world.<sup>36</sup> A strong ego develops from experiences that support a certain degree of splitting which will enable her to choose between good and bad objects, and which will, it might be hoped, govern her object choices in later life so that she will choose what is good, or ego syntonic, over what is bad.

Another consequence of the ability to anticipate the contents of another's internal world is the confusion between oneself and the other. This capacity for great psychological understanding for others and/or psychological confusion between oneself and the other robs both mother and daughter of their psychosexual autonomy. This involves a psychic capacity to merge or lose oneself in the other for good or ill. Klein's observations suggest that this infantile capacity is reactivated in girls around the time of puberty, at the end of the latency period. It is apparent from this reading of Klein there is a likely possibility that the confusion that results from the girl's identification with the m/other, and the attempts she must then make to disentangle herself from the m/other, may be perceived as the feminine inclination towards deceit and intrigue. In

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<sup>36</sup> See Melanie Klein, 'The Effect of Early Anxiety Situations on the Sexual Development of the Girl.' *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, trans. Alix Strachey (London: Virago, 1989).

Harriett Frean, Harriett's only attempt to disobey her mother is quickly reined in. Klein implicitly describes 'feminine' development as always constructed by, and receptive to, the m/other at the expense of the ego or self. She explains how this makes the feminine subject more in touch with the unconscious, with phantasy, and the defence mechanisms of introjection and projection. This makes her more susceptible to a belief in the magical powers of feelings and thoughts. Klein argues that this combination of qualities makes women more intuitive than men and that this is why women are more capable than men in certain areas of achievement. She writes: 'her achievements . . . receive their specifically feminine character of intuitiveness and subjectivity from the fact that her ego is submitted to a loved internal spirit. They [her achievements] represent the birth of a spiritual child, conceived by its father; and the spiritual procreation is attributed to her super-ego'.<sup>37</sup>

In 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms' (1946) Klein observes that mature adults always have an infant inside them, so that even when creative, contained depressive relationships are achieved, they will always have the potential to regress to paranoid-schizoid relationships, and progress back again.<sup>38</sup> This oscillation between the two positions is the oscillation between manageable ambivalent whole object relations and the destructive part-object relations that underpin the whole spectrum of intersubjective relationships. For Klein and her followers, creative processes are thereby subversive of a paranoid schizoid mode of functioning, and at the same time are rooted in, and emergent from, that functioning. For Klein, real depressive relations emerge from a desire to preserve the mother, thus enabling a relationship with her as an

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<sup>37</sup> Klein, 'The Effect of Early Anxiety Situations on the Sexual Development of the Girl' 236.

<sup>38</sup> See Klein, 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms.' The Selected Melanie Klein, ed. Juliet Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1986) 176-200. 189-91, 197-8. In addition, Suzanne Raitt observes that 'Mamma, like the Kleinian child, can only operate by organizing the world into bad and good objects.' See Raitt, May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 248.

autonomous, whole, ambivalent object. Such relations are therefore always potentially subversive of a paranoid schizoid phallogentric psychic economy that conceives of women in part-object relational terms.

As I have already described in Chapter 4 in relation to the bond between Mary Olivier and her mother, the cultural fantasy of the 'at-oneness' of mother and child underpins the idealisation of motherhood. This fantasy encourages merging and promotes a dangerous inertia which blocks the development of mutuality and the recognition and mediation of differences.

Deborah Kelly Kloepfer in The Unspeakable Mother examines the revolutionary semiotics of a maternal prehistory, the 'unspeakable language' of maternal desire and its radical undermining of patriarchal discourses of the so-called enlightenment. Kloepfer writes: 'As a structuring device for this work, I offer a particular "trope": the censored, repressed, or absent mother, a figure missing, not surprisingly so, when we acknowledge that text constitutes itself on the premise of her absence.' She continues:

the mother, as either object or lack, is both dangerous and desired and . . . this ambivalence is reflected in . . . the liminality of the psychological and linguistic space she occupies. Although language constitutes itself at her expense, depends on her absence . . . the maternally connoted semiotic surfaces as a register to discourse, a memory, an intonational 'instinctual' breakthrough.<sup>39</sup>

Kloepfer explains that lack and its association with the mother triggers a 'chain of desire'. She continues by describing the chain of signifiers at the centre of Lacan's psycholinguistics, using the 'presupposition that all systems of representation are based

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<sup>39</sup> Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H.D. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989) 2, 11.

on absence, echoing the primal loss of the mother.<sup>40</sup> This, of course, has important links with Julia Kristeva and the semiotic chora.

Women's psychosexual being reflects a sexually specific relationship to cyclic and monumental time; that is, as Kristeva puts it, 'women's time'. Her ideas are used in conjunction with a psychodynamic conception of memory, differentiating between the ontogenetic memory of cyclic time and the phylogenetic memory of monumental time, to suggest forms of memory traceable to the earliest existential relationship to the mother's body via the modalities of both infinite and cyclic space-time. Kristeva writes in 'Women's Time' (1979):

As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilisations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock . . . On the other hand, . . . there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time . . . [T]hese two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to female subjectivity insofar as the latter is thought of as necessarily maternal . . . [T]his repetition and this eternity are found to be the fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones.<sup>41</sup>

As Harriett becomes middle-aged she tries to overcome her lonely seclusion by following habits and strict rituals to give meaning to her life: 'She liked having the same

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<sup>40</sup> Kloefer, *The Unspeakable Mother* 10.

<sup>41</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time,' trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* 7 (Autumn 1981): 13-35. 16-17.

food at the same hours. . . . She lived by habit, by the punctual fulfilment of her expectation' (HF 162). However, while living in linear time, she attempts to reconstruct her mother's memory in a more enduring, cyclical time and this is aided by her dependence on her maid Maggie in whom she finds maternal shelter. Her mind 'slip[s] from drowsiness into stupor' signalling the shift in time when she reimagines herself as a child in the house in Black's Lane (HF 174). Restoring the blue egg workbox to the drawing room 'gave reality to her return' (HF 176). The idea of the return to the archaic-maternal is taken up in the last section of this chapter and, in my final chapter, I will return to Kristeva's latter point about the resonance of women's time with mystical space-time. I will suggest that this is indicative of the archaic-maternal and Absolute Reality partaking of a common existential register.

### **III. Harriett's Melancholia**

Harriett's adaptation to the loss of her mother closely follows the pattern set out by Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917 [1915]). Here, Freud describes mourning as a process that must be experienced in order to liberate the ego from the lost loved object. Although the experience is painful and time-consuming, Freud concludes that mourning is necessary in order to regain emotional health. However, in melancholia, the loss is more pathological since the loved object is an ideal kind, thus the melancholic's own ego was closely associated with the identity of the lost object. Freud explains:

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produces

melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition.<sup>42</sup>

Freud continues by writing that not only do melancholics suffer from a more severe form of mourning, but that their narcissistic drive in their libido identifies and merges their own ego with that of the loved object. Therefore they suffer a sense of loss of their own identity, and boundaries between self and object-choice become blurred. As Freud explains, when the subject is incapable of relinquishing the object-choice it gives way to a pathological condition:

The object cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. . . . [T]his contradiction seems to imply that the object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that the object cathexis, when obstacles come in its way, can regress to narcissism.<sup>43</sup>

My purpose in drawing upon Freud's work in relation to The Life and Death of Harriett Frean is to examine the contextual ideas of melancholia and the psychic operations inherent in Sinclair's novel, which is remarkably different from the others under appraisal in this thesis. Sinclair draws upon the Freudian concept of melancholia in

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<sup>42</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' 1917 [1915], SE 14, 243-58. 243.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 249.

order to highlight the difference between a fulfilling, productive life where the female protagonist is able to sublimate the cramped, repressive conditions of ordinary life (for example, Mary Olivier), and a life where the autonomous self is stamped out and the protagonist is marked by unproductivity and frustration. Harriett fails to transcend her limited conditions thereby offering Sinclair's antivision of depressive femininity. She is unaware of and fails to make use of her libidinal resources and her capacity for creative sublimation (this too can be usefully compared with Mary Olivier in Chapter 4).

Freud describes melancholia as operating at a deeper, unconscious level than mourning: 'melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.'<sup>44</sup> Since, as I have already described, Harriett's narcissistic choice of love object is her mother, she fails to differentiate between her mother's identity and desires and her own. After her mother's death Harriett continues to vicariously live her life through the mother. Harriett's psyche is completely enmeshed with that of her mother:

Through her absorption in her mother, some large, essential part of herself had gone. . . . All her memories of her mother were joined to the memory of this now irrecoverable self.

She tried to reinstate herself through grief; she sheltered behind her bereavement, affecting a more profound seclusion, abhorring strangers . . . It was only through memory that she could reinstate herself. . . . She clung to the image of her mother; and always beside it, shadowy and pathetic, she discerned the image of her lost self. (HF 108-10)

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<sup>44</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' 245.

Harriett is never able to recover from the loss of her fundamental narcissistic choice of love object, her mother. Thus, as Freud describes, the shadow of the narcissistic love-object dominates the subject's ego, preventing the inability to separate the self from object choice. Although critics have previously noted that it is the dead mother whom Harriett mourns, it hitherto remains unclear what this loss means to Harriett herself. I will now turn my attention to this problem.

In life, Harriett's mother is the self-effacing 'Angel of Repression, the psychic Censor' who controls Harriett's thoughts and desires.<sup>45</sup> Through her mother, Harriett learns the ideals of repression and suppression and the edict to behave beautifully. In Mary Olivier, after her mother's death, Mary embraces the newfound freedom in her life and uses her creative energies to overcome the repressed life she had lived with her mother. However, after Mrs Frean's death, Harriett rigidly maintains her mother's ideals and thus perpetuates her sense of loss. Harriett's real self, or at least the potential to become an embodied self with her own desires, remains buried just as the child Harriett had buried in a coffin-like drawer her doll Ida with its 'real hair' and 'real eyes'. At the close of the novel, Harriett does achieve some insight into her life: she realises the waste and futility of her life and is aware that she was nothing more than a 'stillborn' child or the buried doll Ida with its 'real' features. Harriett's melancholia stems from a failure of self-projection, a problem that Freud describes as owing its origin to narcissism. He observes: 'The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation' 31.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' 246.

Harriett uses her repressed life as a blanket to block out the harsh realities of everyday life. By adhering to her mother's principles, even after her death, she attempts to protect herself from brutal, ugly truths: her 'beautiful' sacrificial act of giving Robin up for Prissie in fact condemns him to an unhappy marriage; her kind, true, honest father bankrupts the lives of others. Rather than face up to these painful realities, Harriett remains imprisoned by her family's principles and her psyche, so thoroughly censored by her upbringing, remains fettered. She is neither able nor does not wish to creatively sublimate herself from the life that she is familiar with and protected by. Harriett instead withdraws into her unconsciousness. A similar verdict is offered by Katherine Mansfield in her story 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' (1922). The two sisters only know themselves as daughters in relation to their father, as the title suggests, and they fail to enter the adult world as grown-ups after his death. They too remain immature and locked in their repressed and regressive, childhood identities. For both Constantia and Josephine, their life is absent of personal fulfilment, finding it easier to passively shut out life than to actively engage with/in it: "Don't let's open anything. At any rate, not for a long time. . . . Let's be weak—be weak, Jug. It's much nicer to be weak than to be strong."<sup>47</sup>

The classic Freudian Oedipus scenario is one interpretation that could be offered to explain Harriett's childhood sexual fantasy. Here, Harriett's desire to have a baby is read as a typical example of Freud's theory on 'phallic organization' and 'castration complex'.<sup>48</sup> Harriett tells her mother: "Some day I shall have a little baby . . . a little girl." She fantasises that '[s]he would be like Mamma, and her little girl would be like herself. She couldn't think of it any other way' (HF 10, 11). From a Freudian reading,

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<sup>47</sup> Katherine Mansfield, 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel,' 1922. The Collected Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield (London: Penguin, 1981) 262-85. 271-2.

<sup>48</sup> Freud, 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex,' 1924, SE 19, 173-79. 178.

Harriett's desire for a baby is the fantasy in which the girl wishes her father to give her a child in order to compensate her for her lack of a phallus: 'Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift—to bear him a child.'<sup>49</sup>

However, I read this scene differently: I believe that Harriett does not suffer from a castration complex but a pre-Oedipal complex from which she is never able to escape. (In a similar manner, I argue that Harriett never fully enters language of signification, remaining trapped by the pre-Oedipal babble represented by the nursery rhyme at the beginning.) Harriett's wish for a baby stems from a desire for union with the mother. Nancy Chodorow also suggests that the idea of heterosexual incest stems not so much from the girl's phallic envy but as a way of access to the mother.<sup>50</sup> I argue that Harriett's fantasy for a baby is an attempt to preserve the mother and thus to perpetuate the status quo of the mother-daughter dynamic. In her desire to bear a *female* child, Harriett is unconsciously expressing the desire that she will take the place of her mother, and her child will become the new baby Harriett. Thus, Harriett is already moulding herself after her mother's image and claiming her maternal inheritance. By imaginatively configuring a birth, or a rebirth, Harriett is effectively restoring the mother. In fact, during the second half of the novel, Harriett struggles to contend with maternal loss—both of her mother and her own failure to be a mother. At the end, she is psychically restored to her mother, giving her a great sense of *jouissance*. The trouble with Harriett is that she is never liberated from this pre-Oedipal bond with her mother, and in trying to re/unite with her mother for the whole of her life, she is never able to find psychical freedom. Thus she remains bound hand and foot in the prison of her past.

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<sup>49</sup> Freud, 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' 179.

<sup>50</sup> See Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1978) 115.

Harriett's loss of self is akin to Ernest Jones's description of aphanisis. I have already examined this psychoanalytic term in relation to Gwenda Cartaret in Chapter 3 as she struggles to find expression for herself. Gwenda's loss of the loved object, Steven Rowcliffe, is followed by a loss of meaning of the self. Harriett's childhood shows continual self-effacement in the process of becoming feminine. As the novel progresses, Harriett becomes more and more a faded subject. After her parents' deaths she withdraws further into her home, taking solace in her daily routines: 'She lived by habit, by the punctual fulfilment of her expectation' and becomes increasingly dependent on her maid, Maggie: 'she found shelter in Maggie as she had found it in her mother' (HF 162, 163).

Harriett's aphanisis, or fading out of the self, begins early in childhood, and centres on two antithetical events. The first, following the children's tea-party when Harriett hangs back rather than appear greedy, Harriett realises the love she can gain from her mother by behaving 'beautifully.' When Harriett drinks the milk brought for her by her mother later that evening, it was 'thin and cold [and] delicious' (HF 15) This is, in effect, the mother's milk, and Harriett feels restored by its nourishing, nurturing powers. Yet drinking the mother's milk actually kills her sense of self and her innate desire for personal exploration. (In The Three Sisters Alice refuses her restorative milk, not wishing to be infantilised.) Secondly, when Harriett does transgress and enters Black's Lane, she comes face-to-face with the ugly reality her mother wishes to protect her from. She realises the evil vision inherent in the 'frightening' man who came out of the 'dirty brown house', and confronts adult heterosexual relations in the heavy symbolism of the 'white froth' of the cow-parsley and the 'red tops of the campion pricking through' (HF 18).

The first event is reinforced and compounded by the second: beautiful behaviour is conflated with the ugly. The scene that takes place in Black's Lane reveals Mamma again assuming the role of psychic censor, forbidding Harriett's sexual curiosity. When she leaves the safe, protected and maternally-inscribed Frean household and enters the lane, ten year old Harriett trespasses on to forbidden territory. Harriett is conscious of her transgression, repeating to herself: ' "I'm in the lane. I'm in the lane. I'm disobeying Mamma" ' (HF 17). In the lane she comes across her nightmare vision: 'there was something queer, some secret, frightening thing about it.' This vision is associated with a man: '*He* was the frightening thing' (HF 18). This image is immediately juxtaposed with the appearance of her mother 'coming down the garden walk, tall and beautiful' (HF 19). The red flowers are associated with sexuality, raising the ideas of defloration and the potential of a future sexual life for Harriett. Harriett realises that her mother is implicated in her vision of adult sexuality, which also implicates the man behind the railings. As her mother holds the red campion to her lips, Harriett is traumatized by this overt sight of her mother's sexuality and at this moment her consciousness breaks into the narrative: 'It was awful, for you could see her mouth thicken and redden' (HF 20). Mamma's mouth is seen as a wound by Harriett, signifying Freud's primal scene, that of parental intercourse. Her mother tries to deny Harriett full knowledge of adult sexuality: she is told to 'run away' by her mother, and receives a lecture from her father. Mr Frean again instructs Harriett to forget ugly things and to behave beautifully. Her parents are denying her access to sexuality; she must remain repressed and pre-sexual: 'She hid her face on his breast against his tickly coat, and cried. She would always have to do what they wanted; the unhappiness of not doing it was more than she could bear' (HF 23). During the following three years, Harriett (mistakenly) comes to view as right the code of conduct that her parents instil in her. She withdraws into the family home,

finding sanctuary behind the walls of the Freans' house. Her self-effacement—or fading out of the self—has begun. She begins to display the symptoms of melancholic withdrawal and paranoiac self-defence as described by Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia': a 'withdraw[al] into the ego'.<sup>51</sup>

#### **IV. The Revelation: The Return to the Mother**

At the end of the novel Harriett's latent feelings come to the surface and she is conscious of her frozen self. In mourning for her loss of self, she calls herself a stillborn child, referring to the waste of her life: ' "It's sad—sad to go through so much pain and then to have a dead baby" ' (HF 183). Harriett Frean ends with the fading from life of Harriett but at this very moment of departure there is an ecstatic reunion with the mother, and Harriett experiences *jouissance*. Jones describes that the symptomatic figure of aphanisis is eventually replaced by a therapeutic figure of anamnesis, a psychoanalytic recall of inherent or inherited memory that dispels the darkness with the maternal eros.<sup>52</sup>

After her mother's death, Harriett lives out the remainder of her life yearning for the psychic mother who offers the promise of love and wholeness; the illusory oneness of the imaginary. This is emphasised by the merging imagery of mother and child in the pre-Oedipal bond, a fusion or oneness in which there is no subjectivity, no differentiation. Picking up a book that they had once read together, Harriett is not interested in the contents but can only recall the sight of her mother's beautiful hands holding the green cover and the sound of her voice while reading. This is reflective of the Kleinian yearning for the maternal imago. Harriett's love for her mother holds the

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<sup>51</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' 249.

<sup>52</sup> See Ernest Jones, 'Early Development of Female Sexuality.' 1927. Papers on Psychoanalysis, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Baillière, 1950) 438-51.

promise of the idealised mother, and is composed of projection and desire. Harriett's continual efforts to recreate the mother figure reflect her attempts to reconstitute the self, the subject.

In the final scene of the novel, as Harriett gives herself up to white environment of the hospital room, she regresses and her white world is re-visioned as her nursery. Freud's criteria for the uncanny is applicable here. In his essay 'The "Uncanny"' (1919) Freud claims that, psychoanalytically speaking, homesickness is a longing for the return to the lost maternal home or womb. Harriett finds peace in the return to the comfortable, protected and familiar environment; that is, she is made to feel at home or *heimlich*: 'The white curtain walls of the cubicle contracted, closed in on her. She was lying at the bottom of her white-curtained nursery cot. She felt weak and diminished, small, like a very little child' (HF 184). The recovery of her child-self allows for the longed-for recovery of the mother. At the moment of her revelation, her psyche is liberated from the narcissistic prison of her past. Harriett is finally freed by her vision of maternal *jouissance* and she undergoes an ecstatic deathbed reunion with her mother: 'she smiled with a sudden ecstatic wonder and recognition. "Mamma—" ' (HF 184).<sup>53</sup>

In Mayor's The Third Miss Symons Henrietta too dies alone, disliked by her family and her servants. Although her younger sister, Evelyn, arrives too late to be at her sister's side, the novel ends with a mystical revelation. Unlike the situation in Harriett Frean, the revelation in this case is not the main female protagonist's but Evelyn's: she feels remorse and regret at her sister's life, realising what it must have felt like to have achieved so little, to love and be loved so little. However, as Evelyn looks out at the night stars, she is suddenly aware that 'all [was] perfectly well with Henrietta':

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<sup>53</sup> Esther Greenwood in The Bell Jar experiences a similar rebirthing experience as she recovers from a suicide attempt in hospital. As she emerges from her unconscious state, she utters one word: ' "Mother!" '. Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar (1964. London: Faber, 1974) 181.

At the same moment she felt inextricably mingled with the stars, a rush of the most exquisite sensation, emotion, replenishment she had ever known. She felt through every fibre of her being that it was all perfectly well with Henrietta, and that the bitterness, aimlessness, and emptiness of her life was made up to her.<sup>54</sup>

Evelyn's remorse has a transformative effect: in appreciating her sister, Evelyn makes a self-discovery and is able to find peace with herself: 'Unspeakable comfort.' Instead of becoming ill she 'continued well and strong . . . [and] from henceforth she was perfectly happy about Henrietta.'<sup>55</sup> Evelyn recognises the reality of her relationship with Henrietta; what the relationship had meant to both of them and, by extension, Henrietta's worth, despite appearances. Thus Evelyn's mystical insight rereads Henrietta's life-story. It offers the possibility of transformation, in a quasi-religious sense: although Henrietta was a failure in life, unloved and unloving, in eternity her life gains value and purpose through redemption. For Evelyn, at least, Henrietta has been resurrected and her empty life has been redeemed through love. Thus, as Evelyn comes to realise, life has to be judged from different perspectives and new dimensions; that is, by seeing life *sub specie æternitatis*. I will show in my next chapter that Sinclair too believed in this.

At Harriett's final moment of anaphasis, both bodily and textually, there appears the therapeutic figure of anamnesis in the form of the mother. This has the psychoanalytic function of recalling inherited or inherent memory, displacing Harriett's fear of death and her insight into her wasted life. I therefore argue that Harriett finds freedom at the end with the memory of the mother fully restored and her resurgence of *jouissance* in the maternal recovery. As Harriett rises up to meet the maternal-

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<sup>54</sup> Mayor, *Miss Symons* 143.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

therapeutic figure, her psyche is liberated from the enclosed world of her melancholic existence: 'She smiled with a sudden ecstatic wonder and recognition' (HF 184).

Therefore, the death of Harriett Freat is revisioned as a spiritual rebirth. Sinclair writes in 'The Way of Sublimation': 'To be born again . . . [man] must return to his mother'.<sup>56</sup> Harriett's rebirth gives her the reconstruction of selfhood that she was looking for during her lonely life as a spinster. In reuniting with the mother, Harriett realises her desire for wholeness as experienced in being the 'other' to her mother. At the end of the novel Harriett at last finds peace in the enduring, cyclical, archaic-maternal time. Her lifelong attempt to find union with the maternal is finally realised with the recovery of the mother figure.

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<sup>56</sup> Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation' 62.

## Chapter 6

### 'Flashes of Reality': New Mysticism as a Transformative Power

We laymen have always been intensely curious to know . . . from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable.<sup>1</sup>

#### Part One: Contexts

##### I. The New Mysticism: Answering a Need of the Times?

In A Defence of Idealism (1917) Sinclair remarks that mysticism 'seems to be approaching a rather serious revival.'<sup>2</sup> She observes:

there is not one of the mystic's claims that is not under serious consideration at the present day. . . . The things he calls spiritual and the things other people call psychic are too closely platted together to be easily disentangled. What is more, the belief in the supernatural, even Magic itself, have never died out of human history. Mysticism itself, in some form or other, has never died. (DI 251)

By the first decade of the twentieth century, along with parallel fashions in magic, spiritualism, theosophy, hypnotism and astrology, this revival had began to take firm root. In his seminal work on the Edwardian era, Samuel Hynes writes that social and intellectual restlessness was evident throughout the Edwardian period and the huge variety of new movements 'ranging from socialism to spiritualism . . . had one thing in

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,' 1908 [1907], SE 9, 143-53. 143.

<sup>2</sup> May Sinclair, A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions (New York: Macmillan, 1917) 251. Also in 1917 the literary scholar Dorothy Scarborough notes the 'revival' of supernatural literature. See Dorothy Scarborough, The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (New York: Knickerbocker, 1917) 5.

common . . . they were all opposed to conventional Victorian ideals.’<sup>3</sup> Much of the huge output of literature on mysticism during the first two decades of the twentieth century was the result of reaction from ecclesiastical authority and nineteenth-century materialism. The Modernists began to view Orthodox Christianity—both as an institution and as an intellectual system—as deficient, and they set about accommodating it to secular and scientific thought. Therefore, the revival in mysticism began to flourish in the lacunae left by the dissatisfaction with organised religion.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, with the outbreak of the First World War, there was a deep and very real need for a conviction of spiritual reality. During this period of disillusionment, misgiving, and loss of life on a huge scale, there was a turn inward in the hope that mysticism would offer the salve of healing or a transcendent liberation. Jay Winter has examined memory and mourning resulting from the First World War and describes the study of religious belief and practices as having a real significance for those left behind as the ravages of the war took their toll.<sup>5</sup> By giving voice to the dead, a sense of unification can be evoked between the living and the dead. Winter describes that although powerful ‘aesthetic or political messages [were] available to those in mourning, there was another level on which they lived the “meaning” of the war.’ This was one on a private, solitary level, frequently ‘hidden from view’, and involved

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1968) 135. Moreover, as Patricia Waugh explains, during this time, both philosophers and scientists alike were recognising ‘the limits of ordinary consciousness, of common sense, as a means of apprehending the increasingly apparent “queerness” of the nature of reality.’ See Waugh, *Revolutions of the Word: Intellectual Contexts for the Study of Modern Literature* (London: Arnold, 1997) 42.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Law analyses the role played by specific developments in the nineteenth-century religious thought and early twentieth-century studies of mysticism, showing how strands of affective, empirical, and autobiographical discourses were developed in such a way as to enable women writing at the beginning of the century to draw on the mystical tradition in their fiction. See Sarah Law, ‘The Haunted Mind: Mysticism in the Early Twentieth Century.’ ‘“Écriture Spirituelle”: Mysticism in the Writing of Evelyn Underhill, May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson,’ Ph.D. thesis, QMWC, U of London, 1997. 9-52.

<sup>5</sup> Winter observes that the effect of the war on the religious imagination, both within and outside the confines of the traditional church, is a largely unexplored terrain. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

'timeless questions about the truncation of millions of lives, about promises unfulfilled, about the evanescence of hope'.<sup>6</sup> The catastrophic experience of loss led many to seek an existential meaning. Julia Kristeva suggests that 'religious discourse', alongside 'aesthetic and particularly literary creation', 'set[s] forth a device whose prosodic economy, interaction of characters, and implicit symbolism constitute a very faithful semiological representation of the subject's battle with symbolic collapse'.<sup>7</sup> Kristeva writes: 'the literary (and religious) representation possesses a real and imaginary effectiveness that comes closer to catharsis than to elaboration; it is a therapeutic device'.<sup>8</sup> Those who were attempting to understand the meaning of loss of life during the First World War had to contend with this sense of 'symbolic collapse' and, as Winter explains, 'art and ceremony helped to shore up these symbols'.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps, then, one facet of the new mysticism is in its formulation and a formalisation to find an 'elaboration, expression and revival' for these symbols of meaning.<sup>10</sup>

In Defence Sinclair explains: 'the world has been full of *these* mystics, *these* visionaries, since August, 1914' (DI 269). By the use of the traditional images of loss—as found in metaphysics and religious imagery—I suggest that Sinclair's application of the new mysticism contributes towards the possibility of hope and a process of healing through the Kristevan idea of a catharsis.<sup>11</sup> This idea is given impetus by the

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<sup>6</sup> Winter, Sites of Memory 224.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Winter, Sites of Memory 226.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 227.

<sup>11</sup> However, Law examines Sinclair's mysticism at the point of loss. Law writes: 'Sinclair's exploration of mysticism . . . involves her coming to terms with the concept of loss, the traditional first stage of the mystical journey . . . True mysticism is shown repeatedly in Sinclair's fiction to be a . . . mechanism of response to loss'. See Law, '“Écriture Spirituelle”' 100-44. 104. Kristeva describes this difference in

examination of some of her unpublished artefacts originating from her direct involvement with the First World War.

The war directly challenged Sinclair both personally and aesthetically. In 1913 she had declared to Ford Madox Ford, 'I'm sick of the world we live in, with its cowardice & hypocrisy, & abominable, poisonous, sham morality.'<sup>12</sup> A year later, in 1914, Sinclair wrote to Gilbert Murray stating that she would never write another book like The Three Sisters and predicts the impact the war will have on aesthetics: 'The War will leave none of us as it found us.'<sup>13</sup> Katherine Mansfield makes a similar comment in a letter of 1919 regarding her review of Virginia Woolf's Night and Day:

[T]he novel can't just leave the war out. There *must* have been a change of heart. . . . I feel it in the *profoundest* sense that nothing can ever be the same—that, as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions new moulds for our new thoughts and feelings.<sup>14</sup>

Mansfield adds: 'We have to face our war.'<sup>15</sup> For Sinclair, facing the war was on an emotional level. It offered a chance to become reacquainted in a mystical association with Absolute Reality. In an unpublished typescript, 'The Influence of the War on "Life and Literature"', she writes that the war will 'widen our range of motives and instincts

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approach to 'sublimatory solutions' as 'neutralizing antidepressants' and 'lucid counterdepressants.' See Kristeva, Black Sun 25.

<sup>12</sup> Sinclair, letter to Ford Madox Ford, [1913], NYPL.

<sup>13</sup> Sinclair, letter to Gilbert Murray, 29 Oct. 1914, BL, MS Gilbert Murray 25, fos. 126-7. In an article written for an American audience, possibly as a piece of war propaganda, she looks at the political implication of the war for women, discussing women's roles both during and after the war when the soldiers return. She observes that it will be difficult for women to relinquish their posts once the war is over: 'What women can never give up is the realisation that they can fill and have filled these places hitherto reserved exclusively for men.' 'It means that women's opportunity has come. They can put their beliefs to the test, and justify many of the claims [held by the suffrage movement]'. She also remarks here: 'What is very certain is that the war will not leave us as it found us.' See Sinclair, 'Women's Sacrifices for the War.' Woman at Home 67 (Feb. 1915): 7-11. 10, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Mansfield, letter to John Middleton Murry, 10 Nov. 1919. Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry, 1913-1922, ed. John Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1951) 380.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 381.

and emotions', consolidating and 'heightening . . . emotional values'. Before the war 'the whole obstructive apparatus of material things' were getting in the way of seeing 'the vision' of Reality:

For there is no doubt that these [emotional] values were precisely what we were beginning to lose in 'life and literature,' along with Religion, that is to say with our hold on Reality, before the War. Most of us—with the exception of one or two poets—were ceasing to live with any intensity, to believe with any conviction incompatible with comfort, and to feel with any strength and sincerity. Yet we were all quite sincerely 'out for' reality without recognising it when we saw it and without any suspicion of its spiritual nature.

And Reality—naked, shining, intense Reality—more and not less of it, is, I believe what we are going to get after the War.<sup>16</sup>

Sinclair's attitude towards the war is given further resonance by two letters in the May Sinclair Archive. Firstly, on 28 February 1915, she wrote to Arthur Adcock: 'Personally, I feel as if I had never lived, with any intensity, before I went out to [the war] in the autumn.'<sup>17</sup> Secondly, on 4 March 1916, she wrote to Hugh Walpole with regard to his recently published The Dark Forest: 'you brought back to me with the most startling and uncanny poignancy the feeling of the thing . . . I don't know anybody but you who has realised the ecstasy and joy that came whenever you got into what they call the "danger zone"—it's the nearest and perfect happiness we're likely to reach in this world. It is perfect happiness, and it has nothing to do with "doing yr. duty" . . . it's deeper than all that.'<sup>18</sup> Sinclair continues by writing that she had intended to achieve something along similar lines in her A Journal of Impressions in Belgium (1915):

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<sup>16</sup> Sinclair, 'The Influence of the War on "Life and Literature," ' ts, 2, fo. 481, box 25, UP.

<sup>17</sup> Sinclair, letter to Arthur Adcock, 28 Feb. 1915, fo. 1, box 1, UP.

<sup>18</sup> Sinclair, letter to Hugh Walpole, 4 Mar. 1916, fo. 91, box 3, UP.

'there's . . . a little of it in one or two passages in my journal'.<sup>19</sup> In Journal she describes her feelings as 'ecstasy' when she came face-to-face with fighting and death at the front-line. Although The Romantic (1920) is narrated along more conventional lines than the Modernist texts under consideration here, Charlotte's association with the war is both one of eroticism, giving her *jouissance*, and a maternal one, in which to heal and restore, and even, bring the dead back to life. I argue that Sinclair was in fact very concerned with the place of women during the war and that recent critics' labelling of Sinclair as a megalomaniac, myopic, narcissistic, and self-indulgent is displaced.<sup>20</sup>

Sinclair, a middle-aged woman, believed she was seeing life lived in its reality and this created within her an ecstasy of being:

A curious excitement comes to you. I suppose it is excitement, though it doesn't feel like it. You have been drunk. Very slightly drunk with the speed of the car. But now you are sober. Your heart beats quietly, steadily, but with a little creeping mounting thrill in the beat. The sensation is distinctly pleasurable. You say to yourself, 'It is coming. Now—or the next minute—perhaps at the end of the road.' You have one moment of regret. 'After all, it would be a pity if it came too soon, before we'd even begun our job.' But the thrill, mounting steadily, overtakes the regret. It is only a little thrill so far (for you don't really believe that there is any danger), but you can imagine the thing growing, growing steadily, till it becomes ecstasy. Not that you imagine anything at the moment. At the moment you are no longer an observing, reflecting being; you

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<sup>19</sup> Sinclair, letter to Walpole.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Claire Tylee reads Sinclair as 'myopic' and 'narcissistic'. See Tylee, The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-1964 (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1990) 27-31; and Sharon Ouditt writes that Sinclair 'is in love with the power that war represents.' See Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War (London: Routledge, 1994) 34-5.

have ceased to be aware of yourself; you exist only in that quiet, steady thrill that is so unlike any excitement that you have ever known.<sup>21</sup>

The extracts above offer an eroticised experience: both the body and the senses are directly involved, and this is akin to an awakening of the being on every level. In each of the examples, Sinclair articulates her view that such a confrontation with reality is cathartic, suggesting a psychic rebirth. As Claire Tylee argues, the ecstasy Sinclair experiences on the frontline and writes about, again and again, is derived from the sensation of danger that produces an awareness of 'heightened experience, of exaltation'.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see, in her writing on mysticism and uncanny experiences, Sinclair relates the feeling of ecstasy to eroticised bodily sensations.<sup>23</sup>

The sense of a new awareness that Sinclair writes about, both in her novels and in her personal life, articulates the relation of the woman and her place in the First World War. This is an area currently under appraisal in critical examinations.<sup>24</sup> For example, Sharon Ouditt looks at the traumatic nature of women's experience during the First World War, and reveals the challenge to feminine identity that the war both demanded and attempted to restrict. As Ouditt examines, women's work during the war

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<sup>21</sup> Sinclair, A Journal of Impressions in Belgium (London: Hutchinson, 1915) 14.

<sup>22</sup> Tylee, The Great War 30.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair's association of war with an eroticised ecstasy is remarkable and problematic. Critics, such as Suzanne Raitt and Tylee, are uncomfortable with Sinclair's eroticised, mystical response to the danger confronted by soldiers on the battlefield. For example, Raitt examines Sinclair's 'ecstasy of war' as a 'vicarious sexualised enjoyment' of power normally experienced by men. See Raitt, '“Contagious Ecstasy”: May Sinclair's War Journals.' Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate, eds. Women's Fiction and the Great War (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 65-84. 67.

<sup>24</sup> For recent discussions of writings by and about women during the First World War see Laura Stempel Mumford, 'May Sinclair's The Tree of Heaven: The Vortex of Feminism, the Community of War.' Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation, eds. Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich, and Susan Merrill Squier (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 1989) 168-83; Tylee, The Great War; Ouditt, Fighting Forces; Raitt and Tate, eds., Women's Fiction; and Trudi Tate, Modernism, History and the First World War (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998). Much of this interest was stimulated by Sandra Gilbert's essay, 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,' Signs 8 (1983): 422-50. Rpt. in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Sexchanges, vol. 2 of No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1989).

was culturally reconstructed to offer an ideal of woman as subordinate and self-sacrificing. Yet, as Ouditt and others have recently suggested, women wrote from a stance of radical female alterity, undermining the symbolic order. It is this line of enquiry, the alternatives to the rational and normative symbolic order to find a catharsis or a healing cure, which I follow in my analysis of Sinclair's writing on the new mysticism.

In her conclusion to her argument on the new mysticism in Defence, Sinclair refers to the soldiers who fought in the war and whom she went to the battlefields, in order to help. For Sinclair, the soldier is a metaphorical figure: he is an upholder of moral values, a man who has to confront his mortality, and who must venture into the 'danger zone', the no man's land (or the 'borderland') between the living and the dead. This direct confrontation with reality at an extreme moment is given literary representation in her war novels The Tree of Heaven (1917), The Romantic (1920), and Far End (1926). In the latter, the two male protagonists observe: '[T]here was even a sort of queer ecstasy, they said, in going over the top.'<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in The Tree of Heaven Nicholas Harrison writes to his wife Veronica from the front-line and conveys at length his feelings while caught up in battle: 'when you're up first out of the trench and stand alone on the parapet, it's absolute happiness. And the charge is—well, it's simply heaven. It's as if you'd never really lived till then' (TH 368). He continues by offering his comrades' descriptions of going into battle. One soldier refers to it as 'sex-madness' and another refers to the 'ecstasy' (TH 368). The former reference articulates an awareness of the body as an eroticised involvement, although Nicky believes that the 'gorgeous fight-feeling' is more than that: 'You're bang up against reality—you're going clean into it—and the sense of it's exquisite' (TH 369). Later, Michael Harrison

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<sup>25</sup> Sinclair, Far End (New York: Macmillan, 1926) 55.

also writes to Veronica from the front, elaborating upon Nicky's description of the ecstasy experienced at the moment of reality. However, he adds: 'It's not as if danger were the only point of contact with reality. You get the same ecstasy, the same shock of recognition, and the same utter satisfaction when you see a beautiful thing' (TH 397).

For both Sinclair and her soldier protagonists, 'moments of danger . . . are moments of sure and perfect happiness, because then the adorable Reality gives itself to our very sight and touch' (DI 338, 339). Sinclair's experiences both at the frontline and with war in general constitute a 'shock of contact with reality' and gave her a chance to experience true self-realisation. An important constituent of Sinclair's new mysticism, then, is her plea for 'Ultimate Reality as the object of desire': the 'hunger and thirst for Life, for New Life and more abundant Life' (DI 267). This imperative is the driving force behind her writing on new mysticism. As Law explains: 'If there is mysticism as a direct result of war, it is a "spiritual compensation" rather than a logical consequence of combat.'<sup>26</sup>

The revival of mysticism meant that the way was also open for the quacks and amateurs whose interests were not so pure or genuine. Such groups gained a loyal and fashionable following in the early decades of the twentieth century, and particularly so during the years of the First World War. Sinclair's response to their particular manifestation of psychic powers is ambivalent. In Defence she declares that she believes their claims to be sceptical and their aims dubious. For example, in her chapter on the new mysticism, Sinclair writes that the areas of 'faith-healing, palmistry, clairvoyance, clair-audience, automatism, mediumship, and the rest' are 'still mixed up with such fraud and humbug and silliness, and with persons so disgraceful, so discredited, so absurd . . . I simply

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<sup>26</sup> Law, ' "Écriture Spirituelle" ' 132.

cannot afford to be suspected of tenderness, or even toleration for the professors of the occult' (DI 263). However, she herself attended séances in an attempt to communicate with her brother. Suzanne Raitt notes Sinclair 'regularly attending spiritualist sessions run by Catherine Dawson Scott' during which she repeatedly attempts to call up her dead brother Frank.<sup>27</sup> Another source of evidence that shows Sinclair attended séances comes from a letter she wrote to the editor of the Medical Press and Circular in 1917 under the title 'The Spirits, Some Simpletons, and Dr Charles Mercier.' She observes two mediums touching hands during one of their communications but claims that the methods of the Spiritualists are 'innocently amateurish rather than sternly scientific.'<sup>28</sup>

Sinclair finds that the powers of mysticism, magic, the occult, the uncanny, and dreams are all found in the same borderland. In Defence, Sinclair explains that she disapproves of the people who are 'adepts in the art of suggestion and auto-suggestion' since they 'have more or less control over whatever powers are involved in telepathy, clairvoyance, automatism, and mediumship' (DI 266). However, she finds 'the most elementary power of telepathy and suggestion', as exhibited by 'ordinary people', 'a very remarkable and significant thing' (DI 266). Despite declaring her scepticism in her non-fiction, the methods of psychic healing and auto-suggestion are very powerful tools and narrative devices in the uncanny stories she wrote mainly during the second decade of the twentieth century, collated in Uncanny Stories (1923) and The Intercessor and Other Stories (1931).<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Scarborough explains that the advances in 'modern science, the new study of folk-lore, Psychological Research Societies, modern Spiritualism,

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<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Raitt, May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 134. Sinclair also lost two nephews to the war in 1915.

<sup>28</sup> Sinclair, letter to the Editor, Medical Press and Circular 8 Aug. 1917.

<sup>29</sup> The stories in The Intercessor were written during the second decade of the twentieth century, although collated after the period under examination. However, 'The Intercessor' was first published in 1911, 'Heaven' in 1922, 'Jones's Karma' in 1923.

the “wizardry of dreams studied scientifically”—all suggested new themes, novel complications.’<sup>30</sup>

Diana Basham describes how, at the turn of the century, psychic research moved away from physical mediumship ‘with its dubious theatricality’ towards ‘“mental mediumship” with its emphasis on automatic writing and clairvoyance.’<sup>31</sup> This turn in direction is also suggested by the announcement at the beginning of one article in a contemporary journal: ‘I believe that the Society of Psychical Research [sic] is still by some known as the “Spook Society” . . . implying that its main business is the seeking out or even the brewing of ghost stories. . . . This view is somewhat inadequate; it mistakes both the purpose and temper of the SPR.’<sup>32</sup> As we shall see, many of Sinclair’s own uncanny stories read like the case studies that were transcribed in great detail both in the Journal and Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) from the time of its naissance. Sinclair gives a brief examination of ‘Spiritualistic phenomena’ in Defence. She thinks ‘there cannot be a doubt in the mind of any unprejudiced person, that, both through the agency of mediums and otherwise, *things happen*; things that are not explainable by any trickery; things interesting enough, and even uncanny enough to charm the most fastidious lover of the occult’ (DI 312).

Sinclair became a member of the SPR in June 1914 when the Society had been established for thirty-two years and was to remain a subscribing member for the remainder of her life. Despite her own misgivings over the both the efficacy and validity of some of its research methods, the Society attracted respected academics and intellectuals of its time. Indeed, its founder members were not cranks, quacks or

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<sup>30</sup> Scarborough, Supernatural 55.

<sup>31</sup> Diana Basham, The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society (New York: NYUP, 1992) 184.

<sup>32</sup> C. W. Emmet, ‘Psychical Research and its Bearing on Some Biblical Problems,’ Expository Times 24 (1912-13): 344-349. 344.

laymen, but reputable, academic and often scientific men.<sup>33</sup> The central tenets of the SPR were twofold: to investigate the claims of human survival beyond death, and ‘to investigate that large body of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and spiritual.’<sup>34</sup> For this undertaking, a ‘group of Spiritualists . . . would join forces in dispassionate investigation with a group of scientists and scholars . . . [so that] the phenomena might perhaps be elucidated’.<sup>35</sup> This group was formally constituted on 20 February 1882 as the Society for Psychical Research with Henry Sidgwick as its first President. Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney were among the founder members, and although they were initially unconvinced about the Society’s claims, it was not long until they too were immersed in research and writing books about their findings.<sup>36</sup>

Alan Gauld believes that the SPR ‘answered a need of the times’ since its members saw that psychical research offered a possible antidote to contemporary materialism.<sup>37</sup> Attempts to make the SPR an orthodox society with a serious scientific undertaking were therefore an important concern. At the turn of the twentieth century the members of the SPR attended and played prominent roles in several International Congresses of Psychology, and the Society’s work was brought to the attention of the general public with numerous letters and articles in the Times and leading journals (for example, Nineteenth Century Review, National Review, Contemporary Review).

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Gauld extensively details the backgrounds of the founder members of the SPR in his book devoted to its early history. See Alan Gauld, The Founders of Psychical Research (London: Routledge, 1968).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 138. The chief theoretical outcome of this enquiry was F. W. H. Meyers’s book, Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death, published posthumously in 1903, which details Myers’s theory of the subliminal self.

<sup>35</sup> Gauld, Psychical Research 137.

<sup>36</sup> For a full history of the SPR see Gauld, ‘The Foundation of the Society for Psychical Research 1882,’ Psychical Research 137-49.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 140.

Although, as Gauld describes, the formalised study of psychical research met with derision and hostility in its early days, by the second decade of the twentieth century its subject matter was topical and achieved a more favourable and accepted reception. For example, the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research for November 1912 features an article on multiple personalities, one on hysteria, and another by Freud on the unconscious.

At this time, the anthropologist Andrew Lang wrote a generally positive entry on psychical research for the Encyclopædia Britannica. Lang begins his lengthy synopsis by stating that psychical research may be defined in part as ‘an examination into the amount of truth contained in world-wide superstitions’.<sup>38</sup> After outlining its investigations through the ages, he continues by observing that its boundaries are hazy, that its range is ‘almost unlimited.’ ‘It impinges on anthropology (with its study of the savage theory of the spirits—animism—and of diabolical possession), and on the usual province of psychology, in the problems of the hallucinations both of morbid patients and of people in normal mental health’.<sup>39</sup> This crossing of disciplines, this inability to precisely define the boundaries of psychical research and the application of the word ‘hazy’ in the inability to do so has reverberations in Sinclair’s own problematic of defining the borderland that subsumes mysticism.

Sinclair uses an all-embracing definition regarding that pertaining to the supernatural:

there is a *dubious borderland*: the region of the so-called supernatural powers, of which the mystic himself cannot say whether they are magical or spiritual: the power of healing, of vision, of clairvoyance and clairaudience, of control over matter. This is the region where ‘miracles’ are said to happen; though neither the

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<sup>38</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Psychical Research,’ Encyclopædia Britannica, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. 1911.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

believer in magic nor the mystic know what is really happening. “It,” whatever “it” is, happens in the East and West wherever magic and mysticism are known and practised. (DI 250; italics added)

Sinclair examines the powers of this borderland state, explaining that ‘“psychic” powers . . . belong to the world of Mysticism and Magic and the occult’ and that they ‘are claimed equally by scoundrels and by saints’ (DI 263). In Mysticism in English Literature (1913), Caroline Spurgeon too takes the blurring of the boundaries between mysticism and the occult as her starting point: ‘mysticism is often used in a semi-contemptuous way to denote vaguely any kind of occultism or spiritualism’.<sup>40</sup>

A useful benchmark with which to compare the contemporary synthesis of the term mysticism is the definition given in 1917 in the Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics:

‘Mysticism,’ in common speech-usage, is a word of very uncertain connotation. It has in recent times been used as an equivalent for two characteristically different German words: *Mystizismus*, which stands for the cult of the supernatural, for theosophical pursuits, for a spiritualistic exploitation of psychical research; and *Mystik*, which stands for immediate experience of a divine-human intercourse and relationship. The word ‘mysticism’ has, furthermore, been commonly used to cover both (1) the first-hand experience of direct intercourse with God and (2) the theologico-metaphysical doctrine of the soul’s possible union with Absolute Reality, *i.e.* with God.<sup>41</sup>

The author for this introduction to the long entry on mysticism, Rufus Jones, concludes that it was conducive for clarity to restrict mysticism to its second term, namely *Mystik*, in order to ‘designat[e] the historic *doctrine* of the relationship and potential union of

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<sup>40</sup> C. F. E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1913) 1.

<sup>41</sup> R. M. Jones, ‘Mysticism,’ Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics, 1917. 83-4.

the human soul with Ultimate Reality, and to use the term “mystical experience” for direct intercourse with God.’<sup>42</sup> He continues: ‘*[f]irst hand, or mystical, experience is primarily a psychological question*; the doctrine of mysticism is essentially a metaphysical problem. . . . Mystical experience is marked by the emergence of a type of consciousness which is not sharply focalized, or clearly differentiated into a subject-object state.’<sup>43</sup>

Even Freud struggles to adequately define mysticism. He suggests that although one may have a degree of familiarity with the feeling of mysticism, it is beyond precise definition. Throwing up his hands he asks, ‘Mysticism, Occultism—what is meant by these words?’ and warns his readers:

You must not expect me to make any attempt at embracing this ill-circumscribed region with definitions. We all know in a *general and indefinite manner* what the words imply to us. They refer to some sort of ‘*other world*’, *lying beyond the bright world governed by relentless laws* which has been constructed for us by science.<sup>44</sup>

## II. ‘Mysticism is a Psychological Phenomenon’<sup>45</sup>

The above brief examination of the literature on mysticism during the first two decades of the twentieth century shows the development towards a psychology of mysticism.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jones, ‘Mysticism’ 83.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 83-4. Italics added.

<sup>44</sup> Freud, ‘Dreams and Occultism.’ New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, 1933 [1932], SE 22, 31-56. 31; italics added.

<sup>45</sup> Sinclair, Defence 245.

<sup>46</sup> In ‘Reminiscences (of Professor H. M. Gwatkin)’, Sinclair writes: ‘[Gwatkin] made you see that Christianity was an affair of history and psychology rather than of theological metaphysics’. See May Sinclair, ‘Reminiscences (of Professor H. M. Gwatkin),’ 4, fo. 456, box 24, UP. Henry Melvill Gwatkin was Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He gave the 1904-05

Previously, the historical approach, in presenting the lives of great mystics, regarded mysticism as indissolubly bound with certain classical forms and definite theological and philosophical assumptions. For Sinclair, the 'old mysticism' is a 'backward force' that arrests the personal growth of the individual.<sup>47</sup> She argues that the old 'Mystic Way' is imperfect since it is the 'surest way backwards and in' for two reasons:

First, because in the mystic longing and the mystic union Sublimation is still imperfect. The 'libido,' although it is transferred from a human and bodily object to a divine and spiritual one, is not transformed. It is simply 'carried over' in a more or less unsublimated state. Secondly, because the mystic look is essentially an inward one. The mystic seeks God . . . not in the outer world of art and science and action, but in the darkest and most secret recesses of his own soul. And it is precisely this darkness and secrecy that the psychoanalyst has the most reason to mistrust. (DI 257)

The psychological method, on the other hand, examines mysticism as a timeless concept and argues that it is rather more a spirit than a system of beliefs to be followed. Evelyn Underhill was the predominant contemporary and popular exponent of this form of mysticism. She argues that there is a fundamental unity of all mystical experience, whether Christian, pagan, Eastern or Western. In her classic study, *Mysticism* (1911), she introduces the concept of the timeless mystical soul. Underhill discusses the phenomena of mysticism in relation to mystic apprehension, attempting to re-instate the old doctrine of a special 'mystic sense' in terms of the new psychology. She postulates that there is a special mystical faculty which is related to the ordinary or 'normal'

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Gifford Lectures on *The Knowledge of God*. During the mid 1890s Sinclair visited him on several occasions at Cambridge, and received from him unofficial one-to-one tutorials on theology.

<sup>47</sup> Kinnamon Neff and Law examine the repressive forces of the old mysticism and explain why Sinclair was trying to rewrite this form of mysticism. See Kinnamon Neff, 'May Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* as Metaphysical Quest.' *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 26 (1983): 187-91; and Law, ' "Écriture Spirituelle" ' 100-44.

faculties of the soul. In her view, the special mystic sense ‘differs from and transcends the emotional, intellectual, and volitional life of ordinary men’, although she does not imply that this is opposed to or separated from that life.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, it ‘has attachments at each point to emotion, intellect, and to will’ and ‘can express itself under each of the aspects which these terms connote’.<sup>49</sup> Underhill claims that only the mystic can succeed in ‘establishing immediate communication between the spirit of man . . . and that “only Reality,” that immaterial and final Being, which some philosophers call the Absolute, and most theologians call God.’<sup>50</sup> For Underhill, a ‘direct encounter with absolute truth . . . appears to be impossible for normal non-mystical consciousness’.<sup>51</sup>

Sinclair too embraces the relation between mysticism and psychology: ‘mysticism is of immense interest and importance in Psychology’ (DI xv). However, although heavily influenced by Underhill, in Defence Sinclair differs from Underhill’s views in places, offering a more hopeful and humanising view.<sup>52</sup> She contends that the power to make contact with reality is latent in *all* human consciousness, even when taking into consideration that such encounters lie beyond ‘normal’ waking consciousness. For Sinclair, what is required is not a renunciation of the world and human desire but a renunciation of the seeker’s *need* for the world and his or her attachment to it: ‘the Christian’s tragedy [is that he] cannot, without an agonizing struggle, get rid of the world that weighs on him’ (DI 279). The conflict between body

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<sup>48</sup> Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1911. London: Methuen, 1912) 59.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Sinclair refers to Underhill as ‘one of the most distinguished authorities on Western Mysticism’ (DI 249). Sinclair and Underhill were friends and frequently corresponded to each other on their ideas and the progress of their works. Indeed, Sinclair read Mysticism in its draft form and is acknowledged in Underhill’s foreword, and Sinclair dedicates Defence to Underhill.

and soul must be resolved. This is the central tenet of Sinclair's new mysticism. In resolving opposites, the physical, sexual self does not need to be renounced in order to affirm the spiritual self. The self exists on two planes of reality: the temporal and the timeless. Therefore, the duality is an illusion since the self is perpetuated in a world that is beyond time. This is the form of mysticism that, as I have highlighted in Chapter 2, the poet Prothero practises in The Creators (1910).

Sinclair's chapter in Defence, 'The New Mysticism', illustrates her pull towards Eastern mysticism. She interprets the *new* mysticism as essentially a modernist dilemma, highlighted in the modern literature of both the East and West:

Mysticism itself is a thing of gradual development, and the Eastern and Western forms of it are tending to approach . . . This tendency is so conspicuous in the modern literature of East and West, that it may be fairly called the New Mysticism. . . . [I]t has put the disease of ascetism behind it (DI 274).

However, a discussion between Underhill and Sinclair about four years prior to the publication of Defence highlights Underhill's exception to Sinclair's fascination with the form of mysticism offered by Brahmins and Buddhists. On 26 March 1913, in reply to a letter from Sinclair, Underhill writes:

I knew your reading of the M.W. [The Mystic Way] wd.n solve the element of surprise but fully anticipated that it would also involve the element of disgust. . . . As to your dear Brahmans and Buddhists however, I'm quite unrepentant: I only grieve that I did not put the case more thoroughly and accurately so as to leave no loopholes! . . . If the Hindu does find the Divine as you say, so fully immanent in the Here-and-Now, why does he devote his energies to getting away from the Here-and-Now, instead of living out of the hiddenness, and actualizing its potential reality? Whatever he may say on this subject in his more

lucid moments, his general system seems to me only comprehensible as a 'way of escape.' Its [sic] true he has not got that horrible dualism,—a godless world set over against its Creator—which you hate (I do too) and which does poison a certain type of Christian thought though it is small, no part of the original brand: but his objective is a Full Stop, and the Christian's objective is just the opposite.<sup>53</sup>

However, Sinclair argues that in the Buddhist Sacred Books (the Upanishads, the Vedânta, and in the Mysticism of Kabîr): 'You enter a purer and a subtler air' (DI 270), implying that the mysticism found in the West is of a poorer quality. In her conclusion, she sums up the metaphysical doctrine of Nirvâna as 'the state of union with the Absolute; or . . . the utter extinction of the individual as such. On its religious side it is the ceasing from the sorrow of divided life' (DI 329). She gives this literary representation in 'Jones's Karma' (1923). Here the Mahatma narrates the story of Jones who 'came back to the same time-space' and 'to the same womb' in a series of births and rebirths. Jones is unable to reconcile his divided life. In summing up, the Mahatma explains: ' "[W]hen you talk of free will and bondage you talk of the pairs of opposites. You are free and yet you are bound also. It is according. But so long as you affirm the reality of the pairs of opposites you are subject to illusion. . . . Notwithstanding, there is a path of perfect freedom" ' (I 57). That is, according to Eastern mysticism, 'the path of perfect freedom' lies in 'escap[ing] from desiring and undesiring, from the pairs of opposites, and from the chain of happening and the round of births' (I 57). Thereby, the divided life may be reconciled.

Sinclair argues that this concept is seductive since Nirvâna is the state of 'pure, absolute, unconditioned Being' and 'Desire is the cause of Life, which is the cause of

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<sup>53</sup> Evelyn Underhill, letter to Sinclair, 26 Mar. 1913, fo. 90, box 3, UP. The work referred to is Evelyn Underhill's The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins (London: Dent, 1913).

sorrow; therefore Nirvâna, the state of blessedness, is attained by simply ceasing to desire' (DI 329-30).<sup>54</sup> Harriott Leigh, in 'Where Their Fire Is Not Quenched' (1922), like Jones, is unable to escape the 'wheel of life' since she is bound to it by desire. Harriott remains chained to life by her memory of a series of inadequately suppressed sexual encounters. Although Harriott dies halfway through the narrative, she lives on in the afterlife, reliving the sexual transgressions that she attempted to repress or deny during her lifetime.<sup>55</sup>

Both Jones's and Harriott's reincarnations give rise to the idea of a plurality of selves. In Defence Sinclair explains that the 'one Real Self' is held together by a 'plurality of finite consciousnesses, a plurality of finite selves', existing 'in and through and for one Real consciousness' (DI 338). She concludes:

There are, after all, different kinds of certainty. . . . Our inner states do succeed each other at different rates of vibration . . . Our perceptions, like our passions, maintain themselves at higher and lower intensities. It is with such rapid flashes of the revolving disc, with such hurrying of the rhythm of time, with such heightening of psychic intensity that we discern Reality here and now. (DI 338)

However, the self, as Sinclair imagined it, is also unstable and precarious, as shown by multiple personality, telepathy and suggestion. Psychic life, she argues, has 'porous walls, and is continually threatened with leakage and the flooding in of many streams' (DI 335). In Sinclair's fiction, as we will see, the flow of the psyche from one character to another suggests this possibility of the permeable self.

Sinclair shared this belief with many of her contemporaries. Spurgeon writes in her analysis of mysticism in literature: 'Reality is fluidity. . . . Reality is movement' and

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<sup>54</sup> For further examples of the influence of Eastern mysticism on Sinclair, see 'The Finding of the Absolute' and 'The Mahatma's Story'.

<sup>55</sup> As I have shown elsewhere, Sinclair also embraces Jung's theories. In her Clinical Lectures, written in 1916, she concurs with his concept of sublimation as a process of sacrifice and rebirth.

'our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of many other forms of consciousness, by which we are surrounded'.<sup>56</sup> William McDougall, whom Sinclair refers to as an 'authority' in Defence, also imagines the consciousness as a flowing together of minds, a stream of networks that can join and separate. In Body and Mind (1911) he writes:

My consciousness is a stream of consciousness which has a certain unique unity; . . . [it] is not self-supporting, is not self-sufficient, is not a closed self-determining system; it is admitted that each phase of the stream does not flow wholly out of the preceding phase, and that its course cannot be explained without the assumption of influences coming upon it from without. What then are these influences? The Psychical Monist must reply—they are other consciousnesses. How then about the process by which other consciousnesses, the other streams of consciousness, influence my stream of consciousness?<sup>57</sup>

Myers, another influence on Sinclair, describes this phenomenon as 'psychical invasion'.<sup>58</sup> He suggests that an agent, through some dissociated element of his personality, creates in the percipient's surroundings a 'phantasmogenetic centre' so as to 'form a phantasmal picture which represents the spirit as going through some dream-like action in a given place.'<sup>59</sup> In 1913 Henri Bergson declared on assuming his presidency of the SPR:

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<sup>56</sup> Spurgeon, Mysticism 153, 157.

<sup>57</sup> William McDougall, Body and Mind: A History and a Defense of Animism (1911. London: Methuen, 1928) 162-63. Sinclair's reading of McDougall may have contributed towards her coinage of 'stream of consciousness' as a literary technique in her review of Dorothy Richardson's novels in 1918. For other possible influences (she makes no mention of the influence of McDougall), see Diane F. Gillespie, 'May Sinclair and the Stream of Consciousness: Metaphors and Metaphysics,' English Literature in Transition 1880-1920 21 (1978): 134-42.

<sup>58</sup> F. W. H. Myers, Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death, vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, 1903) 265.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

It would be monstrous and inexplicable that we should be only what we appear to be, nothing but ourselves, whole and complete in ourselves, separated, isolated, circumscribed by our bodies, our consciousness, our birth, and our death. We become possible and probable only on the conditions that we project beyond ourselves on every side, and that we stretch in every direction throughout time and space.<sup>60</sup>

Bergson's conception of a self that is *not* 'whole and complete' in itself, that it projects beyond itself 'on every side' resonates with the 'selves' in Sinclair's stories. She believes that reincarnation is part of the porosity of self, and accepts the possibility 'that individuality is only one stage, and that not the highest and most important stage, in the life process of the self.' The individual might 'have to die [so] that the self might live' (DI 335). While Sinclair fears the herd-like effect of mass movements, doctrines and dogmas that tend to stamp out the individual, as described in The Tree of Heaven, she nevertheless accepts the ceasing of mortal personality both by the eternal potential of a greater self of which it might be merely a part, and by the overarching Absolute Reality in which all selves have their origins. Other examples of this are seen in 'Where Their Fire is Not Quenched,' 'Heaven' and 'The Finding of the Absolute' where flux-bound individuals are subsidiary to the imperative of the Absolute.

Therefore, in her fiction Sinclair attempts to show grounds for 'supposing that the Self is something over and above its own experience, its own memories, and its own organism' (DI 317). Crucially for Sinclair, real life exists only in annihilating moments of perfection, brought on by intense danger, an intense recollection, or through a glimpse of an object and, at the same time, that such moments could never be

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<sup>60</sup> Henri Bergson, 'Presidential Address. Delivered on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1913,' trans. H. Wildon Carr. Proceedings for the Society for Psychical Research 27 (1914-15): 157-175. See Waugh, Revolutions of the Word 48-9 for the appeal of Bergson on Modern writers.

summoned at will.<sup>61</sup> She ends Defence with a plea for such moments of ‘heightened psychic intensity’:

No reasoning allows or accounts for these moments. But lovers and poets and painters and musicians and mystics and heroes know them: moments when eternal Beauty is seized travelling through time; moments when things we have seen all our lives without truly seeing them, the flowers in the garden, the trees in the field, the hawthorn on the hillside, change to us in an instant of time, and show the secret and imperishable life they harbour; moments when the human creature we have known all our life without truly knowing it, reveals its incredible godhead; moments of danger that are moments of sure and perfect happiness, because then the adorable Reality gives itself to our very sight and touch.

There is no arguing against certainties like these. (DI 338-39)

Some of the ideas given above are traced in Sinclair’s examination of the Brontë sisters, in particular Emily Brontë whom Sinclair believed to be a mystic, possessing the ‘ultimate vision’ (TB 170). Sinclair reflects on the impact the Gondal game had on Emily Brontë, suggesting that this ‘mysterious game of make-believe’ ‘haunted’ her (TB 193, 195). She writes that the Gondal cycle of poems:

trail an epic splendour, they bear the whole *phantasmagoria of ancestral and racial memories*, of ‘*old, unhappy, far-off things* and battles long ago’. These songs and ballads . . . are the voice of an enchanted spirit, recalling the long roll of its *secular existences*; in whom nothing lives but *that mysterious, resurgent memory* (TB 195; italics added)

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<sup>61</sup> Virginia Woolf describes similar moments of being and explains that ‘it will not stand argument’ that such moments occur ‘without a reason’. See Virginia Woolf, Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings, ed. and introd. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Triad, 1982) 142.

The idea of ‘ancestral and racial memories’ echoing down the ‘long roll of . . . secular existences’ and ‘resurgent memory’ is another contemporary viewpoint.<sup>62</sup> Sinclair returns to this in Defence, explaining that ‘our ancestral and racial territory’ is the place of ‘our forgotten and yet undying past’ (DI 258). The language employed in Sinclair’s extract given above closely follows that of Freud’s in his essay ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’ (1908[1907]): ‘myths . . . are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity’.<sup>63</sup> In addition, this theory anticipates McDougall’s Body and Mind. Here, McDougall airs his view that there is no such thing as an individual mind, only a collective consciousness, and that this has been passed down the ages. At the centre of McDougall’s argument is the belief that ‘manifestations of life and mind which distinguish the living man from the corpse and from inorganic bodies are due to the operation within him of something which is of a nature different from that of the body, an animating principle generally, but not necessarily or always, conceived as an immaterial and individual being or soul.’<sup>64</sup> He concludes that all conscious thinking is ‘conditioned and governed by psychical dispositions . . . built up in the course of the experience of the race.’<sup>65</sup> It is clear from Sinclair’s extract quoted above that she finds a strong resonance in Emily Brontë’s writing of an inherited, collective consciousness: a ‘phantasmagoria of ancestral and racial memories’.

Similarly, in his essay ‘The “Uncanny” ’ (1919) Freud offers an explanation of uncanny phenomena whereby ‘the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but

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<sup>62</sup> This also refers to Underhill’s definition of mysticism, mentioned previously, as being at once temporal and timeless.

<sup>63</sup> Freud, ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’ 152; original italics. Here, Freud made his first real attempt in offering a psychoanalytic perspective on aesthetics, raising the question of what there is in a work of literature that elicits pleasure in the reader.

<sup>64</sup> McDougall, Body and Mind viii.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 379.

something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression . . . something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light'.<sup>66</sup> To support this hypothesis, Freud traces the most prominent and popular uncanny themes back to infantile sources. He establishes a connection between the eerie suspicion of having a double and the instinctual compulsion to repeat; the terrifying idea of being buried alive and the infantile fantasy of intra-uterine existence; the horrifying prospect of the dead returning to life and a primitive belief in animism. Freud summarises the kinds of phenomena that produce uncanny effects by explaining that they appear both in literature and in life: 'animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny'.<sup>67</sup>

Freud's essay on the uncanny concludes by arguing 'an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed'.<sup>68</sup> That is, uncanny experiences arise from sources in the repressed consciousness whose arousal may be attributed to memories of individual or racial prehistory, to the reliving of eroticism or animism that once animated the world of the child or of the mystic.

This introduces another class of the uncanny where a set of surmounted beliefs gains a measure of validation in either experienced or depicted reality. In response to

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<sup>66</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', 1919, SE 17, 219-56. 241. For a deconstructive reading of Freud's essay 'The "Uncanny"' which describes the etymological and philological complexities of the work and points out Freud's possession by the uncanny themes and motifs he discloses, see Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* ('The Uncanny'),' trans. Robert Denomé, New Literary History 7 (Spring 1976): 525-48.

<sup>67</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' 243.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 249.

that which provokes confirmation of long discarded beliefs in phenomena such as the omnipotence of thoughts, the prompt fulfilment of wishes, or the potential re/animation of lifeless matter, a feeling of uncanniness is aroused. Freud writes in 'The "Uncanny"': 'we have *surmounted* these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us, ready to seize upon any confirmation'.<sup>69</sup> That is, what has been repressed is a belief in the reality of a particular idealised content rather than the particular idealised content itself. Yet Freud notes that, in the former case, to use the term 'repression' is to extend it 'beyond its legitimate meaning':

It would be more correct to take into account a psychological distinction which can be detected here, and to say that the animistic beliefs of civilized people are in a state of having been (to a greater or lesser extent) *surmounted*. . . . Our conclusion could then be stated thus: an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.<sup>70</sup>

The use of the *doppelgänger* and the alter ego in ghost stories, which Sinclair frequently employs, can be interpreted as a distinct embodiment of a primitive belief in the existence of a double, a psychological invention which provides infants with insurance against the destruction of the ego, but which later 'reverses its aspect' and functions as an oppressive censor of the self.<sup>71</sup> If this is correct, Freud writes, the ability of these fictional doubles to engender in audiences a sense of uncanniness depends on their ability to induce a conflict of judgement regarding the nature of the primitive beliefs they embody.

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<sup>69</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny" ' 247.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 249.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 235.

According to Freud, writers of fiction retain the power to solicit the uncanny which most people possess only as children and lose in the process of maturity, or which saints and prophets once possessed but have long since lost to the exorcisms of history. The narrator of Freud's 'The "Uncanny"' depicts a struggle for mastery over death: he desires to possess the artist's control over 'the uncanny in life' and particularly in human nature's deeply ambivalent relation to death.<sup>72</sup>

Sinclair, as a literary artist, adapts the Freudian narrative to represent the *woman's* relationship to death and *her* 'mastery' of the uncanny. She rewrites Freud's representation of the masculine desire either to master death or to master the uncanny feminine in life. Sinclair's interpretation of Emily Brontë's mysticism, as I have shown, clearly reveals this desire for mastery. Similarly, the narrator of Sinclair's tales employs 'poetic licence and the privileges enjoyed by story-writers in evoking or in excluding an uncanny feeling'.<sup>73</sup> Sinclair then, as a female writer, adapts the Freudian model to demonstrate her artistic control or mastery to draw attention to the themes that fascinated her in all her writing: repression, female sexuality, and development, offering the uncanny as a means by which the divided self can be transformed.

### III. The Gender of New Mysticism

The role of women in the revival of mysticism at the turn of the twentieth century is significant. Other early modernist women writers exploring mysticism in terms of their gender and their own experiences include Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson. What, then, did this new mysticism have to offer women? Raitt addresses this question in relation to Woolf and Sackville-West,

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<sup>72</sup> 'Hoffman is the unrivalled master of the uncanny.' Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' 233-34.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 251.

arguing that for them 'mysticism seems to trouble, rather than to guarantee, gender'.<sup>74</sup> Grace Jantzen, in her analysis of Christian mysticism, argues that implicit in any discussion of mysticism is the 'agenda of power', thereby raising questions of 'defining or delimiting authority.'<sup>75</sup> She elaborates: 'Those who are in control are the ones who define what shall count as genuine and what shall count as deviant. . . . [T]he power involved in the social construction of mysticism has consistently been a gendered power.'<sup>76</sup>

Thus, uncanny fiction is a subtle tool for feminist expression, deconstructing patriarchal paradigms of power.<sup>77</sup> For Sinclair, the mystical experience is the search for an autonomous female voice, an uncovering of a realm of female experience, and an expression of the female body. Her uncanny stories serve as a forum for 'deviant' subjects, addressing cultural issues such as female desire, sexuality, and gender roles. Therefore, Sinclair's uncanny fiction illustrates the problematic construction of femininity during her period of interest between 1910 and circa 1923.

This explains why, for Sinclair, the new mysticism is transforming, and outward looking as opposed to the old mysticism which was inward in perspective and negated the importance of the body. This forms the basis of Sinclair's argument with the mysticism implicated with the saints: they failed to acknowledge their physical desires, and merely transferred them. Sinclair refers to Underhill who notes in Mysticism that

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<sup>74</sup> Suzanne Raitt, ' "The Girl Beside Me": V. Sackville-West and the Mystics.' Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 117-145. 119.

<sup>75</sup> Grace M. Jantzen, Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 326-7.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar's edited volume of feminist interpretations on American women's ghost stories: Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women (Knoxville: Tennessee P, 1991). Also, Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White suggest that 'rigid generic expectations are challenged by the fantastic.' See Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White, eds. Introduction. Writing and Fantasy (London: Longman, 1999) 6.

‘nerves and organs . . . suffer under a stress’ if not adapted. ‘It is at least permissible to look on the strange “psychological” state common amongst the mystics as just such a rebellion on the part of a normal nervous and vascular system against the exigencies of a way of life to which it has not yet adjusted’.<sup>78</sup> Underhill ‘does not blink the patent, and indeed blatant, fact of “mystical ill-health” ’ (DI 257). In a similar fashion, Sinclair refers to ‘the saints and mystics of the Salpêtrière’ who provide ‘in a supreme degree all the conditions of the hysterical neurosis; [their] repressions are the classical repressions; [their] results the classical results’, and therefore claims that ‘the history of Mysticism is the history of neurosis’ (DI 252). For Sinclair the form of mysticism practised by saints fails because they merely ‘transfer’ their libido instead of transforming it, resulting in an imperfect or incomplete sublimation.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, this clarifies Sinclair’s definition of true and false mysticism, between genuine contemplation and the frustrated language of hysteria. For Sinclair, many forms of mysticism, particularly those in the West, have failed simply because they were not sublimated enough. She writes that Christian mystics had never ‘quite perfected the technique’ of their mysticism and seldom achieved a ‘perfect and safe attachment’ because they had not learnt how to ‘sublimate their libidos’ (DI 270). Imperfectly sublimated libidos are ‘morbid and unbalanced’ (DI 256), full of ‘perverse amorousness’ or, by recoil, full of self-torture. They have revelled in ‘the most horrible tangle of material and carnal imagery’ (DI 275). Sinclair believes that ‘the disease of asceticism’ (DI 274), or ascetic mysticism, fails as it can only offer a cure which attempts to achieve by repression what can in fact only be achieved by sublimation. The ascetic seeks to stamp out the will-to-live in its physical form; but this takes its revenge in the form of dreadful phantasies, hallucinations and dreams—‘the psychic backsliding

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<sup>78</sup> Underhill, Mysticism 73-4.

<sup>79</sup> See Sinclair, Defence 257.

and spiritual torment of the Christian mystic' (DI 272). This is a mysticism of 'sick souls' and Sinclair offers in its place a 'robust and joyous Mysticism, reconciled to the world' (DI 274). This reconciliation is achieved through a sublimation with the

Absolute Spirit:

there is a pure and beautiful Mysticism that springs from the vision or the sense of the 'Oneness' of all things in God. It knows nothing of passion's disturbance and its strain. Its saints are poets and its counterpart in Philosophy is Spiritual Monism. (DI xv-xvi)

Sinclair contrasts the certainty of spiritual instinct with the certainty of reason, claiming that the highest degree of certainty requires the mutual corroboration of both. The difficulty is how to maintain the distinction. She argues that in all great and intense experiences—in love, and in facing death—there is 'the shock of contact with reality' (DI 269). Her view is a similar one to that held by Underhill. In Mysticism she writes:

Both mysticism and hysteria have to do with the domination of consciousness by one fixed and intense idea or intuition, which rules the life and is able to produce amazing physical and psychical results. . . . [T]he mono-ideism of the mystic is rational, whilst that of the hysteric patient is invariably irrational.<sup>80</sup>

For Underhill, the difference between mysticism and hysteria is a matter of reason. For Sinclair, the chance of self-realisation is offered through the sublimative powers of mysticism.

William James defines mysticism in gendered terms in his essay 'What Psychical Research Has Accomplished' (1897). 'Something escapes the best of us. . . . The scientific-academic mind and the feminine-mystical mind shy away from each

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<sup>80</sup> Underhill, Mysticism 72.

other's facts, just as they fly away from each other's temper and spirit'.<sup>81</sup> The juxtaposition of words at play here—scientific versus feminine; academic versus mystical—suggests that the first word of each pair carries gravitas and respect. Although he does not label the scientific mind specifically as 'masculine', this is his insinuation; it is what is not feminine. James continues his argument by saying that he prefers to let the critical and analytical perspective take priority when it comes to investigating and theorising about any 'wild facts' since 'to pass from mystical to scientific speculations is like passing from *lunacy to sanity*'.<sup>82</sup> James's remarks suggest that there is a strict dichotomy between the controlled, scientific work of the academic men of psychical research (such as those involved with advances in psychology and the SPR) and the more ephemeral studies in mysticism. The two, James argues, differ in 'temper and spirit' and a methodology needs to be developed in order to 'pay attention to facts of the sort dear to mystics, while reflecting upon them in academic-scientific ways'.<sup>83</sup> For James, the 'feminine-mystical mind' is the other, thereby implying that the realm of mysticism is fluid, uncontrollable, unscientific and non-logical: it does not belong to the patriarchal symbolic order.

Later, Jacques Lacan, like James, also refers to mystic feeling as essentially feminine. In his seminar 'God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman' Lacan explains his view that the achievement of subjectivity comes about by entry into language, coded as masculine.<sup>84</sup> He suggests that the essence of female mysticism is a movement beyond

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<sup>81</sup> William James, 'What Psychical Research Has Accomplished,' 1897. The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979) 222-241. 224.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.; italics added.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Sinclair states she 'abhors William James's way of thinking and adores his way of writing.' Sinclair, Defence vii.

<sup>84</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman. A Love Letter,' trans. Jacqueline Rose. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne (London: Macmillan, 1982) 137-48.

the possibility of meaning and the everyday: 'There is a *jouissance*, since we are dealing with *jouissance*, a *jouissance* of the body which is, if the expression be allowed, *beyond the phallus*'.<sup>85</sup> Lacan believes that women are associated with an excess of ecstasy which he would like to understand, and turns to mystics in order to do so. He writes of St Theresa: 'you only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming, there is no doubt about it. And what is her *jouissance*, her *coming* from? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that they are experiencing it but know nothing about it.'<sup>86</sup> Thus, Lacan too links mysticism, female sexuality and ignorance on the one hand, and masculinity, rationality, and the scientific gaze on the other.

Although for Sinclair mysticism is part of the quotidian, Raitt calls Sinclair a 'proto-Lacanian' in her formulation of sublimation and explains that for Sinclair 'sublimation works on women's sexual energy to make them into mystics.'<sup>87</sup> Therefore, Sinclair embraces women's difference, making it a positive asset. Sublimation offers women an escape from hysteria and repression, sexual and otherwise, giving women a chance of self-realisation. Sinclair views sublimative techniques through the Jungian concepts of sacrifice and rebirth: by the processes of sublimation the individual 'asserts himself against the backward pull of the instincts that tend to merge him with the race' (DI 293). This was a deeply personal and important concept for Sinclair and her voice can be heard through Dorothy's in The Tree of Heaven at the point where Dorothy expresses her fear of becoming part of the vortex:

These people lived in a moral vortex; they whirled round and round with each other; they were powerless to resist the swirl. Not one of them had any other

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<sup>85</sup> Lacan, 'God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman. A Love Letter' 145.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>87</sup> Raitt, May Sinclair 238.

care than to love and to make love after the manner of the Vortex. This was their honour, not to be left out of it, not to be left out of the vortex, but to be carried away, to be sucked in, and whirl round and round with each other and the rest.

(TH 158)

To be part of this world is to sacrifice the self, reflecting the fear of other collective movements in the novel such as boarding school, artist communes and even, it is suggested, war. Initially, Michael Harrison is fearful of the communal, patriotic spirit he will be engaged in once he signs up: 'the thing that threatened him had not been the War but [the] collective war-spirit, clamouring for his private soul' (TH 376).<sup>88</sup> However, as I examined earlier, Michael realises an epiphany on the battlefield when he experiences ecstasy at the point of contact with reality.

Sinclair's interest in mystical writing therefore stems from its transformative, or sublimative, potential which allows for escape from the powerless whirl of everyday life. As I have examined, the idea of sexual anxiety pervades both Sinclair's own life and that of her female protagonists. In her uncanny stories, Sinclair offers very repressive sexual images for women in the everyday, symbolic world and looks for ways of expressing their inner lives through an alternative sphere or arena, such as that brought about by the mystical experience.

On the one hand Sinclair endorses both the New Woman's clarion call for sexual licence for women and her fellow feminists' demands for political liberation. Yet, on the other hand, she finds the idea of a woman completely set free from sexual bonds a morally corrupting and repugnant image. In her article 'A Defence of Men' (1912), she argues not for *more* licence for *women* to enable them to become as free as men, but for greater moral control for *men*. Although she believes that 'the two sexes [must] hang

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<sup>88</sup> Mumford writes on the dissociation between the individual and the collective in The Tree of Heaven. See Mumford, 'May Sinclair's The Tree of Heaven' 168-83.

together', equality will not be achieved by women emulating a male model: 'there cannot be a low standard of sexual morality on man's part without some corresponding, if more secret, laxity on woman's.'<sup>89</sup> Instead, Sinclair believes that 'equality of the sexes' lies in the 'equality of elevation' for '[w]oman is labouring at man's deliverance through her own.'<sup>90</sup> For Sinclair, then, women preserve moral and spiritual values and men could learn much from the repressive bonds they place on them. Licence at any level, at any cost, was anathema to her. While Sinclair offers a rational analysis of women's psychological handicaps in the early twentieth century on the one hand, she simultaneously argues for her female protagonists to rise above these deficits on the other.

Sinclair's women experience mystical insight as life-affirming; sublimation allows them to recover from their experiences of loss in order to appreciate a more fulfilled, enhanced life. Sinclair's work on Emily Brontë as a mystical poet offers a useful paradigm in that it highlights all that she set out to achieve in her own use of mysticism as a transforming experience for her female protagonists. Sinclair refers to one of Brontë's Gondal poems, 'The Prisoner', as replicating a 'vision of the transcendent spirit' (TB 178). Sinclair writes: 'The vision is of the woman captive, "confined in triple walls", the "guest darkly lodged", the "chainless soul", that defies its conqueror, its gaoler, and the spectator of its agony' (TB 178). She is most attracted to the mystical quality of the poem at the point where the heroine speaks of her wish for death and her desire to be free of the chains of life:

Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals;

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<sup>89</sup> Sinclair, 'A Defence of Men,' *English Review* 11 (July 1912): 556-66. 562.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 565. Although Sinclair did not condone sexual licence she was not a sentimentalist and rejected outright puritanism. Women were not entirely blame-free in the inequality between the sexes: she accused the Victorian woman of being '[p]rone to excess and trained to repression' and who ' "took it out" in orgies of emotion'. See Sinclair, 'A Defence of Men' 562.

My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:

Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,

Measuring the gulf, it stoops and dares the final bound. (Qtd. in TB 179)

For Sinclair, the poem at this point signifies the ‘language of a mystic, of a mystic who has passed beyond contemplation; who has known or imagined ecstasy’ (TB 179).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain that Brontë’s mysticism ‘is more on the loss rather than on the pursuit of power.’<sup>91</sup> Brontë captures the spirit of negation of her heroine by depicting her in a series of inversions: unseen/revealed; sense gone/essence feels; on the wing/in the harbour; stoops/bounds—all of which evoke a sense of psychic freedom from the restraint of repression. Whereas in the verse above Sinclair notes that the heroine’s joy was unmistakable, she remarks that in the subsequent verse ‘unmistakable, too, is the horror of return’ (TB 179):

Oh! Dreadful is the check—intense the agony—

When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;

When the pulse begins to throb, the brain begins to think again;

The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain. (Qtd. in TB 179)

Here, Brontë’s heroine describes her longing to be free of the restraints of the physical senses. In this poem, Brontë speaks from her inner life or, in psychoanalytic terms, her own internal world rather than the make-believe world of Gondaland. The verses imply that a profound truth is being voiced: Brontë too feels that she is a prisoner, not in gaol but in her own mind and body. The implication held in ‘the flesh to feel the chain’ is that the flesh *is* chained; that life itself is the unwelcome dawn intruder and death is the

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<sup>91</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 255.

saviour. As seen elsewhere in Brontë's writing, the death urge, or the Freudian thanatos, finds a creative outlet here.<sup>92</sup>

## Part Two: Texts

### IV. 'The Everlasting Glamour of the Uncanny': Crossing the Boundaries of the Self

On the preparation of her tales for publication in 1923, Sinclair offers the following thematic milieu of Uncanny Stories:

Seven stories of the supernatural happenings in this world, the other world beyond death and the borderland between. Beginning with Where Their Fire is Not Quenched . . . ; The Finding of the Absolute; The Flaw in the Crystal (a tale of the dangerous possibilities of psychic healing, invasion of a personality by the insane deliverance . . . [sic]<sup>93</sup>

However, Sinclair had already started to work on these supernatural tales in 1910. In a workbook, dated 7 August 1910, she gives a plan for a short story to be called 'The Haunted House (Yorks.)'.<sup>94</sup> It is probable that this is an early version of the 'The Intercessor', a story Raitt suggests was born out of her fascination with Emily Brontë.<sup>95</sup> Also in this workbook is a long list of titles for other short stories that were unwritten, unpublished or prototypes of later stories, including one called 'Remorse (the Ghost-

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<sup>92</sup> Freud postulates that the death drive is more fundamental and life is a compromise between the two until the latter prevails. He offers 'eros-thanatos' as a new definition for the life instinct versus the death drive. See Freud, Civilisation and Its Discontents, 1930 [1929], SE 21, 118-22.

<sup>93</sup> Sinclair, workbook 19, box 39, UP, [1922/1923?].

<sup>94</sup> Sinclair, workbook 28, box 40, UP.

<sup>95</sup> Raitt traces the 'debts' of 'The Intercessor' to Emily Brontë and examines 'the troubling remote insistence of the dead Emily Brontë' on Sinclair. 'The Intercessor' is Sinclair's most thoroughly examined ghost story. See, for example, Raitt, May Sinclair 131-35; and Kinnamon, 'May Sinclair's Fiction of the Supernatural' 34-48.

Wife)'.<sup>96</sup> She wrote to Annie Fields that she was 'busy writing short stories—stories of all queer lengths and queer subjects; "spooky" ones, some of them. I like doing them!'<sup>97</sup> When she collated her 'spooky stories' in 1923 it was four years after the publication of Freud's essay 'The "Uncanny" '. Using the richly Freudian-sounding title for her volume Uncanny Stories the implication is overt.

Here lies a literary conundrum: how much of the content of her stories was in debt to Freudian theory, or did the use of 'uncanny' gain its Freudian resonance as the general public were beginning to assimilate and become familiar with popularised readings of Freud? Rebeccah Kinnamon writes that Sinclair's 'tales are the result of her conscious efforts to propagate the discoveries of modern psychology'.<sup>98</sup> I argue that, although Sinclair was an early reader of Freud (reading his work in the original German), the psychoanalytical 'uncanny' overtones are a slightly later gloss—a less significant interpretation than they may initially seem—since Sinclair had already labelled her supernatural stories as 'uncanny' in a pre-Freudian context in 1912: 'The "Flaw in the Crystal" . . . is to be published in America in the autumn as a tiny book, and later perhaps to be included in a volume of *uncanny tales*. I want to write some more of these; they fascinate me: but I think they should be kept to themselves in their own atmospheres'.<sup>99</sup> However, I believe it may well have been a conscious decision on Sinclair's part to give her collection of stories a title signalling a potential Freudian

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<sup>96</sup> Sinclair, workbook 28, box 40, UP.

<sup>97</sup> Sinclair, letter to Annie Fields, 9 Dec. 1910, fo. 27, box 1, UP.

<sup>98</sup> Rebeccah Kinnamon, 'May Sinclair's Fiction of the Supernatural,' Ph.D. thesis, Duke U, 1974, 127.

<sup>99</sup> May Sinclair, letter to Annie Fields, 16 July 1912, fo. 27, box 1, UP. Italics added. In one of her workbooks Sinclair lists the titles of short stories to be included in Uncanny Tales I: 'The Intercessor', 'The Flaw in the Crystal', 'The Wife', 'Where Their Fire is Not Quenched', 'Heaven', 'The Villa Désirée', 'Ghosts', 'The Mother', 'Possession', 'The Token', 'The Victim', 'Diary of Teresa', 'The Mahatma's Story', 'Jones's Karma'. Workbook 33, box 40, UP.

interpretation although Sinclair had, more than ten years previously, been aware of the special 'atmosphere' her stories were to impart.

In Sinclair's introduction to a collection of short stories published in 1914 she elaborates on this special atmosphere: she explains that 'certain psychological happenings, certain emotions and impressions, certain complexities [are] far more essential than the material plot.' She discusses her technique of 'oblique narrative':

It is difficult because of its severe and embarrassing limitations. But its defects become its qualities where certain limitations happen to be the essence of the desired effect; where motives are dubious and obscure; where the interest of the entire performance lies in *how* certain things and certain people appeared to the teller of the tale. The way he makes it out, his surmises, his doubts, his divinations, his interferences, which would be criminal in direct narration, are lawful and expedient here; they are all part of the game. Hence the eternal fascination of the method of those who love to deal in half-lights and obscurities, in things insubstantial, intricate, and ill-defined.<sup>100</sup>

In 1923, after the publication of her uncanny stories, Sinclair responded to three questions put to her in a 'Christmas Symposium on Dreams, Ghosts and Fairies'. Again she reflects on the 'atmosphere' that such stories convey:

1. My 'attitude' towards ghost-stories is one of enthralling interest and admiration if they are well-told. I regard the ghost-story as a perfectly legitimate form of art and at the same time as the most difficult. Ghosts have their own atmospheres and their own reality, they also have their setting in the everyday reality we know; the story-teller is handling two realities at the same time; he is working

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<sup>100</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *The Judgement of Eve and Other Stories* (London: Hutchinson, 1914) xi-xii. Spurgeon also explains mysticism as 'a temper . . . an atmosphere'. See Spurgeon, *Mysticism* 2.

- on two planes, in two atmospheres, and must fail if he lets one do violence to the other.
2. I am not a judge of 'popularity,' but I should say, off-hand, that an interest in ghost stories has always existed, and it is neither a sign of morbidity, nor of 'increased belief in spiritual phenomena.' The ghost-lover is on the look-out for his own special thrill which is, or may be, independent of any belief in the supernatural.
  3. I think Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw' the most perfect and the most convincing ghost-story I have ever read.<sup>101</sup>

With reference to the first point on ghost stories, Sinclair emphasises the responsibility of the narrator to handle different forms of 'realities' or dimensions. She was intrigued by the idea of a 'fourth dimension': her continuing fascination with it is shown in her workbooks. In one, she sketches numerous diagrams to define linear versus cubic time; in another, she toys with the idea of calling one of her philosophical books The Fourth Dimension.<sup>102</sup> The coincidence of Sinclair's 'two realities' manifests as space-time in her short stories. In 'The Finding of the Absolute', for example, the philosopher explains to Mr Spalding:

"You will see . . . for yourself if you will come with me into the state of three dimensional time. . . . That . . . is time which is not linear succession, time which has turned on itself twice to take up the past and future into its present. For as the point is repeated to form the linear time of past, present, future. And as the

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<sup>101</sup> Sinclair, contributor to 'Christmas Symposium on Dreams, Ghosts and Fairies,' Bookman (Dec. 1923): 142-9. Previously, Sinclair had written to Charlotte Mew admitting that Henry James 'has influenced me considerably, and I'm not a bit ashamed of it. He is a good master, if you're strong enough not to be totally swamped by him.' Sinclair, letter to Mew, 22 Apr. 1915, NYPL.

<sup>102</sup> See workbook 29, box 40 and workbook 35, box 41, UP. Scarborough also notes: 'The Fourth Dimension is another motif that seems to interest the writers of recent ghostly tales.' Scarborough, Supernatural 259.

one-dimensional line turns at right angles to itself to form the two-dimensional plane, so linear or one-dimensional time turns on itself to form two-dimensional or plane time, the past-present, or present-future. And as the plane turns on itself to form the cube, so past-present and present-future double back to meet each other and form cubic time, or past-present-future all together.” (US 243-44)

Suspension of spatial-linear boundaries is given in various places throughout Sinclair’s work. They are normally associated with a revelation, a state of being suggesting alterity, or coming into direct contact with reality. The ghost is the ultimate example of disruption to spatial-linear boundaries.

In an article written in 1912 Sinclair describes the background to writing ‘The Flaw in the Crystal’.<sup>103</sup> She explains that it ‘has a charm of its own, more fascinating than the form’ she has given it since her subject has ‘the everlasting glamour of uncanny’.<sup>104</sup> Sinclair wonders whether ‘such happenings . . . come under the head of psycho-therapeutics, Christian Science, the higher Thought, or the New Mysticism’, but nonetheless ‘they presuppose a pull upon some utterly secret and mysterious and immaterial power, some way of communication between persons below or above the level of their ordinary consciousness.’<sup>105</sup> She describes that the doctor would explain Agatha Verrall’s healing as an effect of auto-suggestion, and continues: ‘one of the most remarkable healers’ that she had ever met was a Daleswoman who viewed herself as ‘the humble vehicle of a tremendous and divine power.’ She also describes the phenomenon of ‘transference of mental and bodily states’ experienced by ‘a tall, strapping farmer of the Dales’, attesting that his psychic powers brought him

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<sup>103</sup> First published in 1912 in English Review and as a novella in America; later collated in Uncanny Stories.

<sup>104</sup> Sinclair, ‘Concerning My Book,’ New York Times Review of Books 3 Nov. 1912, lit. sec.: 1.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

'continuous and indestructible blessedness and joy.' Sinclair writes: 'The experiences of other persons soak in and out of him as if he were a sponge.'<sup>106</sup>

Sinclair's uncanny stories refer specifically to cultural configurations of oppression, sexuality and resistance. A comprehensive examination of the woman's position in these stories has been neglected. There is a real sense of struggle for mastery between Sinclair's male and female protagonists, typically played out in the sexual arena. The female protagonist falls into one of two roles: she is either in the position of power to make men 'see' or 'realise' the truth through her healing, mystical power, or else she herself undergoes a healing, transformative process which allows her to transcend the reality that previously was her lot.

Many of Sinclair's short stories play out the preoccupation with the Freudian double. In 'The Mahatma's Story' the Mahatma tells one tale 'about a man . . . who could be in two places at once' (I 12), and another complicated by two sets of couples who swap partners, trade identities, and 'exchange memories' (I 22). Many of the stories present an erotic triangle; for example, 'The Intercessor', 'The Flaw in the Crystal' and 'Villa Désirée'. Often a male protagonist has to choose either between his mother or a lover ('Heaven' and 'If the Dead Knew'), or between two women who are of mirroring types: the fair versus the dark; the virginal versus the sensual ('Heaven' and 'The Nature of the Evidence').

Psychic experiences in Sinclair's stories are frequently related to sexual passion or guilt. In 'The Nature of the Evidence', Edward Marston is presented with two choices: the 'overpowering beauty' of his second wife, Pauline, who is described as a worldly woman with a strong sexual libido, and the child-like, innocent Rosamund whose reappearance is a 'heavenly, discarnate thing' (US 158). Rosamund returns to

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<sup>106</sup> Sinclair, 'Concerning My Book' 1. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf uses a similar image to describe the transference of other people's emotions to Mrs Ramsay: 'She often felt that she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions.' Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927. London: Hogarth, 1943) 54.

occupy the narrative space as both a psychological and a psychic spectre; she acts as a psychic censor over Marston's choice of second wife. As the two women contend for their right in the marriage bed, there is a scene of orgiastic carnival:

First something had come swinging smack across her face. A thick, heavy rope of woman's hair. It had waked her. Then she had put out her hands and felt the body. A woman's body, soft and horrible; her fingers had sunk in the shallow breasts. Then she had screamed and jumped. (US 155)

As illustrated in figure 5, Marston comes to look upon Pauline's earthly body as 'a worm, like a beast' (US 158) in contrast with Rosamund's incorporeality which he experiences as 'passion at all points of being', the 'supreme moment' and 'ecstasy' (US 159).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Sinclair's friend, Jean de Bosschère, illustrated both Uncanny Stories and The Intercessor and Other Stories. Letters in the May Sinclair archive show that this was a collaborative enterprise, with Sinclair offering detailed suggestions and directly influencing the evolution of the illustrations. She made the final selection of illustrations, out of a vast quantity, to be published in her two collections of uncanny stories.



Fig. 5. 'Pauline's naked body . . . drew itself after him, like a worm, like a beast, along the floor'.

In 'The Token' there is another uncanny return of the wife as a phantasm. Cicely Dunbar's marriage is repressive and she is constantly denied acknowledgement of love from her husband. After her death she returns and is set upon extracting a signal or token from Donald of his feelings for her. However, Cicely is a voiceless, or aphasic, ghost. Helen, Donald's sister, inherits her 'uncanny gift', or—as Donald refers to it—'hysterical fancy', from her mother and is able to detect Cicely's phantasm. Through unspoken communication or telepathy, Helen acts as an intermediary to interpret and impart Cicely's message: 'I knew now what it wanted. It was trying to make itself seen

by him. To make itself felt, and it was in anguish at finding that it could not. It knew then that I had seen it, and the idea had come to it that it could make use of me to get through to him' (US 52). There is a flow of feeling, idea, will, intention between the two women. Similarly, in 'The Victim', a phantasm tells Steven Acroyd at the very end of the tale that Dorsy 'knew all the time' what Steven had done (US 222), suggesting that she has a form of psychic communication or channel open to Steven. Both cases are representations of the psychoanalytic concept of thought transference in Sinclair's narrative and can be compared with a description of transference given later by Freud: 'mental processes in one person—ideas, emotional states, conative impulses—can be transferred to another person through empty spaces without employing the familiar methods of communication by means of words and signs'.<sup>108</sup>

In The Tree of Heaven Veronica is also able to experience the life of others. Through her psychic powers she demonstrates a porosity or fluidity of her boundaries:

It was as if in her the walls that divide every soul from every other soul were made of some thin and porous stuff that let things through. And in this life of yours, for the moments that she shared it, she lived intensely, with uncanny delight and pain that were her own and not her own. (TH 263-4)

Veronica is vividly aware of the moment of her husband's death. She is in the garden, Sinclair's typical separate, 'other' sphere for women, listening to the striking of the clock: 'then, almost on the stroke, her rush of pure, mysterious happiness. . . . [H]er happiness had come . . . not out of herself or out of her thoughts, but mysteriously and from somewhere a long way off' (TH 370). As the vision of Nicholas's death is played before her eyes, 'everything was still; her body and her soul were still; her heart was

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<sup>108</sup> See Freud, 'Dreams and Occultism.' New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, 1933 [1932], SE 22, 31-56. 39.

still' (TH 371). Although temporal time is marked it is suspended; it is during an empty space or void, representing timelessness, that Veronica experiences heightened reality.

I have already examined the contemporary background to Sinclair's discussion of the porosity of the self and her hypothesis that the self 'takes on the experiences of other selves' (DI 335). Kristeva also describes the crossing of psychic boundaries and finds similarities in the relationship between lovers and the relationship the mystic has for the other whereby 'boundaries of the self' are crossed and recrossed; the mystic and the lover make and lose and remake their identities. Kristeva writes: '[We are] subjects *in process*, ceaselessly losing our identity, destabilized by the fluctuations in our relations to the other, to whom we nevertheless remain bound by a kind of homeostasis'.<sup>109</sup> Love, Kristeva says, is '[b]oth a fear and a need of no longer being limited, held back, but going beyond. Dread of transgressing not only proprieties or taboos but also, above all, fear of crossing and desire to cross the boundaries of the self'.<sup>110</sup> In Sinclair's review of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry she too describes the similarity between mystical love and human love: 'the love of God and the soul is exceedingly like the love of man and woman.'<sup>111</sup>

A close relationship that opens a channel between couples through which the very identity of each may flow into the other is also seen in 'The Flaw in the Crystal'. Agatha feels herself and Rodney to co-exist in an 'undisturbed communion' (US 68). Between this couple there is 'the intangible, the unique relation . . . a charmed circle; or rather . . . a sphere' that keeps them 'holy'. 'She had drawn her circle around Rodney

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<sup>109</sup> Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. A. Goldhammer (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 9.

<sup>110</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 6.

<sup>111</sup> Sinclair, 'The "Gitanjali": Or Song-Offerings of Rabindranath Tagore,' *North American Review* 197 (May 1913): 659-76. 674.

and herself. Nobody could break it. They were supernaturally safe' (US 74). In Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier (1918) Margaret leads Chris Baldry 'into this quiet magic circle' and they sit together 'englobed in peace as in a crystal sphere.'<sup>112</sup> Unlike the inflexibly separate sexual relations between Donald and Cicely in 'The Token', the ego-boundaries between Agatha and Rodney, Margaret and Chris, are permeable. It is through this matrix that Agatha wishes to heal and merge with Rodney. Part of the process means she must heal others—Bella (Rodney's wife) and Harding Powell—to ensure the psychic health of her own relationship. Just seeing Agatha makes Rodney feel better. Similarly, in The Return of the Soldier, Margaret's healing powers extend to others: Jenny feels an urge to be in Margaret's vicinity in order to experience her beneficent effect. This implies fluidity in the diffuse possibility of human relationships, as opposed to the rigid and linear dictates of the patriarchal vision.

However, diffuseness in relationships in 'The Flaw in the Crystal' is not benign in all cases. Although the association between Agatha and Harding is a non-sexual one, the atmosphere between the two is heightened, suggesting a sexual tension. Agatha feels that her own 'walls of personality were wearing thin, and through them she felt [Harding] trying to get at her' (US 115). At play here is Myers' description of psychic invasion or the demand by one character for possession of another. Agatha describes how her very self feels to be permeable to Harding's invasive psyche:

She had not prepared for his clinging. It was as if, in their undivided substance, he had had knowledge of her purpose and had prepared himself to fight it. He hung on desperately; he refused to yield an inch of the ground he had taken from her. He was no longer a passive thing in that world where she had brought him.

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<sup>112</sup> Rebecca West, The Return of the Soldier (London: Daily Express Fiction Library, 1918) 145, 141.

. . . He had possessed her for three nights and for three days. She had made herself porous to him; and her sleep had always been his opportunity. (US 124)

The insidious nature of Harding's tenacity shown in this passage has both violent and sexual overtones. The force and strength with which his psyche of spirit tries to invade hers is described in terms of a violation, suggesting a sexual transgression. He 'clings' and hangs on to her, refusing to 'yield'. He becomes dominant, taking possession of her when she is at her most vulnerable during her sleep. Agatha feels drained by Harding, suggesting a transfer of energy in her powers as a medium. She is aware that Harding's strength is gained at the detriment of her own.<sup>113</sup> The struggle for mastery between Agatha and Harding enacts the Freudian tension between life and death, eros and thanatos.

That is to say, in Sinclair's work, the mystical experience is a domain of experience in which the protagonist enters a relationship with an other (typically sexual). This borderland is a place in which boundaries overlap or are confused, where differences both converge and collide. Sinclair's female protagonists are defined, limited and/or exceeded by this borderland state. The psychic conflict between Agatha and Harding is enacted in an arena that gives credence to Sinclair's idea of mysticism belonging to a borderland between conscious reality and a 'suprareality' that is governed by psychological frames of mind. This mind frame is also seen in 'If the Dead Knew'. Nurse Eden struggles with Wilfred Hollyer for psychic control over Mrs Hollyer. Nurse Eden wishes to restore Mrs Hollyer to life. She tells Wilfred: ' "She's on the edge. She's in that state when a breath would tip her one way or the other" ', and

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<sup>113</sup> Martha Banta argues that several of Henry James's novels and stories explicitly draw on the tradition of a 'vampire heritage'. The blood-sucking gothic ghoul was replaced, in the nineteenth century, by the 'vampire-like creature that takes possession of the soul of the living person. . . . The "new supernaturalism" . . . drew away strength, thoughts, and souls of others in recognizably psychological terms'. See Martha Banta, *Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1972) 89.

adds that she needs total control over Mrs Hollyer to 'bring her around' (US 174).

Wilfred, however, secretly wishes his mother dead so that he is free to marry his lover.

He resents his 'life of dependence and frustration' (US 176). Later, he is convinced he

has killed his mother by the power of his thought transference. He asks Nurse Eden,

' "Could a thought . . . kill?" ' (US 178).

Crossing of boundaries not only takes place between self and other but between self and landscape. As I have examined in this thesis, in Sinclair's oeuvre landscapes are often introjected as psychic spaces; and mental states may be projected onto external landscapes. In 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Agatha experiences the power of her gift working in a subterranean arena of her mind:

[Y]ou shut your eyes and ears, you closed up the sense of touch, you made everything dark around you and withdrew into your innermost self; you burrowed deep into the darkness there till you got beyond it; you tapped the Power, as it were, underground at any point you pleased and turned it on in any direction. (US 85)

Later, she finds that her sexual desire for Rodney prevents the crystal purity of her gift.

This desire must be beaten back to the underground: 'There were moments when her desire to see Rodney sickened her with its importunity. Each time she beat it back, in an instant, to its burrow below the threshold, and it hid there, it ran underground' (US 100).

In 'If the Dead Knew' Wilfred too likens unwanted thoughts functioning in a part of his mind to a subterranean landscape: 'In the dark, secret places of the mind your thoughts ran loose beyond your knowing; they burrowed under the walls that shut off one self from another; they got through. It was as if his secret self had broken loose' (US

178).<sup>114</sup> In 'Heaven', by way of contrast, when Albert Sessions is in the mystical, borderland state of dreaming, landscape is transparent. Psychic space is projected as externally as a labyrinth of crystal walls through which can be seen other rooms:

[H]e took in the wonderful interior where every object shared the transparent hardness of the crystal walls. . . . At first he thought he was in a hall of looking-glass blazing with electric light and reflected at each end in a long sequence of blazing halls. Then he saw that these vistas were not reflections; they were other rooms with other furniture, seen through and through as the light penetrated the transparent crystal. This would have surprised him if he hadn't known that he was dreaming. (I 75-6)

The psychic location of 'The Token' is within an enclosed, familiar domestic setting. As illustrated in figure 6, the library is Donald's domain and the action of the narrative takes place in this one room.

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<sup>114</sup> Dr Anderson in The Return of the Soldier elucidates the nature of mental illness to the women, referring to a subterranean self. He explains: 'There is a deep self in one, the essential self, that has its wishes' and it is his job 'to bring people from various outlying districts of the mind to the normal.' He adds that he does not entirely believe that this is necessary or urgent in every case. See West, The Return of the Soldier 163.

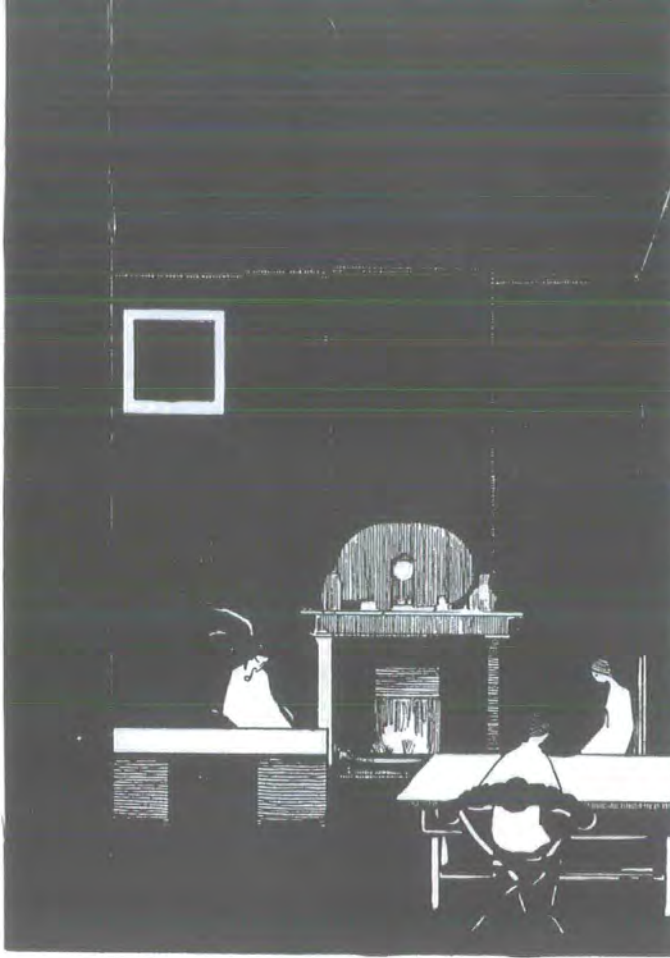


Fig. 6. The Library.

Cicely's presence is unwanted: 'Donald didn't want to have her with him in his library' and would rather 'shut her out' (US 42). Donald's presence is monolithic: he dominates the room with his masculine sense of possession and authority, and this is given representation in the phallic symbol of the paperweight. Cicely is confined to her chair 'where she would sit over her book or her embroidery for hours without speaking, hardly daring to breathe lest she should interrupt him' (US 42-3). The masculine and feminine spheres are clearly demarcated and the story's dynamics depend on the oscillation between power and denial. The battle between the sexes operates around the limitations of masculine rationale to give voice to the inner world of feelings. In Donald's ideological convictions there is no room for voicing love: '[W]ords hurt him, to speak or hear them' (US 46). Cicely, as a woman, indeed as the angel in the house,

also lacks discourse: she is a wordless woman both before and after her death. Cicely's absence of language anticipates Kristeva's semiotic realm, which contrast with the patriarchal or symbolic realm of language. When her ghost returns to seek the truth, Donald confesses his affection for her and breaks the phallogentric symbol that marks their divisive world. As illustrated below in figure 7, at the moment of communion, the two converge in a symbolical union: 'He stepped forward, opening his arms, and I saw the phantasm slide between them. For a second it stood there, folded to his breast; then suddenly, before our eyes, it collapsed in a shining heap, a flicker of light on the floor, at his feet' (US 56).



Fig. 7. 'He stepped forward, opening his arms'.

In contrast, the location of 'The Flaw in the Crystal' is far removed from the patriarchal, symbolic world. In this story, the landscape of Chess Valley is at once

home-like and familiar yet also strange, giving way to a depiction of Freud's uncanny.<sup>115</sup> This separate, mythical world is typical both of Sinclair's fiction, for example in The Three Sisters, and in the work of other women modernist writers. In West's The Return of the Soldier the 'secret' Monkey Island is imbued with symbolical qualities, defining its ancient fertility, regeneration, and mystical associations:

In the liquefaction of colours which happens on a summer evening, . . . the green grass seemed like a precious fluid poured out on the earth and dripping over to the river, and the chestnut candles were no longer proud flowers, but just wet lights in the humid mass of the trees, . . . the brown earth seemed just a little denser than the water.<sup>116</sup>

In the twilight and liquid landscape, the identity of Margaret becomes dampened and blurred: her obscured 'physical details' 'seemed to him a guarantee that theirs was a changeless love'.<sup>117</sup> Chris Baldry returns again and again to the island and to Margaret, finding restoration, tranquility and respite in each from his father's business world that he is about to enter.

In 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Agatha takes delight in the solitude and desolation of Chess Valley: 'It was impossible to be more sheltered, more protected and more

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115 See also the 'queerly familiar' landscape in 'Heaven' (US 72) and Harriott's return to a world that is at once 'familiar and yet unfamiliar' in 'Where Their Fire is Not Quenched' (US 24). According to Freud, after consulting Grimm's dictionary, *heimlich* invariably means *unheimlich*, signifying at once all of the following '[f]amiliar, amicable, unreserved . . . the idea of 'homelike', 'belonging to the house' . . . withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret . . . *Heimlich* parts of the human body, pudenda . . . mysticus, divinus, occultus, figuratus . . . that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge' (225-6). Analytically, Freud revises the ambiguity inherent in the term so as to accommodate a further, more psychological interpretation in the sense of change over time, of development or regression. In his revaluation, the interchangeability between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* becomes the transition from *heimlich* to *unheimlich*. This semantic ambiguity is matched by psychological ambiguity. After various etymological applications, Freud concludes: '*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*' (226). He elaborates, suggesting the reason for its change is the unveiling of 'something which ought to have remained hidden' (241). Thus, what was before familiarly secret and concealed has now become unfamiliarly exposed and revealed. See Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' 219-56.

<sup>116</sup> West, The Return of the Soldier 77.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

utterly cut off' (US 65). There is a very strong association of Agatha's retreat to the valley with a return to the protection of the maternal womb. Yet, it can only be defined by enumerating negated elements from the real world: 'it had neither sight nor hearing of the high roads beyond' and the two villages are 'unseen, unheard' (US 65). It is also 'god-forsaken place' and 'the end of the world' (US 73, 83). During the narrative, Agatha's meaning becomes wholly irreducible to the external world outside Chess Valley: she has a private significance that must remain hidden and separate. Therefore, Agatha seems to be seeking an alternative space in which she can practice her secretive powers. The success of her gift, as we later find out, is dependent on her psychic conservatism. She must scour herself free of sexual desires and cut herself off from the physical world:

She had set herself apart; she had swept herself bare and scoured herself clean for him. Clean she had to be; clean from the desire that he should come; clean above all, from the thought, the knowledge she had now, that she could make him come. . . .

But to ensure continuous results it had to be a continuous process; and in order to give herself up to it, to him . . . she had lately . . . 'cut herself completely off.' (US 62, 64)

However, by removing herself to an isolated world and by devoting her self solely to Rodney there is inherent a very repressive image of womanhood. In The Creators we saw how Nina Lempriere escapes the sexual fraughtness of cosmopolitan life and flees to a border country in order to devote herself to her writing. For Nina and Agatha to succeed with their gift, artistic or mystic, it depends upon their abilities to set themselves apart. Nina also undergoes a purification process: she too attempts to absolve herself of sexual desire that, she believes, hinders her creative output. I

suggested in Chapter 2 that Nina self-consciously embodies androgyny in order to devote herself more fully to her art. However, there is something troubling in this depiction of alienation, sexual and physical, for these women: it implies that, for Sinclair, social marginalisation is necessary in order for women to create, whether through writing (Nina) or through mysticism (Agatha). For these women, the creative act can only take place in an alternate sphere away from patriarchal codes of conduct.

#### V. 'Heightened Psychic Reality': A Feminine Withdrawal?

In The Tree of Heaven Dorothea Harrison is repelled by the communal spirit of suffragism and turns inward to another realm. At the banquet for released suffragist prisoners held by the Women's Franchise Union, the 'savage and . . . piercing collective sound' of the women's baying voices is 'frightful' to her (TH 223-4). When the singing starts, 'she felt again her old terror of the collective soul. Its massed emotion threatened her' and she longs for 'her white-washed prison-cell, for its hardness, its nakedness, its quiet, its visionary peace' (TH 225).

Elaine Showalter argues that feminist novelists 'withdraw' from the world to 'find a higher female truth.'<sup>118</sup> The private arenas that symbolize their work, such as the prison-cell that Dorothea yearns for and the enclosed valley that Agatha retreats to, are, in Showalter's examination, 'fantastic sanctuaries . . . linked to their own defensive womanhood.'<sup>119</sup> Showalter's reading is pessimistic: 'It is a pity that the feminists, showing the limits of their world in their writing, also elevated their restricted view into a sacred vision.'<sup>120</sup> Showalter adds, in response to The Tree of Heaven: 'Inside

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<sup>118</sup> Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing (rev. ed. London: Virago, 1982) 215.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

[Dorothea's] cell, women could preserve the illusion of specialness, of being different. Outside it, they encountered the complexity of being merely human. It is no wonder that sometimes they yearned to go back.'<sup>121</sup> However, I argue that Sinclair's work is not illustrative of a wish to exchange mundane, everyday life for a withdrawal into solitary meditation. Rather, it is reflective of an aspiration for women to be able to live to their full potential and to escape the forces that restrain their own, individual, unique energies and resources. By situating women in their separate spheres, away from the symbolic, patriarchal codes of conduct, I suggest that Sinclair is envisioning what women are potentially capable of: heightened psychic realities; not a mere escape from their own inadequacies.

In 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Agatha retreats to a separate sphere in order to more fully realize the beneficent union between her gift and surrounding nature. The French feminists argue for an association of these realms and spaces with the feminine, as I have suggested, for example, in relation to The Three Sisters in Chapter 3. As well as its remoteness, Chess Valley is a 'land of pure curves, of delicate colours, delicate shadows . . . a land shining with silver and green' (US 65). Kristeva describes women writers' tendency to 'flee everything considered "phallic" to find refuge in the valorization of a silent underwater body'; this is the 'foreign land' in women's writing.<sup>122</sup> Kristeva, like Showalter, suggests this as a potential criticism of women's writing; that they create from a position of 'estrangement', thus 'abdicating any entry into history.'<sup>123</sup> Although this may well be the case for Sinclair's women such as Agatha and Nina, Kristeva's

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<sup>121</sup> Showalter, A Literature of Their Own 239.

<sup>122</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Oscillations Between Power and Denial,' trans. Marilyn A. August. New French Feminisms, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981) 165-67. 166.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

metaphor of the underwater body to describe the other, semiotic realm echoes Sinclair's depiction of Agatha's watery experience of the female mystical moment:

It came, solemn and pure and still . . . it grew like a wave . . . It was as if her heart rose on the swell of it and was carried away into a rhythm . . . It was the blessed state desired as the condition of the working of the gift. . . . [H]er being drunk at every pore the swimming darkness; as if the rhythm of her heart and of her breath had ceased in the pulse of its invasion. She sank in it and was covered with wave upon wave of darkness. She sank and was upheld; she dissolved and was gathered together again, a flawless crystal. She was herself the heart of the charmed circle, poised in the ultimate unspeakable stillness, beyond death, beyond birth, beyond the movement, the vehemence, the agitations of the world.  
(US 86-7)

This wave is both still and has movement; Agatha is both submerged by it and transported by it; she is 'dissolved' and then 'gathered together' by it. (It reflects the similar set of inversions in Sinclair's reading of Emily Brontë's poem, 'The Prisoner'.) The passage moves towards a climactic moment, gathering strength like the wave itself, as Agatha is carried away by the rhythm. As she becomes implicated in the wave, there is something sensuous and erotic in her merging with it. The loss of sense of self gives way to a sense of timelessness: 'She was herself . . . beyond . . . the agitations of the world.' The external, huge forms of nature metaphorically attest to Agatha's awareness of the moment in which she transcends the human form. In other words, the potential for transcendence is underlined by the metaphors of transformation. Agatha 'sank' and is 'upheld' by the transformative powers of nature.

Wilfred and Effie are similarly both submerged and overcome by their joyous, oceanic union at the beginning of 'If the Dead Knew'. Again, the climactic moment has

strongly sexual overtones as they are transported by their shared love of music. Music, it must be remembered, is one of the creative forces that, in Defence, Sinclair suggests can stimulate heightened psychic reality:

The voluntary swelled, it rose, it rushed to a climax. The organist tossed back his head with a noble gesture, exalted; he rocked on his bench; his feet shuffled faster and faster, pedalling passionately.

The young girl who stood beside him drew in a deep, rushing breath; her heart swelled; her whole body listened, with hurried senses desiring the climax, the climax, the crash of sound. Her nerves shook as the organist rocked towards her; when he tossed back his head her chin lifted; she loved his playing hands, his rocking body, his superb, excited gesture. (US 163)

The language in both stories at these points shows an awareness that is beyond normal consciousness. Wilfred is a vessel through which the mystical force of music is conducted; Agatha is not in command of the sensations that she experiences—they are relayed to her from a greater authority that is ‘beyond the world’.<sup>124</sup> Both moments of transcendental union are parallel to Underhill’s interpretation of the mystical moment: ‘the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental’.<sup>125</sup>

In Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay undergoes a similar experience as she is bathed by an underwater light; she too is suspended from linear time, oblivious to

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<sup>124</sup> This passage can be compared with the Wordsworthian interpretation of the moment of transport: ‘My mind did at this spectacle turn round/As with the might of waters’ (Prelude, VII 643-44). This is the Wordsworthian sublime: a moment that is precipitated by a collision with mortality followed by a celebration of the self’s triumph over anything that would undermine its autonomy or interfere with its movement towards transcendence. The essential claim of the romantic sublime is to transcend the human; to find in the unlimited a self-transcendence. Sinclair inherits this literary concept and offers it in a modernist form in her tales collated in Uncanny Stories. Sinclair, as Wordsworth had done before her, suggests that during these moments of mental lucidity there is a struggle for dominance between opposing forces; an almost Darwinian contest in which the strong flourish and the weak are overcome. This is also evident in ‘The Flaw in the Crystal’ when Agatha Verrall is seen to be on the verge of a breakdown.

<sup>125</sup> Underhill, Mysticism x.

the houseguests surrounding her. As she merges with the stroke of the lighthouse, trees, streams and flowers, her mind becomes a site of eroticised unification. Mrs Ramsay feels:

[A]s if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly . . . and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind.<sup>126</sup>

For both Agatha and Mrs Ramsay, water provides a metaphorical link between obstacle or 'blocking agent' and vision or ecstasy. Water is traditionally associated with the feminine and is a Jungian symbol for the realm of the collective unconsciousness. Hélène Cixous relates water to the realm of the feminine imaginary, the realm where creativity is gendered:

[W]ater is the feminine element par excellence: the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother's womb. It is within this space that Cixous' speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with the world.<sup>127</sup>

This oceanic merging with the world aptly explains the situation in 'The Flaw in the Crystal'. The mystic Agatha's self is not fixed and inviolable but fluid: she overflows the boundaries of the self in order to become part of the other, and this flow is both spiritual and physical, in and of the body. The potential for flow through the membrane

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<sup>126</sup> Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 103-2.

<sup>127</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985) 117.

of the self therefore suggests an uncanny connection between mystic and other.<sup>128</sup>

Through the power of her uncanny gift, Agatha is dissolved and remade, giving rise to the idea of both a disembodied self and a multiplicity of selves (see Kristeva below).

It was noted at the start of this chapter that ecstasy is a word used frequently by Sinclair at the point of transcendence—it occurs when the self is elevated over an object or experience that threatened it.<sup>129</sup> A period of blockage is followed by heightened lucidity. At the climax of the ecstatic moment, through ‘flashes of reality’, the self gains a new, enhanced sense of identity. By using the vocabulary of ecstasy, the woman’s experience is empowered, giving rise to the notion of the possibility of transcendence and thereby offering the potential of a rejuvenation, or even a reinvention, of the woman’s lot. Both Agatha and Mrs Ramsay’s mystical moments make an interesting point of comparison with Luce Irigaray’s depiction of ecstasy, which describes the moment of *jouissance*:

The only possibility is to push onward into the night until it finally becomes a transverberating beam of light, a luminous shadow. . . . She is torn apart in pain, fear, cries, tears, and blood that go far beyond any other feeling. . . . But already there is delight and longing in this torment . . . she is impatient to set everything else aside and pleads to go on. But she cannot specify exactly what she wants. Words begin to fail her. She senses something *remains to be said* that resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out. . . . What is expected is neither a *this* nor a *that*, nor a *here* any more than a *there*. . . . So the best plan is to abstain

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<sup>128</sup> The Christian mystic explicitly works to reduce the defining characteristics of identity: instead of seeking self-determination, self-sufficiency, and the rights and powers of individual will, she seeks to be empty of ‘self’ in order to be filled with God.

<sup>129</sup> Spurgeon refers to the ‘definite faculty of vision’ which has ‘been variously called “transcendental feeling,” “imagination,” “mystic reason,” “cosmic consciousness,” “divine sagacity,” “ecstasy,” or “vision”’. Spurgeon, *Mysticism* 7.

from all discourse, to keep quiet, or else utter only a sound so inarticulate that it barely forms a *song*.<sup>130</sup>

The female mystic is part of the rhythm of the moment, yet it is also still; it is both temporal and atemporal; a cycle of birth and death. Irigaray's description of this as a constantly renewing circle is also seen in 'The Flaw in the Crystal'. For Sinclair, ecstasy is never pure pleasure (or *jouissance*): birth, death and rebirth are all implicated in the experience.<sup>131</sup>

The trope of death for writing the body is a significant feminist modernist device. Through the death of the self, the self may be born anew. In 'Where Their Fire is Not Quenched' the narrative unfolds along conventional, linear lines with the passage of time regularly and rigidly demarcated. However, this is interrupted at the mid-way point by Harriott Leigh's death. As her ghost looks down upon her physical self, there is an uncanny shift in temporal and spatial perspectives; the aspect of the room 'was familiar and yet unfamiliar' (US 24):

Then, suddenly, the room began to come apart before her eyes, to split into shafts of floor and furniture and ceiling that shifted and were thrown by their commotion into different planes. They leaned slanting at every possible angle; they crossed and overlaid each other with a transparent mingling of dislocated perspectives, like reflections fallen on an interior seen behind glass. (US 24)

This is given in graphic illustration in figure 8, below.

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<sup>130</sup> Luce Irigaray, '*La Mystérique*.' *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985) 191-202. 193; original italics.

<sup>131</sup> Death is frequently associated with *jouissance*: see, for example, Sinclair's wartime descriptions. This again refers to Freud's definition of the instincts as a pull between eros and thanatos.



Fig. 8. 'Then, suddenly, the room began to come apart . . .'.

Now Harriott embarks on a series of spiraling deaths and rebirths. Harriott is shown to have a plurality of selves or states of being, and desire is no longer attached to a single domain or landscape but gains new meanings and associations. Death turns out to be 'bliss' for Harriott: ' "This—is—dying. I thought it would be horrible. And it's bliss. . . . Bliss" ' (US 23). Similarly, as I discussed in Chapter 5, Harriett Fren's reunion with her mother at the point of death gives rise to a sense of ecstasy. Her return to the archaic maternal gives way to a final sense of the eternal timelessness that is glimpsed at throughout the narrative.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Kristeva, in her reading of Freud's 'The "Uncanny" ', refers to the uncanny strangeness of intra-uterine existence. She quotes Freud in referring to the *unheimliche* place as the entrance to the former *heim* of all human beings. See Julia Kristeva, 'Might Not Universality Be . . . Our Own Foreignness?' *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. L. Roudiez (New York: Harvester, 1991).

Kristeva argues in 'Women's Time' that the disembodied or dissolved female self undoes essentialist conceptions of womanhood. It negates the patriarchal, specular gaze that circumscribes woman as an object. Moreover, it allows women to become signifying objects. This provides a new narrative model for women which is enlarged upon in Kristeva's 'space-time in infinite expansion'; it has an early precursor in Sinclair's writing, as we see here. Agatha, as a signifying object, sees the world anew and notices the extraordinary vibrations of her physical surroundings.<sup>133</sup>

At that moment, in a flash that came like a shifting of her eyes, the world she looked at suffered a change.

And yet it did not change. All the appearances of things, their colours, the movement and the stillness remained as if constant in their rhythm and their scale; but they were heightened, intensified; they were carried to a pitch that would have been vehement, vibrant, but that the stillness as well as the movement was intense. She was not dazzled by it or confused in any way. Her senses were exalted, adjusted to the pitch. . . . It was the same world . . . but radiant, vibrant, and, as if it were, infinitely transparent. (US 92)

She is unable to share this vision with Harding Powell who is at her side. She realizes that she 'sees' the world in a greater dimension than him.<sup>134</sup> Harding only 'had eyes for the beauty of the earth, but no sense of its secret and supernatural light' (US 92).

Although he is aware of the change that comes over him, resulting from Agatha's healing powers, he lacks the vocabulary to express this: 'something queer and

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<sup>133</sup> Again, Agatha's experience can be compared to Mrs Ramsay's in *To the Lighthouse* who also sees the world in intensified colours.

<sup>134</sup> The idea of seeing and not seeing is played out in 'The Flaw'. Agatha, possessing mystical insight, is able to 'see' the world to a greater depth while other characters live blindly. Bella declares that 'she had never seen anything *in* Agatha' which, as Rodney tells her, amounts to 'not seeing Agatha at all' (US 62). Rodney himself is uncertain of the colour of Agatha's eyes: 'the secret of her eyes, whose colour (if they had colour) he was never sure about' (US 66). Similarly, Wilfred finds something unfathomable in Nurse Eden's eyes in 'If the Dead Knew': 'the stillness of her dense, grey eyes . . . made him feel uneasy, somehow, and unsafe' (US 174).

spontaneous and unaccountable' (US 93). His experience is ineffable. Similarly, Agatha's gift works through 'its silences . . . its inexplicable reservations and evasions.' It is a 'high and holy . . . unspeakably pure thing' (US 101).

The concepts referred to here—mimetic repetition, and the inadequate vision of those who cannot see beyond the normal parameters of the masculine literal or philosophical gaze—have been described by Irigaray. She writes that the woman at the point of dereliction has the potential of achieving a unique revelation. For Irigaray, femininity is a necessary condition for experiencing and communicating the mystical vision:

[I]t is for/by woman that man dares to enter the place, to descend into it, condescend to it, even if he gets burned in the attempt. It is in order to speak woman, write to woman, act as preacher and confessor to women, that man usually has gone to such excesses.<sup>135</sup>

This suggests, then, that feminization, which includes loss, is necessary for mystical knowledge, bringing about a transcending knowledge. During her anti-vision, Agatha sees the same world in heightened colours, but this time it seems an abomination to her. Rather than an ecstatic recognition she notices the 'corruption' and 'evil' of life. As Harding tries to break through and invade Agatha's inner self, her surroundings radically alter to become imbued with menace:

Agatha had known once, standing where she stood now, an exaltation of sense that was ecstasy; when every life and every blade of grass shone with a divine translucence; when every nerve in her thrilled, and her whole being rang with the joy which is immanent in the life of things.

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<sup>135</sup> Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' 191-2.

What she experienced now . . . was exaltation at the other end of the scale. It was horror and fear unspeakable. Horror and fear immanent in the life of things. (US 119)

This polarity between the vision and the anti-vision is familiar from the writings of Christian mysticism. All that had previously promised life, hope and immanence is now marred by their polar opposites: dissolution, 'the corruption of life', and 'the passion of the evil which was Life'. All that was once familiar and *heimlich* to Agatha has become unfamiliar and *unheimlich*. The tale operates on these oscillations: everything that was once familiar to her now becomes 'horror and fear unspeakable' (US 119) as illustrated in figure 9 below:



Fig. 9. 'She saw the world in a loathsome transparency'.

From Irigaray, the abject position of the female mystic 'finds her purity again' only 'at the bottom of the pit,' in the extremity of loss:

She is pure at last because she has pushed to extremes the repetition of this abjection, this revulsion, this horror to which she has been condemned, to which, mimetically, she had condemned herself. . . . And she has left the others behind. . . . Unable to go and see.<sup>136</sup>

Agatha's experience follows the pattern described by Irigaray as the mystic's masochistic *jouissance*. During her anti-vision, Agatha undergoes Irigaray's description of the dark night: 'This is the place where consciousness is no longer master, where . . . it sinks into a dark night that is also fire and flames.'<sup>137</sup> Here, subject and other mingle. Irigaray describes mystical ecstasy as the delusional fantasy of blissful self-dissolution in the presence of a greater power: the *mystérique* feels possessed by an other. Agatha's experience of her gift can be summed up by Irigaray as the 'theo-logical onto-logical perspective . . . called mystic language or discourse.' This 'other scene' is 'cryptic'.<sup>138</sup>

Agatha's hysterical experience also provides the locus for erotic vision. Three elements are combined in the tale: erotic, artistic, and mystic. Agatha's gift for successful, positive healing depends upon the unity of all three. The two men may be read as doubles, and Agatha is at a loss to know which to choose to heal. Her vacillation between the two contributes to her illness and ultimately she terminates both relationships. However, her complex love is the source of ecstatic, visionary reverie, pointing not only to an eroticism capable of transcending the sexual norms of patriarchy but also to a poetism capable of envisioning worlds beyond those formulated by conventional discourse.

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<sup>136</sup> Irigaray, 'La Mystérique' 199.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 191.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

An application of the work of the French feminists, such as Kristeva's 'space-time in infinite expansion' in 'Women's Time' and Irigaray's description of *jouissance* in 'La Mystérique', helps to decipher Sinclair's description of ecstasy at the point of contact with reality. For Sinclair, as later for Irigaray, it is a moment of association with a greater power. It is not so much a case of Sinclair's megalomaniac sense of being in love with power (such as direct association with war experienced on the frontline, as described by Ouditt, Raitt and Tate), but the mystical dissolution of self that occurs in the face of Absolute Reality. As we have seen, mystic ecstasy is the fantasy of blissful self-dissolution in the presence of a greater power; such fantasy is the symptomatic (hysterical, psychotic) expression of the dissolution or devolution of ego and sex, neither of which the subject felt she ever properly possessed. Instead, as Irigaray argues, the mystic feels possessed by the 'God' of her union (comparable to Agatha's sense of union with the greater powers of her gift), a mythified figure of the masochistic *jouissance* that delivers her from the mundane insignificance of the women's lot in a patriarchal world.

## **VI. The Healing Power of Mysticism**

Sinclair's uncanny stories read like case studies in that they follow the Freudian therapeutic imperative. The Medico-Psychological Clinic used eclectic psychotherapeutic methods of treatment, including 're-education and suggestion in the hypnoidal and hypnotic states' alongside psychoanalysis. A brochure for the Medico-Psychological Clinic, written by Sinclair and Dr Jessie Murray during the First World War, explains that 'the promoters of the Medico-Psychological Clinic believe that the time is ripe for employing these newer methods on a larger scale'.<sup>139</sup> Sinclair's fiction similarly

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<sup>139</sup> Medico-Psychological Clinic, 'Special Appeal in Time of War,' [8 Oct. 1917], 3, fo. 548, box 49, UP.

explores these new forms of healing through her analysis of mystical states of consciousness and the blurring of subject-object relations.

The medium of the transference narrative and the application of fantasy and its related terms (daydreaming, psychic reality, primal fantasy, sexual fantasy, hysterical fantasy, screen memory, and telepathy or thought-transference) all belong to Freud's psychopathology of everyday life. Freud understood fantasy as the product of a near-waking, preconscious activity, for example in daydreaming. Similarly, Sinclair's stories are told in a special 'atmosphere' of dream-like, unreal states. These are the 'certain . . . impressions' she wishes to convey, as she suggests in 1914.<sup>140</sup> Each of Sinclair's stories has both a psychological and mystical interpretation that lies in this borderland of a supraréalité. During the narrative, the protagonist journeys from conscious thought to unconscious representation. In between, the mechanisms of repression and the return of the repressed are played out. This is the cathartic nature of the supernatural that I suggested at the beginning of this chapter. Thus, during the second decade of the twentieth century, Sinclair found a new narrative medium in which to accommodate mystical states which often arise from traumatic experiences such as confrontation with the First World War.

This method can be usefully compared to the sentiment given by Underhill that an altered mental state gives access to a vision. In 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Sinclair suggests that an altered state of mind can be embraced and utilized for positive, creative purposes.<sup>141</sup> Underhill reflects upon this in a letter written to Sinclair in May 1911:

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<sup>140</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *The Judgement of Eve and Other Stories* (London: Hutchinson, 1914) xi. This volume is dedicated to the staff of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. Raitt notes that Sinclair attended lectures at the Clinic. See Raitt, *May Sinclair* 140 n.103.

<sup>141</sup> The idea that 'sailing close to the wind' can initiate creativity was discussed by Al Alvarez in the University of Durham Lecture Series 'The Mind, Medicine and Literature: Madness and Creativity', Feb. 2002.

It's simply amazing about that evil vision of the world, and makes me quite afraid of you! I've never heard of anyone else having it in that violent form . . . [M]y own belief about it is that where not associated with insanity it is educative, and ought to be endured as long as possible. . . . The heavenly vision seems to be much more common, does it not?<sup>142</sup>

Underhill's comment above refers to the idea that after the experience of loss witnessed in the 'evil vision' comes an 'educative' or creative sublimation. Sinclair's vision of underworlds in Uncanny Stories too highlights the idea of the mystical experience as a journey, of facing and overcoming loss before achieving a cathartic insight.

For these women writers, the association between insanity and creativity was fascinating. Periods of madness also brought creative inspiration to Woolf, and she meditates on this association at various points throughout her writing. For example, in a letter to Ethel Smyth she explains: 'As an experience, madness is terrific . . . and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about. It shoots out of one everything shaped, final, not in mere driblets, as sanity does.'<sup>143</sup> Similarly, when working on The Waves, she writes in her diary: 'I believe these illnesses are . . . partly mystical. Something happens in my mind. It becomes a chrysalis . . . Then suddenly something springs.'<sup>144</sup> The idea of mysticism as a self-expressive mode is reflected

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<sup>142</sup> Evelyn Underhill, letter to May Sinclair, 2 May 1911, fo. 90, box 3, UP. Additionally, Sinclair explains to Annie Fields that the 'queer thing about this tale' is that the uncanny aspect 'really happened.' May Sinclair, letter to Annie Fields, 16 July 1912, fo. 27, box 1, UP.

<sup>143</sup> Virginia Woolf, The Letters of Virginia Woolf, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1978) 180.

<sup>144</sup> Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1975) 150.

upon here. For Sinclair as well as Woolf, much of her writing on the mystical experience was autobiographical in nature.<sup>145</sup>

The psychoanalyst Hanna Segal elucidates this idea further in her paper 'A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics' (1952):

One could say that the artist has an acute reality sense. He is often neurotic and in many situations may show a complete lack of objectivity, but in at least two respects he shows an extremely high reality sense. One is in relation to his own internal reality, and the other in relation to the material of his art. . . . The neurotic uses his material in a magic way, and so does the bad artist. *The real artist, being aware of his internal world, which he must express, and of the external materials with which he works, can in all consciousness use the material to express the phantasy.*<sup>146</sup>

This explains the fundamental difference between the true artist and the neurotic: while the artist has intimate knowledge of her inner life and is able to control this world rhythmically, the neurotic loses control. Segal reads the artistic impulse as specifically related to the Kleinian depressive position and the need to repair or heal the destruction in the internal world or to recover the lost objects. This also refers back to Freud's thanatos or death instinct. Literature, indeed all forms of artistic creativity, is like daydreaming: it represents the fulfilment of repressed wishes or an attempt to work through a traumatic or mourning situation, giving rise to the idea of sublimation of the self that Sinclair held dear.

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<sup>145</sup> See Sinclair's personal experience of the anti-vision in 'The Flaw in the Crystal' as reflected upon by Underhill above. In one of her workbooks Sinclair comments apropos Mary Olivier: 'All the description in inner life is autobiographical and as accurate as I can make it. . . . [T]here is much of me in it', workbook 34, box 41, UP. Other examinations of Sinclair offer comprehensive accounts of the autobiographical elements in her work. See, for example, Raitt, May Sinclair 215-7, 223, 224-5, 236; and Kinnamon, 'May Sinclair's Fiction of the Supernatural' 7, 11-2, 17, 19, 23-4, 48, 69-72.

<sup>146</sup> Hanna Segal, 'A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics.' The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice (London: Jason Aronson, 1981) 185- 205. 197; italics added.

Sinclair acknowledges the importance of writing from the body in her new mysticism: in the 'new mysticism physical desires are not repressed, but accepted, valued for what they are, and worked through.'<sup>147</sup> Whereas Mary Olivier, aware of her physicality and her sexual desires, achieves mystical insight, Harriett Frean remains unaware and does not achieve any sense of sublimation (although in her revelation at the close of the novel she does recognise the anaesthetised quality of her life). Her friend Prissie, suffering from repression and frustration, develops a psychosomatic illness. As Sinclair explains, an unacknowledged libido and a repressed psychological mind results in an abhorrent form of hysteria, not true mystical feeling: 'I am as convinced as any alienist that [mysticism's] more abhorrent psychological extravagances are the hysterical resurgence of natural longings most unspiritually suppressed. These things are worthy only of the pity we give to things suffering and diseased' (DI xv).

In Uncanny Stories and The Intercessor and Other Stories Sinclair illustrates how women can use their uncanny powers for healing. In 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Agatha Verall's ability to heal through her mystical artistry is a creative act. The psychic health of her lover's wife is integral to the well-being of Agatha and Rodney's own relationship. This reflects upon Agatha's powers as a medium as a mode of self-invention: the successful outcome of her powers gives her self-definition. The positive application of Agatha's psychic abilities determines her own future and place within the world that she has created. For this end, she re(de)finest herself to a pure level. Implicit in Agatha's gift is the idea of intentionality and control. She must remain in mastery of her powers otherwise she fails as a vehicle for healing. Similarly, Nurse Eden in 'If the Dead Knew' demands total control over her patient, not wishing to share the treatment

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<sup>147</sup> Hrisey D. Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne English Author Ser. 192 (Boston: Twayne, 1976) 107. This became a predominant theme in later feminist critical thinking.

of Mrs Hollyer with Dr Ransome. In West's The Return of the Soldier Margaret takes charge over Chris Baldry in order to cure him.

Throughout 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Agatha is terrified of losing control and proportionality. Sublimation is offered within the framework of sexual purity: the gift can only function along flawless lines if Agatha herself is sexually flawless. She believes that she can manipulate her gift by keeping herself pure and therefore models herself on a virginal state. In order to heal Harding Powell she diminishes 'all fleshly contacts' (US 87). Yet this is in tension with her desire for Rodney and her wish to draw him into her circle. Patterns of desire for separation and connection can be traced in the narrative, similar to those explored in Mary Olivier. To devote herself to her art in the manner that she chooses, her individual feminine power brings her fulfilment even if she must set herself apart. Awareness of individual isolation is a key to self-awareness.

The narrative action is set within the contexts of Christian sacrifice and time framework: the story unfolds in April, the season of new beginnings; the Easter moon offers the possibility of redemption; significant action frequently takes place on a Friday; and the narrative moves forward in intervals of threes ('three nights later', 'three days later', 'three weeks later', 'three Fridays had passed'). Ultimately, Agatha makes her own life an 'offering' to the utter devotion of the gift, as illustrated in figure 10:

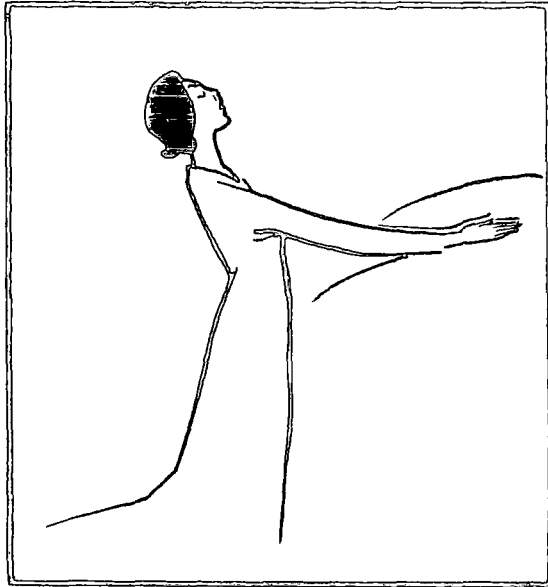


Fig. 10. 'She bore herself humbly towards the Power'.

Agatha's visionary idealism remains intact while unmarred by compromise and defilement. She is described in virginal terms and her relinquishment of the outer life of things, her retreat to an enclosed sphere, is nun-like—Agatha is virginal in both location and in psyche. Here her environment is mirrored by her psychic state: 'She turned the lights out in her room and undressed herself in the darkness. She laid herself on the bed with straight lax limbs, with arms held apart a little from her body, with eyelids shut lightly on her eyes; all fleshly contacts were diminished' (US 87). This is later echoed in Woolf's description of Clarissa Dalloway's attic room in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) which is also monastic, isolated, and emblematic of virginal solitude. In both cases, the secret room is not so much emblematic of a means of escape from reality and the self, as Showalter suggests, but an access *to* reality and a restoration of the self.

The force of the gift lies in its power to restore psychic health to sufferers. Acting as a conduit for this force, Agatha heals through a fusion of her sexual and maternal roles. In *The Return of the Soldier* Margaret too restores Chris through a dialectic of maternal healing and as a lover. Chris Baldry is child-like in his relationship

with Margaret, looking to her for maternal succour: 'He lay there in the confiding relaxation of a sleeping child, his hands unclenched and his head thrown back so that the bare throat showed defencelessly.' As they sit in the woods together she watches over Chris as a mother would over her sleeping son: '[T]he woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time.'<sup>148</sup>

Harding is also infantile in his possessive demands on Agatha. He is at once helpless and ridiculous as well as terrifying, embodying a fusion of a pathetic child-like dependency with an aggressive male ego: 'There was something about him that she had not been prepared for, something strange and pathetic, humble almost and appealing' (US 109). He demands feminine nurturance to soothe, salve, and restore his collapsed ego and expects Agatha to devote herself entirely to his well-being, providing an endless source of healing.

Harding cannot accept her fiercely defended emotional privacy. However, Agatha's carefully guarded psychological space has a flaw: she develops symptoms of Melanie Klein's paranoid schizoid modality of existence as a result of treating both men. In 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms' (1946) Klein observes that creative, contained depressive relationships have the potential to regress to paranoid-schizoid relationships, and progress back again. This oscillation between the two positions is the oscillation between manageable ambivalent whole object relations and the destructive part-object relations that underpin the whole spectrum of intersubjective relationships.<sup>149</sup> Agatha experiences a constant tension between treating out of love and devotion and treating because of obligation. As her loyalties increasingly divide, she

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<sup>148</sup> West, *The Return of the Soldier* 142, 144.

<sup>149</sup> See Melanie Klein, 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms' (1946). *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1986) 176-200, 189-91, 197-8.

transfers the malign, carnal life to her landscape and this disgusts her. Aware and fearful of ego-engulfment and a disintegration of the self, Agatha retreats to her white house and her bed, closing the windows, as an act of self-preservation. Agatha's own sanity is restored when she realises that she must give up both men and devote herself supremely to her gift.

I suggested at the beginning of this chapter that for Sinclair the mystical experience is a cathartic process. The transforming moment takes place through the Jungian concept of sublimation: 'sublimation is a turning and passing of desire from a less worthy or less fitting object to fix it on one more worthy and more fitting' (DI 7). This was also true for Freud, as he suggests in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917 [1915]), cathexes may be achieved by the climbing from the lower plane of desire to a higher one. In 1923 she reviewed Jung's The Psychological Types (1923[1921]), and highlights his statements where he notes that the healing power of creativity is equated with mysticism. Sinclair sums up her review by arguing for the necessary 'reconciliation' within the individual psyche: 'mankind [is divided] into two outstanding types: the introvert, whose consciousness is turned in towards the subject and the subjective aspect of things, and the extravert, whose consciousness is turned outwards to the world of objective reality.' '[T]he superior and inferior functions, the dominant and the repressed attitudes, are reconciled' in the mystic and the poet.<sup>150</sup> Sinclair emphasises that when the splits in personality are bridged, a healing power is brought about which gives way to a creative vision:

In Professor Jung's mythology Prometheus and Epimetheus stand respectively for the introverted and extraverted man, and Pandora for the 'creative phantasy' that reconciles their opposites. . . . [T]here is no middle way except the state of

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<sup>150</sup> Sinclair, 'Psychological Types,' English Review 36 (May 1923): 436-39, 437, 439.

mystical absorption in God, mystical deliverance from 'the pairs of opposites.'<sup>151</sup>

By making her women 'speak' as mystics Sinclair discovers a semiotic reserve in order to restore the symbolic power to women from objects of patriarchal desire and sexual repression. These women function potently as signals (see Kristeva): recalling true, healthy desire (Rosamund in 'The Nature of the Evidence'); catalyzing a life-transforming dream (Alice in 'Heaven'); assuaging guilt and remorse (Mrs Hollyer in 'If the Dead Knew'); offering restorative forgiveness (Effy in 'The Victim'). Yet, as Sinclair and her contemporaries' writing show, martyrdom is implicated in these women's ability to heal. In West's The Return of the Soldier, Margaret successfully cures Chris Baldry through her mystical knowledge, but loses his love in doing so. In Sinclair's 'The Flaw in the Crystal' Agatha heals both Bella and Rodney Lanyon, but—realizing that her sexual desire is the flaw in her gift—gives Rodney up. She supremely sacrifices herself to her gift.

Sinclair's mystical writing is hard to define; it is precisely in this resistance to definition, its 'free-floating' and escapist qualities, that its attractiveness lies. Her female protagonists are free from the many conventions and restraints of patriarchal, everyday life. They refuse to observe unities of time, space and character, and are often situated in the blurring of the boundaries between self and other, life and death. Their psychic fluidity and ability to transgress thresholds challenge traditional gender boundaries and politics. Therefore, their freedom from restraint, and their positions as figures of power, agency and redemption, mirror the psychological and political milieu during which Sinclair began to contemplate her mystical fiction. Thus, in Sinclair's

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<sup>151</sup> Sinclair, 'Psychological Types' 436-7.

examination on mysticism as a creative vision, she looks to transcend the reality of the quotidian woman.

## Conclusion

The position of May Sinclair's women in her texts is complex. She places them within her own contemporary psychological, cultural and social frameworks, and looks to ways in which women may find freedom. This is found through sublimation, the key to analysing the woman's psychic self in Sinclair's texts. However, as I have suggested, the woman's position within patriarchal society often remains problematic. It is only in alternative spheres or in alternative manifestations that women find any sense of selfhood. It became evident during the writing of this thesis that the location of Sinclair's women, psychologically and geographically, is a major concern hitherto unexplored.

Assessing this very uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and feminist politics, Jacqueline Rose writes: 'the concept of the unconsciousness [does not] sit comfortably with the necessary attempt by feminists to claim a new sureness of identity for women, or with the idea of always conscious and deliberate political decision-making and control.'<sup>1</sup> In Sinclair's texts I have shown how the contemporary psychoanalytical and political frameworks frequently clash in her exploration of a 'sureness of identity for women'. In Uncanny Stories, although a woman is given power by her mystical insight or role as psychic medium, her position within society often remains equivocal.

One of Sinclair's main concerns is the need for women to find expression for their inner lives. Often women are portrayed as suffering from psychosomatic illnesses, symbolic of either the inability to give voice to their inner desires or the lack of an adequate language in which to express them. Alice Cartaret is unable to articulate her

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'Femininity and Its Discontents,' Feminist Review 14 (1983): 5-21. 19.

sexual desires, and her repression is manifested through the body in a variety of physical disorders. Gwenda, too, constantly fails to find an appropriate form of expression for her inner self, and I describe her fading from life as apanisis.

In her depictions of women and mysticism, Sinclair turns to alternative realms and alternative forms in order to find a new mode of being for the female self. In Chapter 6 I show how Sinclair contemplates mysticism as both a source of power for women and as a mechanism by which they could experience psychic reality. This too has scope for further, prolonged examination. Although critics have recently begun to tackle the problematic of Sinclair's portrayal of an eroticised, ecstatic association of the First World War with mysticism, I feel that further analysis would reveal that Sinclair was in fact deeply concerned about the role of women in the War. In The Romantic, Charlotte Redhead is fascinated by the faces of the women aboard the boat to France, with the unknown dangers in front of them. She initially feels uneasy in her unaccustomed garb of puttees and worries over the appearance of her knees; thus giving rise to anxiety of the female body. Nonetheless, Charlotte shows bravery and more than adequately fulfils her duty during danger in contrast to the hysteria of the male protagonist, associated with sexual impotence, giving way to ideas of male anxiety. Although Sinclair's highly sexual imagery in her war fiction does give rise to a problematic of approach, I believe a new reading would further expand our understanding of Sinclair's views of women, their capabilities, and their refusal to be marginalised. In fact, Sinclair was deeply concerned about the meaning of war and its impact on the lives of women, as her non-fiction testifies.

However, even in mystical realms, given the limitations of patriarchally inscribed, symbolic language, expression is often problematic for women. For Sinclair herself, the mystical experience is ineffable. When she attempts to elucidate her feelings

aroused by the mystical nature of Rabindranath Tagore's poems, she explains: 'The thing was an experience too subtle, too profound, and too personal to be readily translatable into language.'<sup>2</sup> Sinclair's efforts to make her mystical subjects, usually women, speak therefore result in disruptions to symbolic, patriarchal language that come close to aphasia. However, as we have seen, mysticism is an ecstatic discourse in which the self is undone and remade through a disontological relationship with the other. It is through this rewriting of the relationship between self and other—through the annihilation and transformation of the self—that Sinclair finds a way of speaking, of reinventing in language, the unspeakable subject of mysticism.

Other women writers of the Modernist period also contemplate the inadequacy of everyday language to give voice to their inner, spiritual lives. For example, Virginia Woolf too finds the mystical moment is beyond expression. In To the Lighthouse she writes: 'the mystic, the visionary, walked the beach, stirred a puddle, looked at a stone, and asked themselves "What am I?" "What is this?" and suddenly an answer was vouchsafed them (what it was they could not say)'.<sup>3</sup> In Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier the narrator observes that Chris Baldry's 'very loss of memory was a triumph over the *limitations of language* which prevent the mass of men from making explicit statements about their spiritual relationships.'<sup>4</sup>

Sinclair was interested in a female aesthetic and, in her many portrayals of the female artist, she looks at a variety of circumstances that hinder or help the artistic flame. Additionally, both Sinclair's fiction and non-fiction constantly suggest a link between the creative acts of mysticism and art. The act of writing is frequently

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<sup>2</sup> Sinclair, 'The "Gitanjali": Or Song-Offerings of Rabindranath Tagore,' North American Review 197 (May 1913): 659-76. 659.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (1927. London: Hogarth, 1943) 203-4.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca West, The Return of the Soldier (1918) 133; italics added.

described as a mystical process: both require the acts of surrender and self-sacrifice in order for spiritual reward. In The Creators Jane Holland elaborates upon her talent as a writer, referring to it as a 'divine thing that fed on suffering'. 'It rewarded supremely the supreme surrender' (C 117). Agatha Verrall's uncanny gift in 'The Flaw in the Crystal' depends on the 'process of purification and surrender' (US 101). Mary Olivier too recognises that she can only succeed as an artist if certain elements of her personal life are sacrificed.

This aesthetic quality of Sinclair's work can be related to Katherine Mansfield's own comments on her role as an artist. In a journal entry dated 31 May 1919 she writes:

Shall I be able to express, one day, my love of work—my desire to be a better writer—my longing to take greater pains. And the passion I feel. It takes the place of religion—it *is* my religion—of people—I create my people: of 'life'—it *is* Life. The temptation is to kneel before it, to adore, to prostrate myself, to stay too long in a state of ecstasy before the *idea* of it. I must be more busy about my master's work.<sup>5</sup>

In Chapter 6 I observe that for Agatha Verrall, in 'The Flaw in the Crystal', her complex love is the source of ecstatic, visionary reverie, pointing not only to an eroticism capable of transcending the sexual norms of patriarchy but also to a poetism capable of envisioning worlds beyond those formulated by conventional discourse.

This discussion points the way forward to the current debates in literary scholarship concerning women writers and their aesthetic theories. Much of this work has been covered in relation to Woolf;<sup>6</sup> however, a similar engagement with other

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<sup>5</sup> J. Middleton Murry, Journal of Katherine Mansfield (London: Constable, 1954) 161.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Patricia Waugh, 'From Modernist Textuality to Feminist Sexuality; Or Why I'm No Longer A-Freud of Virginia Woolf.' Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern (London: Routledge, 1989) 88-125; Rachel Bowlby, Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997); and Patricia Waugh, 'Revising the Two Cultures Debate: Science, Literature, and

women writers is only now receiving more widespread attention. From my study on Sinclair, who anticipated Woolf's work by about ten years, Sinclair's female aesthetics offers a fruitful area for further, sustained examination. This could include an examination of Sinclair's 'poetics' through her semiotic discourse which points to an analysis using the French feminists and *écriture féminine* as a critical framework. To a certain extent, Sarah Law's recent chapter on Sinclair in her doctoral thesis offers this.<sup>7</sup> Law's account looks at Sinclair's mysticism, considering her entire oeuvre in one chapter. She argues that Sinclair is an early precursor to the French feminists, and scrutinises Sinclair's depictions of loss in her texts. However, I embrace a rather more celebratory and cathartic appraisal than Law's pessimistic conclusions. I argue that although Sinclair *does* consider loss, in the form of repression, in women's lives, this is merely her starting point. She looks to a variety of potential alternatives for women to escape the nets. As I discuss in my study, these are typically found in different spheres, both psychic and physical. Women successfully create—for example, as artists or as mystics—away from patriarchally inscribed codes of conduct. (Women frequently occur in threes in Sinclair's novels, perhaps a reflection on the different opportunities and different outcomes available to women.) Admittedly, as I show, her novels do not always end triumphantly, suggesting that the methods and ways of achieving these ends could not be fully envisioned at her moment of writing.

In my examination of Sinclair's women, texts and contexts, it becomes apparent that Sinclair is self-consciously examining the intersection between gender and artistic creativity. Therefore, as a subtext, I argue that she is an artist theorising about her own

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Value.' *The Arts and Sciences of Criticism*, eds. David Fuller and Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 33-59.

<sup>7</sup> See Sarah Law, Chapter 3, 'May Sinclair: Mourning the Feminine.' ' "Écriture Spirituelle": Mysticism in the Writing of Evelyn Underhill, May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson,' 100-44. Ph.D. thesis, QMWC, U of London, 1997

arthood. Sinclair frequently draws upon artists as her female protagonists and, in addition, I believe that her female protagonists are foreshadowed and informed by the lives and work of the Brontës; she is a self-conscious female writer exploring and articulating the lives of women in order to develop her own female aesthetic.

Although much attention has been paid to Woolf's work on the nature of the female artist, I argue that Sinclair, too, engages in the debate. The idea of the female as an artist, infused with the power of words, which places her in a position of authority, is a dangerous position for a woman to have. Thus, the female artist posits a threatening presence to male authority/authorship.

Sinclair criticises the traditional form of the novel for its limited, linear approach. She turns to new forms in an attempt to find 'aesthetic unity'. At the beginning of my analysis of Sinclair's fiction I referred to her contemplation of the artistic urge in 1909 as the *buried, inner 'germ'*.<sup>8</sup> Here she is looking for transcendence in the endeavour for creative unity. In her interview on the 'The Future of the Novel' (1921) she returns to this idea, arguing that 'there is nothing more fundamental than the unity of consciousness.' She suggests that the future of the novel lies in the author's ability to transmit the 'inside of the characters' and present at once 'things as they are and things as they appear to consciousness.' In this manner, the 'synthetic psychological novel . . . has a future before it.'<sup>9</sup>

Returning to the 'spiritual certainty' of womanhood with which my textual examination of Sinclair begins,<sup>10</sup> it is now possible to see that Sinclair argues for psychic freedom for her female protagonists, thereby negotiating the shackles of

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<sup>8</sup> Sinclair, introduction, *Villette*, by Charlotte Brontë, Everyman's Library Ser. (London: Dent, 1909) vii-xviii; viii; original italics.

<sup>9</sup> Meredith Starr, ed. 'May Sinclair.' *The Future of the Novel: Famous Authors and Their Methods. A Series of Interviews with Renowned Authors* (Boston: Small, 1921) 87-89; 88, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Sinclair, 'How It Strikes a Mere Novelist,' *Votes for Women*, 24 Dec. 1908: 211. See Chapter 2.

patriarchy. Most of all, Sinclair became fascinated by interiorised narratives and, as her Modernist texts centred around female protagonists reveal, she was most particularly interested in the inner life of the woman, and the ways in which this could be expressed or released. These then, are the 'spiritual certainties' she is looking to in modern literature.

My study focuses on Sinclair's historical perspective—I look at Sinclair's women from their position within her texts, her non-fiction, and psychological and political enquiries of the time. I also briefly compare Sinclair with other women writers of her day, reflecting upon the communality of the desire to find a place for themselves in the early twentieth century.

In my thesis, I unweave and interweave Sinclair's texts and contexts in order to highlight the threads that make up the inner lives of her women. 'Existence', Sinclair writes, 'remains as full-blooded and gorgeously coloured, as variegated and multitudinous, as everlasting exciting, mysterious and surprising' (DI 309-10). In the space of Sinclair's feminine imaginary, politics and aesthetics collide to suggest a more optimistic womanhood; one that envisions spiritual certainty. This holds the promise of the 'ceasing from the sorrow of divided life'.

## Appendices

The letters between Ernest Jones and Sigmund Freud have not been hitherto published in any source and have not been discovered and reviewed in association with the psychoanalytic scene in Britain in the early twentieth century, let alone with Sinclair and her involvement. They bring to light the serious attempt to undermine the 'pioneer venture' of the Medico-Psychological Clinic. A reading of these letters alongside the history of the Clinic therefore reflects the very real struggle that the founders of the Clinic were under to gain general acceptance and credibility for their aims.

The letters are in fact 'group letters': each is divided into sections, dealing with a specific branch of the International Psycho-Analytical Association. Jones's tone in each letter referring to the Medico-Psychological Clinic is demeaning and censorious. After discussing the 'outrageous' and alienating' behaviour of Dr Elizabeth Meakin Herford, an early member of staff at the Medico-Psychological Clinic, Jones belittles Dr Jessie Margaret Murray's involvement, and criticises the training practices at the Clinic's sister association, the Society for the Study of Orthopsychics.

The 'Special Appeal in Time of War' (1917) highlights the eclectic form of psychotherapy offered by the Clinic, referring to an array of European psychotherapeutic practices including Freud, Janet, Morton Prince, Jung, Déjerine, and Dubois. It also provides tangible evidence that this new enterprise was in great demand by both the general public and a new type of patient, the 'war combatant.'

## A. Ernest Jones/Sigmund Freud Letters<sup>1</sup>

(1) 2 Nov. 1920

Dear Friends

. . . perhaps she [Dr Herford] belongs to a type of English person who presents their best side to foreigners and reserves their worst for their compatriots. Her behaviour in The Hague was certainly outrageous and alienated all who had to do with her in the hotel. When her name was submitted to the Society last summer everyone who knew her spoke very strongly against her (I did not know her then myself). Dr Glover is certainly better material, and seems to be a very intelligent man. I might remark on the difficulty caused in London (of which we have had two experiences already) by analysts being analysed abroad for a few weeks or a couple of months and then on their return unloading their resistances on their colleagues. There is a very great advantage in analysts not being analysed by their future colleagues, but either by foreign ones or—as in Berlin—by a lay analyst where there is no professional jealousy. But it is important that such an analysis should be as thorough as possible, and that if it is short, and therefore imperfect, that the person should be definitely warned about its completeness.

I am glad of the opportunity of relating about the Brunswick Square Clinic and apologise if it proves impossible to do so in a short space. It was founded in 1913 by Dr Hector Munro, known to our friends in Wien & Budapest. He is a well-intentioned and energetic man, but wild, erratic, unsteady, and with no scientific knowledge. He organised a large public meeting with most of the London neurologists and psychiatrists present, and well supported by high society, where he has much influence. But he was tactless enough to choose as chairman the Earl of Sandwich (uncle of the present one

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<sup>1</sup> CFC/F05/08, CFC/F05/10, CFC/F05/13, CFC/F05/14, CFC/F05/21, Archives of the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London. Reproduced by the permission of Ken Robinson.

who is really interested in Paa), who scandalised the meeting by talking at length about supernatural powers that rare people, including himself, possessed. This was reported in the papers, and most of the medical men, in a panic at being identified with such quackery, withdrew their promised support. In these unfavourable auspices the psychotherapeutic clinic was nevertheless started by Munro and Dr Jessie Murray (now dead). M [Murray] was there for only a few months and has had nothing to do with it since the outbreak of the war. A lay woman, Miss Turner, was appointed Director, now assisted by another, Miss Sharp [sic; Ella Freeman Sharpe]. The remaining doctors, including Stoddart, worked for a time, as did Flügel, but now there is no medical man except Glover, with perhaps some young assistant. The place soon began to have a bad repute in the medical profession, on the following grounds, and this has gone increasing. All the students there are lay, they are mostly women, and often badly neurotic women. These students carry out nearly all the treatment, which has become more and more of an 'analytic' kind. They come as patients or as students, and in a few weeks are analysing others, at the same time as being analysed themselves. So A can analyse B, who analyses C, who analyses D, and the resulting indiscretions, frictions, and scandals can be magnified. Each new case is seen first by a doctor (a new rule), but the lay director decides who is to analyse the patient, interferes with the analysis, and often changes the analyst. It is quite common for a patient to have five or six different analysts in a few months. The nature of the so-called analysis can be imagined, since not one person there has been analysed by a real analyst. Our members rightly refuse to have anything to do with the place, for it is conducted throughout on quite unprofessional lines, turns out scores of so-called lay psycho-analysts every year who practice analysis on their own accord on the strength of a diploma that they are granted, and so discredits psycho-analysis very seriously, especially in the eyes of the medical profession, many of

whom identify psa and lay quackery. We have the secret hope that some day the clinic will collapse and that we may be able to convert it into a proper place, like the Berlin Polyclinic. Last July Forsyth . . . held a meeting with some non-analytic neurologists and tried to take over the clinic (without mentioning it to any member of our society), but the plan miscarried because he could not get Glover to agree to his terms, especially to giving up the lay analysts; it is said that James G. has a strong fixation on one of the women directors, Ella Sharpe, and cannot get loose. He has never made the slightest attempt to get into contact with us, and I never saw him until The Hague. I am sure that the attitude of the Berlin Society would have been the same as our own in similar circumstances. . . .

With cordial greetings to all

Ernest Jones

(2) 9 Nov. 1920

Dear Friends,

Wien.5. First paragraph. I don't understand how you can take the side of the Brunswick Square Clinic against the Society here, and even make promises to support the former, without even hearing the views of our own Society first. I shall be glad to have comments on my account in L.5.

With cordial greetings

Ernest Jones

(3) Vienna, 18 Nov. 1920

Liebe Freunde!

. . . ad Brunswick Square: Es war nicht die Rede davon, dass wir die Partei der Klinik gegen die Vereinigung ergriffen hätten. Wir kannten dazu auch die Verhältnisse viel zuwenig, wussten Z.B. gar nicht, dass die Brunswick-Leute sich der Vereinigung anzunähern versuchten, dass aber die Society dagegen war. Ebenso war nicht die Rede davon, dass wir versprochen hätten, sie fernerhin zu unterstützen, sondern nur davon, dass der Professor zugesagt hatte, falls er nach England käme, sich die Sache anzusehen. In solchen Fällen bleibt selbstverständlich die Entscheidung einer Stellungnahme der ortskundigen Zweigvereinigung überlassen, respektiv deren Präsidenten. . . .

Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank

[. . . re Brunswick Square: *It was never said that we would have taken opposition against the unification of the Clinic. We did not know about the circumstances that the Brunswick people tried to approach towards the unification, but that the Society was against this. Furthermore, it was never said that we would support them but only that if the Professor would go to England he would look into the matter. In such cases, the decision of course is up to the opinion of someone familiar with the sub-group, such as the Director. . . .*<sup>2</sup>]

(4) [23/24?] Nov. 1920

Dear Friends

. . . I am grateful for your comments on the B. Sq. Clinic question, and will read some of your remarks to our society. From facts in my possession, however, I know that Dr H

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by Oliver Vogt.

[Herford] paints matters in a too rosy light. There have been two distinct objections on our part. 1. The wild analysis that was being spread. This will now improve after the Berlin analyses, though only in part (because of the large number of workers of poor quality). 2. The professional one, that the relation between medical and lay workers is the exact opposite of what it should be, and this will remain so while the director is a lay person (Miss Turner, assisted by Miss Sharp [sic]). We have to think carefully before we throw the aegis of our prestige over an institution that can do more harm than good in the eyes of the outer world. We should be more inclined to do so if the workers there were prepared to make the slightest concession on their part, or even to enter into some contact with us, which so far they have absolutely refused to do. . . .

With cordial greetings to all

Ernest Jones

(5) 21 Dec. 1920

Dear Friends

. . . Many thanks for your remarks about Dr Herford, whom I shall certainly invite as guest. Would you consider her fit for membership? Please send me further impressions about the Brunswick Sq. Clinic after you have got to know the next visitors. By the way, my knowledge of it is not so casually gleaned as Dr Herford suggests, but is based partly on full accounts given by four members of our Society who each worked there for years.

With cordial greetings to all

Ernest Jones

# Medico-Psychological Clinic.

## SPECIAL APPEAL IN TIME OF WAR.

The need of the Clinic is now more urgent than ever.

We have a formidable list of patients—**Non-combatants** suffering from War-panic, overstrain, insomnia, and every form of nerve-disaster. After these will come the **Combatants and their Auxiliaries**, to whom we shall offer, through the Army Medical Staff, special facilities for treatment.

You are **earnestly asked for help** in the present crisis.

ALBERT J. GAY,  
*Secretary.*

**BRUNSWICK SQUARE,  
LONDON, W.C.**

<sup>3</sup> [8 Oct. 1917], fo. 548, box. 41, UP. Reproduced by the permission of Nancy Shawcross.

# Medico-Psychological Clinic.

BRUNSWICK SQUARE,

LONDON, W.C.

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## Consulting Staff.

### *Medical :*

Physicians—W. DEANE BUTCHER, M.R.C.S.  
T. W. MITCHELL, M.D.  
HARRINGTON SAINSBURY, M.D., F.R.C.P.  
Surgeon—STANLEY BOYD, M.B., F.R.C.P.  
Neurologist—E. FARQUHAR BUZZARD, M.D., F.R.C.P.  
Gynæcologist—MAUD M. CHADBURN, M.D., B.S.  
Laryngologist and Aurist—GEORGE W. BADGEROW, M.B., F.R.C.S.  
Pathologist—ALFRED NEWMAN LEATHEM, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.  
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# MEDICO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CLINIC.

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## Objects.

- I.—The treatment by medical and psychological means of functional nervous diseases, and of functional disorders accompanying organic diseases.
  - II.—The advancement of this branch of Medical Science.
  - III.—The extension in the community of a knowledge of the laws of Mental Hygiene.
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**I**N the fight against Disease, medical science patiently and persistently seeks to discover its causes and earliest symptoms in order the better to combat it, and from time to time fresh avenues of research open up, giving good promise of new victories over subtle foes which so often disable where they do not destroy.

The Medico-Psychological Clinic marks one of these fresh adventures in the field of **Preventive Medicine**, viz., in **Mental Hygiene**.

Dreaded as Disease is when it attacks the body, it is still more so when it involves the mind. This is partly due to the small hope of cure, but also to the fact that mentality is of the highest possible "survival value" in the struggle for existence; and not only is the victim of mental disease himself thrown out of the running, but the stigma of his misfortune attaches more or less to his near relatives, and hampers them also in their efforts to maintain a good status in life.

Again, from the **sociological** and **economic point of view** this problem is second to none. Insanity, in one form or another, and mental defectiveness are responsible for a large proportion of the crime and poverty in civilised nations, and the maintenance of Asylums for the Insane—to say nothing of Prisons, Reformatories, and Workhouses—is a heavy tax on the State. Hence every attempt to discover and treat the earliest manifestations of any disorder of the brain and nervous system is of profound and far-reaching importance from the point of view both of the individual and the State.

An earnest and scientific attempt in this direction is being made by the recently inaugurated **Medico-Psychological Clinic**, for in the large and somewhat heterogeneous group of diseases which it proposes to treat, some are precursors of mental disease and others are nervous disorders of a highly disabling kind; *e.g.*, insomnia, sleep-walking; the alcoholic, drug, and other morbid habits; mental depression; the anxiety neuroses; obsessions; morbid impulses (including kleptomania) and other aberrations of the will; phobias; various habit and occupation spasms, stammering, &c., &c. Hysteria, in its protean forms, from its simplest manifestations to the development of double personality, must necessarily bulk large in the number of cases treated.

In addition to the special departments in our general hospitals there are several large and important special hospitals devoted to the treatment of nervous diseases, all of them doing noble work, all of them overcrowded. Amongst these the Medico-Psychological Clinic marks a new departure in two directions.

**First**—in providing a centre for treatment for those who ought not to be dependent on the charity of our Hospitals, and who are, nevertheless, unable to pay the fees usually charged for private treatment of the necessary kind.

**Second**—in providing certain newer forms of treatment, the utility of which in the kind of cases indicated has frequently been demonstrated, but which for lack of suitable conditions have so far only been accessible to a very limited number of sufferers. These forms of treatment are often referred to collectively as Psychotherapy and include the various forms of mental analysis, and re-synthesis which are known as **Psychological Analysis** (Janet, Morton Prince, &c.), **Psycho-Analysis** (Freud and Jung, &c.), and as **Therapeutic Conversation and Persuasion** (Dejerine, Dubois, &c.), **Re-Education and Suggestion** in the hypnoidal and hypnotic states. Recognising with the rest of the Medical Profession, that functional nervous diseases have hitherto proved, on the whole, among the most hopeless and intractable, the promoters of the Medico-Psychological Clinic believe that the time is ripe for employing these newer methods on a larger scale, and for making trial of any others that seem to promise good results.

That Psychotherapy has already proved of the utmost value where other means have failed is beginning to be more and more widely recognised both by the Medical Profession and the Public.

Large and important clinics of this order exist in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Zurich, Amsterdam, and many other European centres; and in the United States conspicuously good work is being done in Boston, New York, Washington, New Haven, and many other places. England still lags behind. It is almost a national disgrace that there should not yet be in England a centre for the organised use and further trial of the many methods already at the command of Psychotherapy. All of these are being more and more extensively used in England, but the high fees which are necessarily charged for private treatment put them out of the reach of people of small means, a class particularly liable to break down nervously and mentally owing to economic pressure. Here is a crying need. The Medico-Psychological Clinic hopes not only to meet this need, but to do more. It hopes

to draw upon the Psychological Departments of the Universities for fresh methods, fresh data, and fresh ideas in relation to normal and abnormal processes of the mind. It proposes to apply these in its work and to test their value as diagnostic and therapeutic agents. Many Psychological Laboratories are actively engaged in the study of the mind, in its developmental and adult stages, and in its individual and social manifestations. Extensive research is being executed, resulting in the establishment of important laws and working hypothesis. Medical science should avail itself of these psychological results, no less than of the findings of the Physiological and Pathological Laboratories. In order to facilitate this the Medico-Psychological Clinic has established a Psychological Department under the general direction of Dr. Spearman, Grote Professor of Philosophy of Mind, of the University of London. Here investigation will be carried on, based on careful observations and exact tests, at the same time account will be taken of all progress in Psychological Science, both at home and abroad. The data thus obtained will be at the disposal of the Medical Profession in general and of that section in particular which is interested in this branch of medicine, and will, it is hoped, prove of great therapeutic value.

In addition to the directly therapeutic and scientific work of the Medico-Psychological Clinic an educational side is being carefully planned.

**Lecture Courses in Elementary Psychology and in Mental Hygiene** will be given during the Autumn and Spring terms, and it is also hoped that occasional single lectures will be given by experts in subjects bearing on the different aspects of the work of the Clinic. °

Further, the nucleus of what is hoped will become a useful **Library** is in process of formation, and it is proposed that this shall from the outset consist of two departments :—

1. A Lending Library of carefully chosen works suitable for the use of the patients and others who may attend the Systematic Lectures.
2. A Reference Library for the use of medical practitioners and students of Psychology and of Psychological Medicine.

It is hoped that the usefulness of the Clinic will be increased considerably by means of its library. Contributions will be very welcome.

The work of the Clinic is carried on in six departments, each under the direction of a qualified medical practitioner having special experience in the work of the department and ably assisted by trained workers.

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Medical.            | 4. Physical Exercises. |
| 2. Psychological.      | 5. Electrical.         |
| 3. Psycho-therapeutic. | 6. Educational.        |



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